

## PROFESSOR LEONARD N. NEUFELDT



Leonard N. Neufeldt is a Professor Emeritus of Purdue University, once upon a time a Professor of English while Chair of American Studies. He is the author not only of *THE ECONOMIST: HENRY THOREAU AND ENTERPRISE* but also of the 4th volume in the new Princeton series of *THOREAU'S JOURNAL*, and numerous volumes of his own poems such as *RASPBERRYING*, *THE COAT IS THIN*, *A WAY OF WALKING*, *YARROW*, and *CAR FAILURE NORTH OF NIMES*.

**“NARRATIVE HISTORY” AMOUNTS TO FABULATION,  
THE REAL STUFF BEING MERE CHRONOLOGY**



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**1972**

October: [Leonard N. Neufeldt](#)'s "[Emerson](#) and the Civil War" ([Journal of English and Germanic Philology](#), 71: 502-13).

**[The following review of the Neufeldt article was provided by Professor Donald Ross. It was written by one of the students in one of his classes, although unfortunately he had lost track of that student's name.]**

[Waldo Emerson](#)'s late essays are often ignored by critics because the problems he faced in the 1850s and 1860s have never been directly faced. The writings of these years are directly and indirectly related to the events of the Civil War and [Leonard N. Neufeldt](#) thinks that might be why critics ignore it. The abolition controversy first drew Emerson out of his "private mental places" as Neufeldt calls it. Emerson disliked this sacrifice he was called upon to make; the war was a further disillusionment and he returned to his writings as a scholar with considerable fatigue.

[Neufeldt](#) speaks of three clear-cut phases in [Emerson](#)'s relation to slavery, abolitionism, and the war.

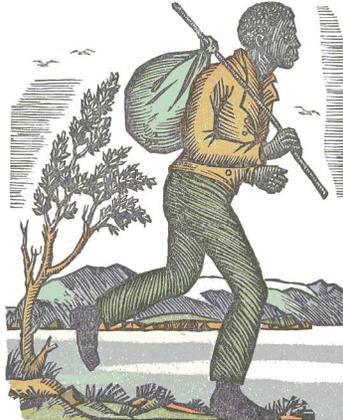
- Definition by the scholar, (who knew his own tendencies towards recluse and withdrawal,) of his commitment. The civil war was not yet a reality for him; The issues of North-South clash over slavery were muddled up by his general views on Individual and Cultural progress. His stand on slavery is clear: "There can never be peace whilst this devilish seed of war is in our soil. Root it out burn it up, pay for the damage, and let us have done with it... It is a local, accidental distemper, and the vast interests of a continent cannot be sacrificed for it." (1851, JOURNAL, 8.)  
End slavery not because of what he felt for the slaves but to prevent the war and to stop America ruining herself over this 'local' and petty issue. A "pathetically small minority of disengaged or thinking men stand for the ideal right, for man as it should be." The interesting thing is Emerson's concern here is exclusively to prevent national hysteria. (Emancipation in the British West Indies.)  
Through this all Neufeldt says Emerson's allegiance is primarily to the "Vital Mind"; he will not give it up for any "statesman's cant." His intellect must be used to separate him from this world, otherwise he would be endlessly immersed in his environment.  
Neufeldt says it is no surprise then to find Emerson is at once a hater of slavery, and recalcitrant towards the abolitionists. The slave-owners and the Unionists fared as badly with him, they appalled him with their moral cowardice. About a man like Oliver Wendell Holmes he could say, "... while I admire his eloquence I had not the faintest wish to meet the man. He had only a platform-existence, and no personality. Mere mouthpieces of a party" (Journal 8). In 1857, at New York he shared the stage with Horace Greeley and the crowd began to chant Greeley's name much to Emerson's annoyance that they should not value a scholarly address. When he did begin to lend his name to the abolitionist movement he still held back from active political involvement. He signed petitions and agreed to address audiences but often baffled the petitioners by what he said. He was reluctant to sign a petition calling for a national convention in support of total emancipation of slaves with fair compensation to the owners, a plan Neufeldt states he had advocated himself a few years back. He wrote to Oliver Wendell Holmes in 1856, "When masses ... go for things as they are we take no note of them ... we leave them to the laws of repression to the checks nature puts on beasts of prey ..." In the same letter he defends the abolitionists despite their "ferocity and narrowness of virtue."  
In May 1851 Emerson delivered the first two addresses on the slave provisions of the compromise of



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1850. The Fugitive Slave Act stuck in his throat. It was eight months after the bills were passed, that he wrote “This filthy enactment was made in the nineteenth century, by people who could read and write. I will not obey it, by God!” The vehemence is unusual for Emerson, and stems from his



growing anger. It was impossible he clarified later to keep quiet when runaway and free slaves were being shot in the streets. This “painful sensation,” that literature and philosophy and all arts better hide themselves till Slavery and these invidious laws are repealed, concerned him more and more. One of the most interesting things about Emerson, which I find doesn’t receive emphasis, is his willingness to rethink things out at this stage. “To me ... the question of the times resolved itself into the practical question of the conduct of life. How shall I live?” His 1854 address was not a fire-breathing one, and the essays did contain a few practical proposals to eliminate slavery but Emerson realized he had to withdraw to keep his own peace of mind.

- [Neufeldt](#) says in the late fifties Emerson’s disillusionment with the federal government increased specially with the notorious Burns case. Emerson senses a “state of siege for the scholar.” He writes to his brother William, “What times are these, and how they make our studies impertinent, and even ourselves the same.” The government is now an “obstruction,” to free creative minds. The Saturday Club of Boston, Emerson’s favorite social circle, apparently felt as he did and the more sympathetic began contributing towards John Brown’s anti-slavery campaign. Three months after at a Kansas meeting Emerson without taking Brown’s name, speaks of the true “Saxon man” who can be a law to himself while linking himself to his brothers. It was Brown’s fanaticism in fact that appealed to Emerson, and his ‘puritan toughness’ and that he was “a pure idealist.” By the end of the decade Emerson was resigned to the prospect of civil war, “War is the safest terms,” (JOURNAL 12) His reasons for accepting the bloodshed are remarkable: “One whole generation might well consent to perish, if by their fall, political liberty and clean and just life could be made to the generations that follow.”
- Stage three according to Neufeldt was a renewal of interest in scholarship and the arts, (1863-64). He was impressed with [Thoreau](#)’s JOURNALS, enough to rediscover his artistry and excellence of thought and regain an interest in writing himself. Another sign was his growing reliance on a benevolent necessity, which guides men in spite of themselves. The body politic rarely features in his talk or writings; he concentrates on friends and individuals. Neufeldt concludes his essay on the note that by the time Emerson was ready to return to the subject of Mind, his own began to fail him. In the chapter “Race,” from ENGLISH TRAITS, [Emerson](#) traces the roots of the English race to the Romans, the Scandinavians, the Normans and the Saxons. Emerson was very impressed with the English race and traced several of the aspects which impressed him back through the ancestors of the English. Emerson greatly generalized the whole of the English people. For example, going through



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the chapter “Race” and picking out main points gives a summary which reads: “The British census proper reckons twenty-seven and a half millions in the home countries...They are free forcible men...It has been determined that the English have genius...The English Composite character betrays a mixed origin...Collectively a better race than any from which they are derived...The English uncultured are a brutal nation...The English, at present day, have great vigor of body and endurance...It is the fault of their forms that they grow stocky, and the women have that disadvantage...Both branches of the Scandinavian race are distinguished for beauty...On the English face are combined decision and nerve, with the fair complexion, blue eyes, and open and florid aspect...they are rather manly than warlike...The two sexes are co-present in the English mind...They have vigorous health and last well into middle and old age...They have more constitutional energy than any other people...The Englishman associates well with dogs and horses...The gentlemen are always on horseback... This long stream of attributes shows how Emerson had catalogued the English. He was very impressed with them physically but was especially pleased by their manners. While quoting from Emerson’s Works, Phillip Nicoloff, in EMERSON ON RACE AND HISTORY (Columbia UP, 1961, pages 22-23), says Emerson was “using the English themselves as models of the proper kind of national self-reliance” and “taking heart from the fact that the American Yankee was but a ‘double-distilled’ Englishman living under new conditions.” Emerson felt that “the American had equally with the English on the other continent the moral sentiment and a strong common sense. (Nicoloff, pages 23) Later in the book Nicoloff traces Emerson’s use of current racial science, most notably Robert Knox’s theories as put forth in his book THE RACES OF MAN: A FRAGMENT (1850). Emerson, according to Nicoloff, combined Knox’s theories with those of other racial scientists to develop a “proper philosophy of race” (Nicoloff 149). Emerson develops his theory of English Superiority through their diverse backgrounds to show his hope for American development.

**THE FUTURE IS MOST READILY PREDICTED IN RETROSPECT**





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1989

Professor [Leonard N. Neufeldt](#)'s THE ECONOMIST: [HENRY THOREAU](#) & ENTERPRISE (NY: Oxford UP) included a section "*Walden and the Guidebook for Young Men*" based upon his Summer 1987 paper in [American Quarterly](#), "Thoreau's Enterprise of Self-Culture in a Culture of Enterprise" (Volume 39, Number 2, pages 231-251). This dealt with the five distinctly recognizable "conduct books" of advice for young men that had been found in Thoreau's personal library:

- ADDRESSES TO YOUNG MEN (2d edition, two volumes in one, Manning & Loring, 287 pages), by the 18th-Century Scottish Presbyterian [Reverend James Fordyce, D.D.](#) (this bears the father John Thoreau's signature, which presumably indicates that at some point it passed from father to son)

ADDRESSES TO YOUNG MEN, I

ADDRESSES TO YOUNG MEN, II

- LETTERS ADDRESSED TO A YOUNG MAN, ON HIS FIRST ENTRANCE INTO LIFE, by the self-educated, popular, and aggressively anti-modernist turn-of-the-century English author [Mrs. Jane Iliffe](#) "[Prudentia Homespun](#)" West (this book had been presented to [John Thoreau, Jr.](#), in all likelihood by the Thoreau family as a birthday present upon his reaching maturity, and presumably had come into the library of [Henry](#) upon John's death in 1842)

MRS. JANE WEST'S ADVICE

- LECTURES ADDRESSED TO THE YOUNG MEN OF HARTFORD AND NEW-HAVEN, by early 19th-Century Hartford, Connecticut Congregationalist (Trinitarian) minister and pastor [Joel Hawes, D.D.](#)

LECTURES TO YOUNG MEN

- THE LIFE OF [DR. BENJAMIN FRANKLIN](#). WRITTEN BY HIMSELF, printed in 1796 at Salem for Cushing and Carlton, at the Bible and Heart

DR. BENJAMIN FRANKLIN

- ESSAYS IN A SERIES OF LETTERS, ON THE FOLLOWING SUBJECTS: ON A MAN WRITING MEMOIRS OF HIMSELF. ON DECISION OF CHARACTER. ON THE APPLICATION OF THE EPITHET ROMANTIC. ON SOME OF THE CAUSES BY WHICH EVANGELICAL RELIGION HAS BEEN RENDERED LESS ACCEPTABLE TO PERSONS OF CULTIVATED TASTE.... 5TH AMERICAN FROM THE 8TH LONDON EDITION (Boston: J. Loring), by the British Baptist [Reverend John Foster](#)

JOHN FOSTER'S ESSAYS

"MAGISTERIAL HISTORY" IS FANTASIZING: HISTORY IS CHRONOLOGY



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"It's all now you see. Yesterday won't be over until tomorrow and tomorrow began ten thousand years ago."

- Remark by character "Garin Stevens"  
in William Faulkner's INTRUDER IN THE DUST



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## *ARRGH AUTOMATED RESEARCH REPORT*

### *GENERATION HOTLINE*



This stuff presumably looks to you as if it were generated by a human. Such is not the case. Instead, someone has requested that we pull it out of the hat of a pirate who has grown out of the shoulder of our pet parrot "Laura" (as above). What these chronological lists are: they are research reports compiled by ARRGH algorithms out of a database of modules which we term the Kouroo Contexture (this is data mining). To respond to such a request for information we merely push a button.



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Commonly, the first output of the algorithm has obvious deficiencies and we need to go back into the modules stored in the contexture and do a minor amount of tweaking, and then we need to punch that button again and recompile the chronology – but there is nothing here that remotely resembles the ordinary “writerly” process you know and love. As the contents of this originating contexture improve, and as the programming improves, and as funding becomes available (to date no funding whatever has been needed in the creation of this facility, the entire operation being run out of pocket change) we expect a diminished need to do such tweaking and recompiling, and we fully expect to achieve a simulation of a generous and untiring robotic research librarian. Onward and upward in this brave new world.

First come first serve. There is no charge.  
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