

meant pork; they were synonymous. Kentucky was the "land of pork and whiskey," and in Georgia a doctor from Columbus, alarmed by the eating of "fat bacon and pork, fat bacon and pork only, and that continually morning, noon and night, for all classes, ages and conditions," advocated naming the United States of America "The Great Hog-Eating Confederacy" or the "Republic of Porkdom." One traveler visiting Illinois in 1819 wrote that during the summer when pork was in short supply, "people would rather live on corn bread for a month than eat an ounce of mutton, veal, rabbit, goose or duck," while in Michigan in 1842, pork was "more cherished than sweetening or whiskey, something one could never have too much of," and pigs were so exalted that "not the sacred cow of Isis was the subject of more reverential attention."

New Yorkers and New Englanders apparently never developed a similar passion for pork. To judge from New Yorkers, when fresh meat was available, northerners preferred beef to either fresh or preserved pork. In New York City between 1854 and 1860 a yearly average of 132 million pounds of cattle was sold fresh at wholesale as compared with only 53 million pounds of pork. Yet it was fresh pork, not beef, that was used to celebrate the Fourth of July, the nation's most important public holiday. A visitor to New York in the 1840's painted this picture of how the republic of porkdom celebrated its independence:

Broadway being three miles long and booths lining each side of it, in every booth there was a roast pig . . . as the center of attraction. Six miles of roast pig! and that in New York City alone; and roast pig in every other town, hamlet and village in the Union.

One obvious reason for the northerners' relative lack of interest in pork is that on the eve of the Civil War northern-grown pigs had become rarer than sheep. Vermont farms, for example, had an average of 25 sheep but only 1.5 pigs in 1860. On a per capita basis the South and Midwest raised about two pigs per person while the North raised less than one-tenth of a pig per person. Pigs became scarce because the forests had been cut down to

supply Yankee shipbuilding and manufacturing industries, and little corn was grown because croplands had been converted into pasture to feed herds of dairy cattle. Whatever the precise combination of factors preventing northerners from developing a preference for pork, they were not merely acting out their ancestral British preference for beef. The British, after all, settled the South as much as the North, and pork-eating Colonial Virginia was in no way less British than beef-eating Colonial New York.

As a national phenomenon, the American preference for beef originated not overseas in Great Britain, but across the Mississippi in America's Great Plains. Here at last was a habitat ideal for raising cattle, but not for raising pigs. Hungry pigs will eat anything, and on certain grasses such as alfalfa they can even gain weight. But no one was going to turn pigs loose to roam the plains of Texas and Kansas. Grass was to cattle as forest acorns were to pigs. And what had to be done to make the plains safe for cattle was similar to what had been done two centuries earlier to make the forests safe for pigs: Indians and wolves had to be subdued. Buffalo presented a third problem; not being domesticated animals, they could not be walked to market, and they had little long-term commercial value. No one except the Indians preferred them to cattle. The stockmen, farmers, and the U.S. Army soon realized that the best way to get rid of the Indians was to get rid of the buffalo. Contrary to what the schoolbooks say, the extinction of the American bison did not result from careless and wanton overkill. Rather it resulted from a conscious policy connived at by the railroads, the army, and the cattle ranchers as a means of subduing the Indians and keeping them on their reservations. General Philip Sheridan put it to the Texas legislature straight from the hip: "Let the [hunters] kill, skin, and sell until the buffalo is exterminated, as it is the only way to bring about a lasting peace and allow civilization to advance." Hunters like Buffalo Bill shot, skinned, and butchered buffalo on the spot, loading the choicest parts on wagons for delivery to the railroad work camps and to frontier towns, helping to make the plains safe for cattle.

As the buffalo disappeared, herds of cattle took their place,