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Forgotten Glory: African American Civil War Soldiers and Their Omission from Civil
War Memory.

Connor Seaman

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Professor Luther Adams

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It is a source of great pleasure to bring to memory many of the scenes that transpired among the soldiers in the Union army in the late war. There were many deeds of heroic valor performed, not only by individuals, but by regiments, worthy to be handed down to posterity through the annuals of history, but which I fear have passed late oblivion, from which the rising generation cannot have the slightest conception.¹

Geo. B. Westsel

After the dust settles at the end of a war and the fires are put out, the memory of that war begins to take shape. Certain aspects of the war, such as specific battles, generals, soldiers, and ideas of why the war had to take place, are perpetuated and remembered in public memory, but other aspects are not. The parts of a war's history that are remembered necessarily have an exclusionary effect. In order to construct a memory of the past, certain aspects are forgotten. In the case of the Civil War, the African American soldiers who fought in the Union Army were excluded from mainstream white public memory in the decades following the conflict.

The African American soldiers who fought for the North were not remembered by white American society in the same fashion as their fellow combatants in the fifty years following the end of the Civil War. 178,000 African Americans served in the armed forces for the North, which was about ten percent of the Union's forces.² Although they served admirably during the time in which they took up arms, their honorable services were not revered by white American society after the war. By and large, their contributions were minimized or not even mentioned in various forms of memory and

¹ Geo. B. Westsel, "Reminiscence of the Fifth Mass. Cavalry," *The Christian Recorder*, February 28, 1878, *Accessible Archives, Inc.*
<http://www.accessible.com.offcampus.lib.washington.edu/accessible/print?AADocList=1&AADocStyle=&AASyleFile=&AABeanName=toc1&AANextPage=/printFullDocFromXML.jsp&AACheck=1.1.1.2.1> (accessed May 15, 2013).

² Donald Robert Shaffer, *After the Glory: The Struggles of Black Civil War Veterans* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004), 11.

commemoration. The sacrifices they made in the war effort, as well as the monumental achievements they made, were forgotten by the white public memory.

After the war finished, the white North and the white South's reconciliation did not allow for African American soldiers to be a part of the Civil War's public narrative. Reunification, rather than emancipation, was the dominant outcome of the Civil War that would be remembered by white society, while African Americans would remember emancipation as the most important outcome of the war. While white Americans acknowledged the freeing of slaves as an outcome of the Civil War, it was reunification of the white North and South that was commemorated and naturalized into the white public memory. In the process of becoming a single nation again after the war of "brother against brother," African American soldiers' part in the narrative and the causes they fought for was minimized and forgotten by white American society.

This phenomenon is apparent in the various forms and mediums through which memory is defined and perpetuated. Commemorative services such as Decoration Day would not include or refer to African soldiers as the years following the Civil War increased. The language in white newspaper articles about the Civil War demonstrates an exclusion of the contributions African Americans made in the Civil War. Veterans' reunions became racially exclusive of African Americans and perpetuated the reunification narrative. In the fifty years after the Civil War ended and well into the early-twentieth century, the narrative that the general American society would adopt was one of reunification, not one of emancipation.

Paul Shackel argues that public memory “is more a reflection of present political and social relations than a true reconstruction of the past.”³ Memory is never complete, and it never offers a full rendition of events that occur in the past whether it is from a personal or public perspective. The way in which American society was constructed and ordered in the fifty years following the Civil War shaped how white Americans remembered the Civil War. As the Reconstruction period transitioned into the Jim Crow Era, public memory was taking shape parallel to the social relations that existed between whites and African Americans. African American veterans represented a challenge to the social order, as well as the Emancipation cause of the Civil War.⁴ Consequentially, this contradiction was excluded from the white public memory.

African American soldiers performed admirably in the Civil War and demonstrated that they were not racially inferior. The former slaves who fought in the United States Colored Troops (USCT) were successful in acting as their own emancipators, as well as their families’ emancipators.⁵ They faced greater hardships and higher hurdles than white soldiers in the Civil War, but, in the face of adversity, they achieved so much. Despite the contributions and sacrifices they made, however, they would be forgotten by white America’s public memory in the years following the war and their influence would be excluded from the Civil War narrative.

³ Paul A. Shackel, “Public Memory and the Search for Power in American Historical Archaeology,” *American Anthropologist* 103, no. 3 (September 1, 2001): 657, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/683605> (accessed May 2, 2013).

⁴ Elsa Barkley Brown and Gregg D. Kimball, “Mapping the Terrain of Black Richmond,” *Journal of Urban History*, Vol. 21 No. 3 (March, 1995): 305.

⁵ Ira Berlin, Joseph P. Reidy, and Leslie S Rowland, *The Black Military Experience* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 1.

Creating a Legacy

Although they were actively forgotten from public memory in the decades that followed the Civil War, African Americans who participated in the military were significant factors in how the war progressed. They performed their duties in an honorable fashion that did not deserve to be forgotten.⁶ When tested on the field of battle, African American Civil War soldiers performed admirably. They proved to be key factors in the success of many of the Union's campaigns in the South. They were successful in becoming their own emancipators in the war to end slavery.⁷

Cause

The reasons why African Americans joined the Army fight against the South were largely different from those of northern whites. Individual whites in the Union forces, for the most part, fought either to eradicate slavery or to preserve the country.⁸ Some white soldiers' sole goal of the Civil War was to reign in the rebels in the southern states.⁹ As one *New York Times* article states, when discussing their views of the *Journal of Commerce's* perspective on the Civil War, that many "favor[ed] emancipation, not as an end in itself, but as a *means* of crushing the rebellion."¹⁰ Whites who wanted to end slavery also had varied reasons for wanting to end slavery: some wanted to abolish an evil institution, but many wanted to eradicate it because that would be the only way to

⁶ Ibid., 34.

⁷ Ibid., 1.

⁸ Chandra Manning, *What This Cruel War Was over: Soldiers, Slavery, and the Civil War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2007), 4.

⁹ Ibid., 4.

¹⁰ "Needless Dissensions," *New York Times*, New York, N.Y., United States, November 13, 1862, *ProQuest*, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/91680169?accountid=14784> (accessed April 29, 2013).

preserve the U.S.¹¹ Slavery was the central issue of the Civil War, but some northern whites only viewed the abolition of slavery as a means to preserve the U.S.

African American soldiers, however, held causes that contrasted from many whites. Rather than fighting to end slavery for the sake of “saving the Union,” African Americans fought to end slavery for the purpose of eradicating an evil institution and to attain freedom.¹² Around three-quarters of enlisted African Americans were former slaves that wanted to end the terrible institution that had inflicted great suffering upon them and their families.¹³ Both reforming the United States and ending slavery were the general reasons of why Northern white soldiers fought in the Civil War, but for African Americans, ending slavery was the reason they wanted to fight.

Beyond ending slavery, African American soldiers also sought to dispel racial inequality and the notion of racial inferiority. Many whites in the North were incredulous about the prospect of black soldiers in combat because they believed that African Americans lacked the courage and intelligence required to be capable soldiers.¹⁴ The act of serving in the armed forces, many African Americans hoped, would demonstrate to whites that African American men are not racially inferior, that African American men could fight as well as, or even better than white troops.¹⁵ For many soldiers, including an anonymous sergeant from the Fifty-Fifth Massachusetts Regiment, they “shed our best blood beneath the Stars and Stripes in order that our downtrodden and oppressed kindred

¹¹ Manning, 127.

¹² *Ibid.*, 127.

¹³ Dora L. Costa and Matthew E. Kahn, “Forging a New Identity: The Costs and Benefits of Diversity in Civil War Combat Units for Black Slaves and Freemen,” *The Journal of Economic History* 66, no. 4 (December 1, 2006): 936, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4501109>.

¹⁴ Shaffer, 12.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 12.

might be elevated and brought more on an equality with the white race.”¹⁶ Through taking up arms and serving as soldiers, black men sought to end racial inequality.¹⁷

This fight for equality was phrased by some as a quest for equal manhood. As Donald Shaffer argues, African American men who enlisted were fighting for the same benefits and rights that white men had, and they viewed their position in gendered terms.¹⁸ As Shaffer phrases, African American soldiers fought for their manhood in the Civil War, which meant fighting for equality, citizenship, power, and honor.¹⁹ It was apparent for African American men that in order to achieve “manhood” and demonstrate their equality, they would have to join the war effort against the white South. As an 1863 *Douglass’ Monthly* article states, “Nothing can be more plain, nothing more certain than that the speediest and best possible way open to us to manhood, equal rights and elevation, is that we en or this service.”²⁰

At the root of the Civil War, ultimately, was slavery. Slavery, as Chandra Manning argues, was the central issue of the Civil War for all involved.²¹ However, how slavery was central to all soldiers varied greatly. The reason why slavery was central to the cause for which the Civil War was fought contrasted between northern white soldiers and African American soldiers. African American men enlisted for the purpose of

¹⁶ “A Soldier’s Letter,” *The Christian Recorder*, July 9, 1864, *Accessible Archives, Inc.*, <http://www.accessible.com.offcampus.lib.washington.edu/accessible/print?AADocList=8&AADocStyle=STYLED&AAStyleFile=&AABeanName=toc1&AANextPage=/printFullIDocFromXML.jsp&AACheck=2.172.8.0.8> (accessed April 26, 2013).

¹⁷ Manning, 128.

¹⁸ Shaffer, 1.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 3.

²⁰ “Enlistment of Colored Men,” *Douglass’ Monthly*, August, 1863, *Accessible Archives, Inc.*, <http://www.accessible.com.offcampus.lib.washington.edu/accessible/print?AADocList=1&AADocStyle=STYLED&AAStyleFile=&AABeanName=toc1&AANextPage=/printFullIDocFromXML.jsp&AACheck=4.14.1.0.1> (accessed April 26, 2013).

²¹ Manning, 4.

combatting racial oppression through the abolition of slavery and the insistence upon racial equality.

Enlistment

African Americans held hope that the Civil War would bring about the end of slavery, but in order to be a part of the force for liberation, they had to push through a long struggle to even be allowed to enlist in the Army. In the first two years of the war, they had been denied the opportunity to serve in the Union Army. Beginning in 1863, however, they would be accepted into service and acquired the ability to prove their worth as equal men.

Despite the fact that slavery was the cause of the Civil War, many whites in the North and the South had denied that slavery was the central issue of the war.²² Many had dubbed the Civil War as the “War for the Union”. Both the white North and the white South wanted the Civil War to remain a war between white men.²³ Christian Fleetwood, an African American who served in the Union Army, described the systematic denial of enlistment as stemming from the notion that “[t]his is a white man’s war.”²⁴

As the war progressed through 1862, however, white northerners became more receptive to the prospect of allowing African Americans to enlist. The death toll through the first year of the war had been daunting, and the U.S. Army had met terrible defeats at the hands of the South at both of the battles at Bull Run and at Antietam.²⁵ The first year of the war had been the deadliest, as there were an estimated 35% more deaths in that

²² Shaffer, 11.

²³ *Ibid.*, 11.

²⁴ Christian Fleetwood, “The Negro as Soldier,” Washington D.C.: Howard University Print, 1895: 6, *The Frederick Douglass Papers at the Library of Congress*, http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/P?mfd:1:./temp/~ammem_nH33:: (accessed April 25, 2013).

²⁵ Berlin et al., 74; Shaffer 11.

year than in each of the following years of the Civil War.²⁶ The U.S. was losing the war. These defeats had discouraged many northern whites from enlisting, which forced Abraham Lincoln to begin recruiting African Americans into the Union Army.²⁷ African Americans were given the chance to prove through their service that they could fight with as much, if not greater valor and courage as any white man. As Christian Fleetwood said, they “saw the opening of the doors... in every direction.”²⁸ This was their opportunity to prove their equality and fight for freedom.

African American’s Importance to the Civil War

There are several ways in which to measure the importance of African American soldiers in the Civil War and how prominent of a chapter in the Civil War’s narrative they deserve. It can be measured through statistics to demonstrate that they were a large part of the Union Army, by their presence at key battles, and by the success they had at these battles. They were a large number of honorable soldiers willing to die for a cause they deeply believed in. Their experiences, both the glorious and the tragic, should have been enough for their part in the narrative to survive. Their contributions were ignored in the years following the Civil War, but their actions were deserving of remembrance and honor.

Over the course of the war, over 178,000 African Americans joined the Union Army, and between 10,000 and 18,000 joined the Union Navy.²⁹ This amounts to roughly ten percent of the total number of men enlisted in the North. These high numbers were

²⁶ Darroch Greer, “Counting Civil War Casualties, Week-by-Week, for the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum,” *BRC Imagination Arts*, http://brcweb.com/alplm/BRC_Counting_Casualties.pdf (accessed May 22, 2013).

²⁷ Shaffer, 11.

²⁸ Fleetwood, 7.

²⁹ Shaffer, 11.

significant to Lincoln and the North because enlistment from whites in the North had fallen by the time African Americans were allowed to enlist; they had been discouraged because of large casualties and embarrassing losses on the battlefield.³⁰ These numbers demonstrate that African Americans were a significant part of the war effort. Although they were initially denied from serving in the Army, African Americans were able to comprise a significant portion of it.

Although the numbers demonstrate that they held a sizable percentage of the total number of soldiers, African American men also demonstrated that they were highly capable soldiers on the battlefield. African American soldiers were significantly involved in important campaigns and battles in the later years of the Civil War, and performed admirably. When asked to perform on the battlefield, they answered the call with courage and valor.

At the Second Battle of Fort Wagner on July 18, 1863, the Fifty-Fourth Regiment Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry spearheaded the frontal assault against the Confederate fort.³¹ They pushed against heavy fire and reached the confederate parapet before being forced back. Although they were driven back and suffered heavy casualties, this African American regiment countered the notion that African American soldiers were not suited for combat. General Truman Seymour, who before the battle was extremely skeptical of African American soldiers, became an “ardent admirer of negro troops.”³²

³⁰ Ibid., 11.

³¹ Berlin et al., 519.

³² Nathaniel Paige, Testimony by a Special Correspondent of the *New York Tribune* before the American Freedmen’s Inquiry Commission, February? 1864, in *The Black Military Experience*, eds. Ira Berlin, Joseph P. Reidy, and Leslie Rowland (Cambridge University Press, 1982), 536.

At the Battle of Milliken's Bend on June 7, 1863, during the Vicksburg Campaign, African Americans took part in one of the hardest fought battles of the Civil War. Among the 1410 men defending the Union camp at Milliken's Bend, only 150 were white men; the rest were ex-slaves from the Ninth Louisiana, the Eleventh Louisiana, and the First Mississippi regiments.³³ Although half of their group suffered casualties, they successfully defended their position until the Navy warship *Choctaw* arrived to provide assistance.³⁴ African American troops demonstrated their combat mettle for all incredulous observers to notice. Adjutant General Thomas of the 94th Regiment of the United State Colored Infantry expressed his impressment by their actions, asking, "What troops could have done better?"³⁵ Their actions demonstrated their value as soldiers.

African American soldiers proved to be central components of the Siege of Petersburg, the final campaign of the Civil War before the brief Appomattox Campaign led to the capture of Confederate General Robert E. Lee. The Siege of Petersburg, led by General Ulysses S. Grant, involved a series of battles with the ultimate goal of capturing Petersburg and Richmond, Virginia.³⁶ The Siege of Petersburg involved a collective force that included 13,630 African American soldiers, the largest concentration of African American soldiers in the Civil War.³⁷ African American troops would take part in several key battles during this important campaign, including at the Battle of the Crater and the Battle of Chaffin's Farm.

³³ Benjamin Quarles, *The Negro in the Civil War* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1953) 221.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 223.

³⁵ Adjutant General L. Thomas to Hon. H. Wilson, 30 May 1864, in *The Black Military Experience*, eds. Ira Berlin, Joseph P. Reidy, and Leslie Rowland (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 531.

³⁶ Richard Wayne Lykes, *Campaign for Petersburg*, (Washington D.C.: U.S. National Park Service, 1970), 5.

³⁷ Hondon Hargrove, *Black Union Soldiers in the Civil War* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., 1988), 199.

Perhaps the finest performance for African Americans in the Siege of Petersburg was at the Battle of Chaffin's Farm. It was a Union victory, but the battle also allowed thirteen individual soldiers to perform gallantly enough to be awarded the Medal of Honor. Among those that achieved glory in this battle were Private James Gardner of the 36th U.S. Colored Troops, who "shot at a rebel officer, who was on a parapet, cheering his men, and then ran through him with his bayonet."³⁸ Christian Fleetwood would receive a medal himself after he "seized the national colors and bore them nobly through the fight" after two color bearers were shot down.³⁹ This battle involved not just an honorable collective action of African Americans, but also a glorious display of individual actions worthy of remembering and commemorating.

African American regiments were highly visible forces in the war, and the causes they fought for were briefly realized in the final days of the conflict. After the evacuation of Richmond, Virginia, the Fifth Massachusetts Cavalry was among the first forces to enter Richmond on April 2nd.⁴⁰ There were also nine USCT Infantry regiments occupying the city.⁴¹ Master Sergeant John C. Brock of the 43rd USCT wrote the *Christian Recorder* describing the scene of Richmond's African American population welcoming his regiment marching into the city:

The delight of the colored population, in welcoming our troops, can neither be expressed nor described. Old men and women, tottering on their canes, would make their way to a Union soldier, catch him by the hand, and exclaim, "Thank God, honey, that I have lived to see this day! I have been looking, and longing, and praying for you to come; and, thank God, He has heard our prayers, and

³⁸ Ed Smith, Assistant Adjutant General, to the Soldiers of the Army of the James, October 11, 1864, *Documents Relating to the Military and Naval Service of Blacks Awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor From the Civil War to the Spanish American War* (National Archives Microfilm Publication M929, roll 1).

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Hargrove, 200.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 200.

preserved our lives to see this salvation!"... When the history of this ungodly rebellion shall be written, nothing will shine brighter on the pages of the historian, than the heroic firmness, endurance, and fortitude, of the gallant armies which struggled over the hills and plains of Virginia for the possession of Richmond.⁴²

This letter represents what African Americans were fighting for and what they had achieved. They had ably fought against a force that defended the wrong side of slavery and were among the occupying forces of the final major occupation of the war. They participated in ending the war over slavery and became their own emancipators. Their presence in Richmond alone signifies the pride they felt in their achievements. African American soldiers were the glorious emancipators of their families and race and made an impact that should have been remembered by American society for generations to come.

African Americans were central to the war effort for the North, and participated in hundreds of battles in the years since they were enlisted.⁴³ They had comprised one tenth of the total number of soldiers who fought in the U.S. Army in the Civil War, but their portion of the northern forces is much higher from the time they were allowed to serve in 1863 to 1865. They clearly had a presence in numbers and in strength.

A Buried Legacy

Although they had performed admirably in the Civil War, African American soldiers and their services were ignored by white Americans. They had clearly made an impact on the war, but their contributions were excluded from the country's collective narrative of the Civil War. After the fighting finished and after Reconstruction took place, African American soldiers' contributions to the war were ignored by whites. The

⁴² "A soldier's letter," *The Christian Recorder*, April 29, 1865. *Accessible Archives, Inc.*, <http://www.accessible.com.offcampus.lib.washington.edu/accessible/print?AADocList=1&AADocStyle=&AASStyleFile=&AABeanName=toc1&AANextPage=/printFullDocFromXML.jsp&AACheck=5.1.1.4.1> (accessed April 27, 2013).

⁴³ Hargrove, 202.

recognition that they sought to achieve through their actions was not maintained as the decades after the war passed.

As reunification between the white North and South took place, white society's memory of the Civil War excluded the contributions that African Americans made on the battlefield. The glory and commemoration that would be applied to African Americans' white allies, as well as their southern enemies, would not be granted to them. The formation of the Civil War's presence in American memory involved the racial exclusion of the members of the USCT.

“The War for the Union”: Competing Causes and Memories

Before the Civil War ended, there was already a debate in the North among whites as to what the war was fought for. Slavery was at the root of the Civil War, but there was still the competing view that “saving the Union” was the central cause that was fought for in the Civil War.⁴⁴ After the war was over and the dead were buried, ending slavery would not be the cause of the Civil War remembered by white society. Instead, the Civil War would be viewed mostly as the war to maintain the Union for northern whites. As a result, the cause that African American soldiers fought for was less revered by white society as the years passed following the war. This was a central facet to how African Americans' contributions were left out of the collective narrative following the Civil War.

As stated before, the causes that African American soldiers fought for were to end slavery and to disprove the notion of racial inequality.⁴⁵ However, many white Northerners did not share this goal. Many white Northerners believed that the purpose of

⁴⁴ Manning, 3; Berlin et al., 1.

⁴⁵ Shaffer, 12.

the war was to reform the U.S.⁴⁶ Others wanted to eradicate slavery, but some wanted to abolish slavery for the purpose of maintaining the country. Many of those who supported ending slavery also did not believe that ending slavery was a message supporting black equality and more citizenship rights.⁴⁷ Although slavery was at the root of the Civil War, reforming the U.S. was at the forefront of many northerners' minds. African Americans' causes for entering into service were not the same as northern whites'.

During the war, northern white society was divided over whether the war was based upon slavery or to reform the broken United States. For many whites, the U.S. waged the war in order to bring the rebellious states back into the Union. In 1862, when considering the viewpoint that the northern states was fighting the war "*for the purpose of opposing Slavery, Union or no Union,*" *The New York Times* found it to be incomprehensible.⁴⁸ *The New York Times* supported the view during this time in the war effort that the war was "for the Union and the Constitution," and that of the people who voted against Horatio Seymour, a man who supported the notion that the Civil War was a "War for the Union," "ninety-nine hundredths, we venture to assert, assent fully to this doctrine."⁴⁹ While it is hard to imagine that slavery was not at the forefront of ninety-nine percent of people's minds, there was certainly a presence of the notion among Northern whites that the Civil War was fought not to end slavery, but rather to reform the U.S.

For many white northerners, even after the Emancipation Proclamation was declared, maintaining the Union was at the forefront of their minds. At a rally in the Cooper Institute in New York in 1863, around four thousand "loyal citizens who are in

⁴⁶ Manning, 12.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁴⁸ "Needless Dissensions."

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

favor of sustaining the Government in its efforts to suppress the rebellion” gathered to support what they viewed as the Union cause.⁵⁰ The citizens were described as “determined to preserve the integrity of the national laws and national territory and to maintain the power of our flag.”⁵¹ As speaker William Bryant declared, all present bore “sentiments of loyalty and devotion to the Constitution.”⁵² The language used in this rally did not condemn the white South for slavery, but rather for dismembering the United States. For those who attended the rally, as well as many other white northerners, the war was centered on the Union cause.

It was also apparent in artwork distributed at the time that the Union cause was at the forefront of white northerners’ minds. A printed illustration in an 1862 issue of *Harper’s Weekly*, a white political magazine based in New York, depicts a Union cavalry charging against a Confederate force, and it is titled, *The War for the Union, 1862—A Cavalry Charge* (see Figure 1). The artist, Winslow Homer, also provides a similar illustration for the same magazine titled *The War for the Union, 1862—A Bayonet Charge* (see Figure 2). Neither of these illustrations represents a specific battle, but they both portray Union and Confederate soldiers clashing on a chaotic battlefield. These illustrations have the effect of portraying the war as a glorious, but gruesome conflict. The one aspect that ties these illustrations’ message together is their titles that indicate that the Civil War was a “War for the Union.” Essentially, these images declare that all of the suffering and fighting in the war was being done in order to reform the United States.

⁵⁰ “THE UNION: Monster Mass Meeting of the Loyal Citizens of New-York,” *New York Times*, March 7, 1863, *ProQuest*, <http://search.proquest.com.offcampus.lib.washington.edu/docview/91762031?accountid=14784> (accessed April 29, 2013).

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.*

These images exclude the notion that the war was being fought for the liberation of African American slaves.

In the white North, there were two competing causes behind the Civil War: preserving the Union and ending slavery. After the war ended, the Union cause would be more prevalent in the public memory of the Civil War than the Emancipation cause.⁵³ African Americans would remember that the war ultimately led to the end of slavery. However, reunification between the white North and the South dominated the narrative in the decades that followed the end of the Civil War. As a consequence, African American Union soldiers' cause would not have the same staying power in public memory as the Union cause. The minimization of their cause was a central aspect to how African American soldiers would be excluded from the narrative. The white Union cause was prevalent during the Civil War, but it thrived in Civil War memory in the fifty years following its end. Although African Americans were a part of the Union, the prevalence of the white Union cause after the war would be a part of the exclusion of African American soldiers from the Civil War memory.

Tools of Commemoration

David Blight argues in his book *Race and Reunion* that there were three competing visions of Civil War memory in the fifty years following the conflict: the emancipationist, the reconciliationist, and the white supremacist visions.⁵⁴ The emancipationist vision held that the Civil War meant a radical reformation of the United States through the liberation of African Americans from slavery and into becoming equal

⁵³ Shaffer, 169.

⁵⁴ David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge, Maine: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001), 2.

citizens under the Constitution.⁵⁵ The reconciliationist vision emphasizes the reunification of warring brothers that inflicted much devastation upon each other, and the necessity to heal from that devastation in the postwar period.⁵⁶ The white supremacist vision involved a segregated vision of the Civil War that excluded African Americans from the Civil War narrative.⁵⁷ Over time, Blight argues, the reconciliationist vision of the Civil War became the primary vision of the nation's public memory.⁵⁸

Blight's argument on the Civil War's standing in public memory bears significance with African American soldiers in particular. Reunification meant the white North and the white South coming back together, hand-in-hand, after inflicting such great pain upon each other. Reforming two highly divided and warring "brothers" became the outcome of the war that the nation in general would revere and reminisce over, not the freeing of millions of oppressed African Americans. Essentially, the cause that African American soldiers fought for would not be seen as prevalent of an outcome of the Civil War as reunification.

Paul Shackel offers a comprehensive description of how memory is forged and saturated in the public sphere. Shackel suggests three ways through which public memory can be established: "(1) forgetting about or excluding an alternative past, (2) creating and reinforcing patriotism, and/or (3) developing a sense of nostalgia to legitimize a particular heritage."⁵⁹ These three ways of shaping public memory are central to Civil War memory and how African American soldiers were left out of white America's public

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁵⁹ Shackel, "Public Memory and the Search for Power in American Historical Archaeology," 656.

narrative. The reunification narrative that formed involved the exclusion of African Americans' alternative past.

Shackel argues that in order to have group cohesion, certain elements of the past need to be remembered, while other elements need to be forgotten.⁶⁰ As reunification took place between white northerners and southerners, African American soldiers' contributions to the Civil War effort were diminished in comparison to the contributions whites on both sides of the conflict made. African American soldiers did not "need" to be forgotten from public memory, but their being forgotten was a consequence of the reunification between white northerners and southerners.

Shackel also argues that public memory "is more a reflection of present political and social relations than a true reconstruction of the past."⁶¹ Memory is never a complete rendition of events that occur in the past, whether it is from a personal or a public perspective. Certain aspects of the past such as people and significant events gain prominence while others are left at the wayside of misremembered history, and whether or not they are remembered is dependent upon current conditions. In order for the memory to be altered, the current social, political, and ideological conditions need to be changed as well.⁶²

The social and political order that existed after Reconstruction and during the Jim Crow Era was that of oppression by whites over African Americans. African Americans were being forced into a place on the social ladder below that of whites. African American soldiers represented a challenge to this ideal, and as a consequence their

⁶⁰ Ibid., 657.

⁶¹ Ibid., 656.

⁶² Ibid., 656.

contributions to the war were excluded from white public memory.⁶³ White society excluded them from white public memory through the advocating of the white Union cause and the ignorance and refusal of the Emancipation cause.

The absence of African American soldiers from the Civil War narrative is apparent in many of the different avenues through which memory is observable and perpetuated. Civil War memory is shaped not only through being present during a memorable event or time period; it is also shaped by public events such as Memorial Day celebrations and soldier reunions, as well as dominant public voices such as newspapers and government officials. Memory is shaped by what takes place in the present. Northern white society promoted the white Union cause of the Civil War as the white North and white South reunited, but excluded the emancipationist vision of the Civil War from being perpetuated. The absence of African American soldiers can be seen in the way in which Civil War memory is created through reunions, Emancipation Day celebrations, Memorial Day celebrations, and monument building. These tools of commemoration were key in creating a segregated memory of the Civil War.

Reunions

One of the ways in which it is observable that African Americans were excluded from Civil War memory was through soldier reunions. Blue-Grey reunions served as occasions to celebrate the surviving soldiers who fought in the war and the reconciliation between the two warring sides.⁶⁴ African Americans would hold reunions of their own regiments, and were sometimes invited to Blue-Grey reunions.⁶⁵ However, the memory

⁶³ Brown and Kimball, 305.

⁶⁴ Paul A. Shackel, *Memory in Black and White: Race, Commemoration, and the Post-bellum Landscape* (Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press, 2003), 176.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 33.

that whites forged at Blue-Grey reunions did not match the memory that African Americans created. White veterans at Blue-Grey reunions perpetuated the reconciliation narrative and ignored the African American soldiers who fought in the war.

African American veterans were able to establish their own memories of the Civil War at African American soldiers' reunions. Reunions were viewed as important events that could help to commemorate their services and perpetuate the causes they fought for in the Civil War. As one veteran from the Fifth Regiment USCT described in 1865, reunions would "connect [them] in the bonds of friendship and grace, and be a guiding star to our future advancement in the cause of liberty and justice."⁶⁶ At one reunion in Massachusetts in 1882, former soldier J.M. Trotter read an article from *The N.Y. Globe* detailing the heroic accomplishment made by the 54th Massachusetts Regiment to acquire equal pay for all African American troops through a boycott: "[T]he Massachusetts colored troops finally won for themselves, for all other colored troops, and relatively for their race and its friends, a complete, a glorious victory."⁶⁷ African American veteran reunions served as a way to recognize their efforts to obtain liberty and equality.

⁶⁶ "Letter from the Fifth Regiment U.S.C.T.," *The Christian Recorder*, November 4, 1865, *Accessible Archives Inc.*, <http://www.accessible.com.offcampus.lib.washington.edu/accessible/print?AADocList=1&AADocStyle=&AASyleFile=&AABeanName=toc1&AANextPage=/printFullDocFromXML.jsp&AACheck=6.1.1.2.1> (accessed April 30, 2013).

⁶⁷ "From The N.Y. Globe," *The Christian Recorder*, December 14, 1882, *Accessible Archives, Inc.*, <http://www.accessible.com.offcampus.lib.washington.edu/accessible/print?AADocList=2&AADocStyle=STYLED&AASyleFile=&AABeanName=toc1&AANextPage=/printFullDocFromXML.jsp&AACheck=7.4.2.0.2> (accessed April 30, 2013).

Many African Americans also saw the importance of reunions in establishing their place in the history of the Civil War. Reverend John C. Brock from Pennsylvania reacted in 1886 to a reunion in Massachusetts by calling for one in his state:

An opportunity would be afforded to collect facts for historical information that will never be published by a prejudiced historian. If we wish to have proper credit let us furnish historians from among ourselves to furnish the facts connected with our own history. Examine our school histories, if you please, and you will find very little, if any, reference made to the fact that nearly 200,000 colored men shouldered the musket and went forth to so and die, that the foul blot of slavery might be forever erased from our national banner. By all means let us have a reunion.⁶⁸

Reunions were desirable because it would give African American veterans the ability to establish their place in the history of the Civil War. It would allow them to tell their stories to themselves and their families so that future generations could have a wealth of knowledge to draw upon. Many African Americans observed that they were being left out of America's collective Civil War narrative, but saw a way to try and insert themselves into it. African American veterans saw it as a way to commemorate the services they made in the Civil War.

African American veterans were never able to form as many or as large of reunions as northern or southern whites, however. The largest known reunion held by African Americans veterans was one held in Boston in 1887, which included over 300 veterans.⁶⁹ Over 50,000 veterans attended the Blue-Grey Gettysburg reunion of 1913.⁷⁰

The consequences of not being able to organize reunions as well as whites was apparent

⁶⁸ Rev. Jno. C. Brock, "Reunion of Colored Troops," *The Christian Recorder*, July 15, 1886. *Accessible Archives, Inc.*, <http://www.accessible.com.offcampus.lib.washington.edu/accessible/print?AADocList=1&AADocStyle=&AASStyleFile=&AABeanName=toc1&AANextPage=/printFullDocFromXML.jsp&AACheck=8.1.1.2.1> (accessed April 30, 2013).

⁶⁹ Shaffer, 161.

⁷⁰ Blight, 12.

to George B. Westsel, a writer for *The Christian Recorder*: “The circumstances under which the colored soldiers entered the army were such that it is impossible for different regiments to perpetuate their memory by annual reunions as the white soldiers do.”⁷¹ If African Americans could not hold regimental reunions regularly, it would be harder to preserve their vision of the Civil War, as well as to preserve their place in the Civil War. Reunions, if held, could have helped to perpetuate their place in Civil War memory, but African American veterans could not hold many African American reunions.

Blue-Grey reunions, on the other hand, produced a counter-narrative to the one that African Americans wanted to tell at their reunions. Often times racially exclusive, these reunions between white northern and southern veterans served to exclude the Emancipation cause and African Americans from Civil War memory. Blue-Grey reunions served as sites of reconciliation between northern and southern whites, and restricted African Americans from attending to participating in the creation of collective Civil War memory. Unlike African American reunions, Blue-Grey reunions were much more frequent. In the five years after the first Blue-Grey reunion at Gettysburg in 1882 alone, there were at least nineteen other Blue-Grey reunions were held.⁷² Blue-Grey reunions effectively excluded African American veterans from having their say as to how the Civil War should be remembered.

Reunions involving white veterans excluded African Americans from being a part of Civil War memory in two ways. The first was physical separation. African Americans were not invited to most Blue-Grey reunions, and even at the ones they were invited to

⁷¹ Westsel, “Reminiscence of the Fifth Mass. Cavalry.”

⁷² Shackel, *Memory in Black and White: Race, Commemoration, and the Post-Bellum Landscape*, 29.

they were segregated into separate camps.⁷³ This segregation parallels the same segregation African Americans experienced in American society. Not being invited barred African Americans from being able to share their experiences with white veterans. However, even for the times in which they were invited, whites did not listen to their views on the Civil War. It was difficult for African American veterans to perpetuate their memory of the Civil War among white veterans unwilling to comingle or listen.

The second way was that Blue-Grey reunions perpetuated narratives that ran counter to African Americans' vision of the Civil War. Reconciliation was the primary narrative expressed at these reunions; one reunion of over 40,000 white northern and southern veterans at Gettysburg was a meeting between "friend and comrades, not as foes."⁷⁴ Although Blue-Grey Reunions were initially sites of sectionalist anger, they became events at which for white soldiers to trade tales of valor and hardship.⁷⁵ They became places where both sides could salute their former opponents and commend them for their honorable conduct on the battlefield.⁷⁶ As a consequence, the reconciliationist vision of the Civil War was perpetuated at Blue-Grey Reunions rather than the emancipationist vision. The Emancipation cause that was fought for in the Civil War by African Americans would remain absent from these reunions.

⁷³ Ibid., 33.

⁷⁴ "MEADE'S MEN MEET LEE'S AT GETTYSBURG: 40,000 Survivors of the Armies That Fought There Will Mingle as Comrades. A 50-YEARS-AFTER REUNION Uncle Sam Will Be the Host and the Old Soldiers Guests of Honor from the 1st to the 4th of July," *New York Times*, June 22, 1913, *ProQuest*, <http://search.proquest.com.offcampus.lib.washington.edu/docview/97397959?accountid=14784> (accessed May 3, 2013).

⁷⁵ Shackel, *Memory in Black and White: Race, Commemoration, and the Post-Bellum Landscape*, 28-32.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 29. Confederate troops were not always honorable on the battlefield, however, as the massacre of surrendered African American soldiers at the Battle of Fort Pillow demonstrates.

Blue-Grey reunions were also sights at which the Lost Cause ideology gained prevalence.⁷⁷ The African American newspaper *The Washington Bee* was aware of this taking place before an upcoming reunion at Gettysburg in 1913:

A more abundant and spectacular display of indelicate wheedle may be expected at Gettysburg, the same malignant and audacious misrepresentation of the Negro and his friends, the same ungracious and inconsistent argument designed to humiliate the North and glorify the white South.⁷⁸

The *Washington Bee* was observant of the prevalence of the Lost Cause at the Gettysburg reunion. The Lost Cause glorified southern veterans and ignored the fact that slavery was at the root of the Civil War. As a consequence, African American veterans could not insert themselves into the collective Civil War memory.

African American Civil War veterans were able to perpetuate their memory of the Civil War amongst themselves at their relatively few reunions, but they could not compete with the commemorative sites that were Blue-Grey reunions. Through segregation and ideological suppression, African Americans were excluded from establishing their places in Civil War memory. Reunions were a lost battle site over the memory of the Civil War.

Emancipation Day

Emancipation Day was one of the most central holidays to African Americans in the years following the Civil War. It was be celebrated by freed slaves and their children. However, white society largely ignored this holiday. After the Reconstruction era, Emancipation Day was celebrated by African Americans, but not whites. Emancipation

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 32.

⁷⁸ “Anniversary of the Battle of Gettysburg,” *The Washington Bee*, May 24, 1913, *GenealogyBank*, <http://www.genealogybank.com> (accessed May 20, 2013).

Day helped to perpetuate African American soldiers' memories and their belonging in the Civil War narrative, but white society largely ignored this form of commemoration.

Emancipation Day marked an important occasion in which African Americans commemorated the realization of the Emancipation cause. The date Emancipation Day was celebrated on varied throughout the country. In Texas, for instance, Emancipation Day was prominently celebrated on June nineteenth, also known as Juneteenth, because that was the day in 1865 when, as one Texas resident described in 1909, "the word reached Texas that our folks were free."⁷⁹ In various other places, Emancipation Day was celebrated on January first in recognition of the Emancipation Proclamation. The *Chicago Defender* described the occasion as one "commemorating the most important day in [African Americans'] history."⁸⁰ There were various dates at different locations for when Emancipation Day was celebrated, but they all commemorated a representative day in which the Emancipation cause was actualized.

One way in which African American veterans expressed the glory and cause they achieved in the Civil War was in the form of Emancipation Day. At one celebration in Washington D.C. in 1890, 4,000 soldiers marched in line in a parade along Pennsylvania Avenue with President Benjamin Harrison watching as it passed by.⁸¹ Along with the

⁷⁹ J.O. Midnight, "EMANCIPATION DAY OBSERVED BY TEXANS: PROBABLY THE ONLY STATE IN THE COUNTRY IN WHICH THE COLORED PEOPLE OWN THE DAY," *The Baltimore Afro-American*, Baltimore, Md., United States, July 3, 1909. *ProQuest*, <http://search.proquest.com.offcampus.lib.washington.edu/docview/530296177?accountid=14784> (accessed May 2, 2013).

⁸⁰ Eloise Bibb Thompson, "CALIFORNIA PEOPLE HOLD EMANCIPATION DAY CELEBRATIONS," *The Chicago Defender (Big Weekend Edition)*, Chicago, Ill., United States, January 23, 1915. *ProQuest* (accessed May 2, 2013).

⁸¹ J.W. Smith, "OPINIONS AND PERSONALITIES," *The Christian Recorder*, May 1, 1890, *Accessible Archives, Inc.*, <http://www.accessible.com.offcampus.lib.washington.edu/accessible/print?AADocList=1>

soldiers were social organizations and carriages carrying African American women waving at the crowds that lined the street. As described by the *Christian Recorder*, “[t]he streets were Africanized.”⁸² This event marked not just a celebration of the liberation of millions of African Americans, but also served as an attachment of the soldiers to that cause. In describing another Emancipation Day celebration in Nashville, Tennessee, the *Chicago Defender* saw the occasion as a way to commemorate “the ex-slaves and old federal soldiers...who fought and shed blood for their freedom.”⁸³ African Americans, including the veterans, professed their memory of the Civil War as a narrative of Emancipation, not reunion at Emancipation Day celebrations such as these. Emancipation Day for African Americans was a commemorative effort for the emancipationist narrative, as well as for the self-emancipating soldiers.

Emancipation Day did not hold the same meaning to whites as it did to African Americans. For African Americans, the day symbolized an important occasion commemorating the liberation of millions, largely including themselves and their relatives.⁸⁴ White Americans in the North in large part remembered the Civil War as the “War of the Rebellion,” which connotes that the war was about reforming the Union

3&AADocStyle=STYLED&AAStyleFile=&AABeanName=toc1&AANextPage=/printFullDocFromXML.jsp&AACheck=1.135.13.0.13 (accessed May 2, 2013).

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ B. H. January, “Emancipation Day a Huge Success,” *The Chicago Defender (Big Weekend Edition)*, Chicago, Ill., United States, September 23, 1916. *ProQuest*, <http://search.proquest.com.offcampus.lib.washington.edu/docview/493311121?accountid=14784> (accessed May 2, 2013).

⁸⁴ Mitch Kachun, *Festivals of Freedom: Memory and Meaning in African American Emancipation Celebrations, 1808-1915* (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003), 4.

rather than emancipation.⁸⁵ Emancipation Day involved the celebration of a cause that was not celebrated by white society, as the Civil War became a distant memory.

Emancipation Day was rejected by white Americans in the North and South. The *New York Times* depicted one year's Emancipation Day celebration in less than glowing terms. Rather than being a celebratory holiday, Emancipation Day was described more as an unnecessary nuisance to both African Americans and their employers. African Americans, it is described, would "drop their employment and go off" to celebrate, which then is "followed by some losses of employment," which is sarcastically described as "a new emancipation."⁸⁶ Rather than blaming their employers for firing African American workers for celebrating the acquisition of freedom, the *Times* blamed the celebrators: "If the negroes more sensibly understood their rights and more carefully observed their obligations, they would avoid this annual annoyance."⁸⁷

This particular discourse was in an article titled "Phases of the Negro Problem." The "Negro Problem" was a term used to describe the feared prospect by whites of African Americans' presence in white American society. The "Negro Problem," as David Blight summarizes, was a "disorder against which white supremacists reacted with fervor."⁸⁸ Whenever whites discussed the "Negro Problem," African Americans were referred to as "the obstacle to national progress, as a people to be reformed or eliminated,

⁸⁵ Shaffer, 169.

⁸⁶ "Phases of the Negro Problem," *New York Times*, April 18, 1897, *ProQuest*, <http://search.proquest.com.offcampus.lib.washington.edu/docview/95507885?accountid=14784> (accessed May 3, 2013).

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ Blight, 354.

as a social crisis demanding solutions.”⁸⁹ Segregation and disfranchisement was a way for whites to counter this “social crisis.”⁹⁰

Initially in the South during Reconstruction, Emancipation Day celebrations were held within the collective public sphere, but as the Jim Crow era progressed, white southerners rejected Emancipation Day and the messages of liberation and equality presented at these celebrations.⁹¹ Racial segregation was taking hold throughout the South, and African Americans and their public commemorations were sequestered to African American neighborhoods.⁹² The threat of violence by whites against African Americans at these events was a key factor that secluded Emancipation Day into African American neighborhoods.⁹³ Emancipation Day celebrations were being pushed outside of the white public sphere and confined to only the African American public sphere.

Emancipation Day was not celebrated by white society partly because the dominant cause that would be celebrated after the Civil War ended would be the white Union cause. Racist attitudes toward African Americans celebrating this holiday pushed Emancipation Day celebrations out of the white public sphere and secluded to the African American public sphere, thus preventing African American soldiers from being included in white mainstream memory. White Americans would subvert the meaning of Emancipation Day through other forms of commemoration. Other days of commemoration such as Memorial Day and anniversaries of key Civil War battles would hold higher prevalence for white Americans.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 364.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 364.

⁹¹ Kachun, 7.

⁹² Ibid., 7, 146.

⁹³ Ibid., 179.

Memorial Day

One of the most central ways to perpetuate the memory of a war and its soldiers is in the form of commemorative holidays. National holidays such as Decoration Day (which later came to be called Memorial Day) served as important memorializing events for the veterans of the Civil War, as well as the dead.⁹⁴ African Americans would celebrate their veterans, as well as the cause that they achieved, on Emancipation Day and Memorial Day. Although they received recognition for their services during these days within their own communities, African American veterans and dead soldiers, along with the contributions they made in the Civil War, would remain conspicuously absent from white national commemorative holidays.

Memorial Day was an occasion that African Americans participated in immediately after the Civil War.⁹⁵ South Carolinian African Americans and white abolitionists were the first to ever organize a Decoration Day on May 1, 1865.⁹⁶ This particular event was organized to commemorate 257 dead Union prisoners held at the Charleston Race Course, and the event involved over 10,000 participants, most of whom were former slaves.⁹⁷ In a few years' time, the ceremony would be adopted by white northerners and perpetuated thereafter.⁹⁸

⁹⁴ Susan-Mary Grant, "Raising the Dead: War, Memory and American National Identity," in *Nations & Nationalism* 11, no. 4 (October 2005): 509, *EBSCOhost*, <http://offcampus.lib.washington.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=18359541&site=ehost-live> (accessed May 22, 2013).

⁹⁵ Kachun, 7.

⁹⁶ Grant, 519.

⁹⁷ Blight, 69.

⁹⁸ Grant, 519.

White society celebrated Memorial Day as a form of remembering the dead of the Civil War, and its celebration helped to create nationalism for white Americans.⁹⁹

Memorial Day was usually recognized by having a parade to cemeteries of dead soldiers and laying wreaths on the graves.¹⁰⁰ White veterans were displayed prominently at these parades and were well-received; one Memorial Day parade in New York in 1890 depicted the white veterans marching in the streets as “well attired, and as they passed along down the densely-crowded avenue, huzzas from thousands of throats cheered them on their way.”¹⁰¹ The streets were adorned with signs of nationalism:

Every [household] who had a flag put it out. Bunting spanned the entire fronts of many houses. The national colors floated at every flagstaff, and the designs that have become familiar on former great decorative occasions enriched again the gorgeous mass of color with which the city had regaled itself.¹⁰²

The nationalism present at these ceremonies was always on full display. Memorial Day celebrations were central events on the white American public sphere to unite and commemorate the dead soldiers, as well as the causes they represented.

African American communities acknowledged the sacrifices made by African American soldiers on Memorial Day in a similar fashion as white Americans for their soldiers: with admiration and condolences. Both types of communities would set flowers on graves of the fallen soldiers. At the African American Mount Glenwood Cemetery in Chicago, around 250 people adorned soldiers’ graves with flowers; the cemetery was

⁹⁹ Ibid., 509.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 519.

¹⁰¹ “Honors to Dead Heroes: Decoration Day Observed with Unusual Ceremony. Thousands View the Military Parade -- Decorating Soldiers’ Graves -- the Day in Brooklyn,” *New York Times*, New York, N.Y., United States, May 31, 1890, *ProQuest*, <http://search.proquest.com.offcampus.lib.washington.edu/docview/94828587?accountid=14784> (accessed May 23, 2013).

¹⁰² Ibid.

described as “the silent city of the dead to be cherished in memory until another visit.”¹⁰³ African Americans did have a presence on Memorial Day in the form of African American newspapers. Along with many other notable African American war figures like Crispus Attucks and Frederick Douglass, the *Chicago Defender* dedicated Memorial Day, to the African American Civil War soldiers, who “fought at Fort Wagner and Fort Pillow, and all the other conflicts of the mighty rebellion.”¹⁰⁴ Memorial Day was a holiday that African Americans participated in to perpetuate their memory of the Civil War. It was through Memorial Day, similarly to Emancipation Day, that African American soldiers were remembered for the sacrifices they made and the causes they fought for.

In the South, most Memorial Day activities, whether conducted by white Union or Confederate veterans after the 1890’s, excluded African American veterans from participating.¹⁰⁵ In the Reconstruction South, African Americans celebrated Decoration Day in the open with white Republicans, but after the federal troops were pulled out they were excluded from celebrating Decoration Day except for within their own neighborhoods.¹⁰⁶ Once power was restored to white southerners, they were able to push out African Americans from the white public sphere.

¹⁰³ “SUNDAY AT MOUNT GLENWOOD CEMETERY: Hundreds Visit Beautiful Burying Ground to Reverence Their Dead and Plant Flowers on Their Graves,” *The Chicago Defender (Big Weekend Edition)*, Chicago, Ill., United States, June 6, 1914, *ProQuest*, <http://search.proquest.com.offcampus.lib.washington.edu/docview/493298486?accountid=14784> (accessed May 25, 2013).

¹⁰⁴ Nahum Daniel Brascher, “HERE’S TO THE MEMORY: ‘Lord God of Hosts, Be with Us yet, Lest We Forget,’” *The Chicago Defender (Big Weekend Edition)*, Chicago, Ill., United States, May 31, 1919, *ProQuest*, <http://search.proquest.com.offcampus.lib.washington.edu/docview/493394904?accountid=14784> (accessed May 15, 2013).

¹⁰⁵ Shaffer, 152.

¹⁰⁶ Kachun, 7.

The spirit in which northern whites celebrated Memorial Day was focused on the white Union narrative. The *Los Angeles Times*, described the veterans of the Civil War in 1897 as “the worn and tattered remnant of the gallant army that saved the Union [that] limps on its way to the cemeteries to lay floral offerings upon the resting places of the gallant old boys who lie asleep.”¹⁰⁷ At a 1902 Memorial Day dedication to a monument to New York’s dead soldiers and sailors, Mayor Seth Low said in a speech to thousands gathered after the parade, “It may well be said that those who fought for the Union in the civil war [*sic*] stand in need of no monument of stone or bronze. Our happy, prosperous, and reunited country is itself a monument greater than any that the sculptor can devise.”¹⁰⁸ The emphasis of these celebrations for northern whites was the reformation of the United States. Rather than the Emancipation cause, northern whites attached Memorial Day celebrations to the white Union cause.

It was highly common for high political figures like Mayor Low to speak at Memorial Day ceremonies.¹⁰⁹ Politicians often spoke at these occasions, and in doing so participated in perpetuating the reunification narrative of the Civil War. President Theodore Roosevelt, at a Memorial Day event in 1907 in Old Point Comfort, Virginia, offered a speech that appealed to white veterans from both sides of the Civil War:

¹⁰⁷ “The Desecration of Memorial Day,” *Los Angeles Times*, Los Angeles, Calif., United States, June 3, 1897, *ProQuest*, <http://search.proquest.com.offcampus.lib.washington.edu/docview/163757467?accountid=14784> (accessed May 15, 2013).

¹⁰⁸ “TRIBUTE TO HEROES ON MEMORIAL DAY: Veterans Once Again Remember Their Sleeping Comrades. The Occasion Here Made Memorable by the Unveiling of New York’s Monument to Her Soldier and Sailor Dead,” *New York Times*, New York, N.Y., United States, May 31, 1902, <http://search.proquest.com.offcampus.lib.washington.edu/docview/96242105?accountid=14784> (accessed May 15, 2013).

¹⁰⁹ Grant, 519.

Moreover, the men to whose valor we owe it that the Union was preserved have left us a country reunited in fact as well as in name. They have left us the memory of the great deeds and the self-devotion alike of the men who wore the blue and of the men who wore the gray in the contest where brother fought brother with equal courage, with equal sincerity of conviction, with equal fidelity to a high ideal, as it was given to each to see that ideal.¹¹⁰

The message that Roosevelt delivers to the veterans is one that has no room for African American soldiers. He did not mention African Americans specifically, but the omission of African Americans from his speech goes beyond just them. It also involves not acknowledging that Emancipation was a significant cause that many white and black northern soldiers fought to achieve. He defines the primary outcome of the war as the reformation of the Union, not the emancipation of slaves.

Reunification is a theme that Roosevelt touches upon in many of his speeches to Civil war veterans. In another speech given earlier that year to Union veterans in Washington D.C. returning from a Blue-Gray reunion, he commended the South for “how well [the Union veterans] were received by the men who wore the Gray.”¹¹¹ He grants glory to both sides of the conflict:

[The Civil War] has left us the right to be proud, not only of the Union, (which by your deeds has become in very truth a union throughout the length and breadth of this land) but of the courage and steadfast devotion to the right, as each man saw the right alike of the men who wore the Blue and of the men who wore the Gray.¹¹²

¹¹⁰ “ROOSEVELT JOINS HANDS WITH BLUE AND GRAY: Veterans of Both Sides Cheer His Memorial Day Address,” *New York Times*, New York, N.Y., United States, May 31, 1906, *ProQuest*, <http://search.proquest.com.offcampus.lib.washington.edu/docview/96679417?accountid=14784> (accessed May 4, 2013).

¹¹¹ “MR. ROOSEVELT TO VETERANS: Commends Fraternization of Those Who Wore the Blue and the Gray,” *New York Times*, January 19, 1907, *ProQuest*, <http://search.proquest.com.offcampus.lib.washington.edu/docview/96701809?accountid=14784> (accessed May 5, 2013).

¹¹² *Ibid.*

Roosevelt's speech emphasizes the reunification of the northern and southern states, but leaves out the emancipation cause that African Americans, as well as many white northerners, fought for. This speech in Washington D.C. was given to a group of one hundred veterans, among which were two African Americans. He glosses over the Emancipation cause and focuses exclusively on the white Union cause. Although there are two African Americans veterans present at the speech, he gives a speech designed more for the white veterans.

The way in which whites celebrated Memorial Day excluded African American soldiers from the Civil War narrative. With African American soldiers excluded from white Memorial ceremonies, whites celebrated the reformation of the Union and ignored the Emancipation cause that was achieved. Memorial Day, like reunions and American society, was a segregated affair.

Monuments and Memorials

The segregation of Civil War memory is also apparent in the monuments and memorials that were constructed in commemoration of the Civil War and its fighters. Monuments and memorials are unique forms of commemoration because they not only serve to remind people who lived during a conflict to remember what they experienced and lived through; they also hold the purpose of reminding the next generation and the generations that follow of those experiences. Monuments are meant to teach certain lessons for future inquisitive minds, historians, and patriots as to what exactly Americans revered in the time in which they were constructed, as well as what should be revered in future generations' times. The permanent nature of monuments (provided that they are properly maintained) has a lasting effect and demonstrates the intentions and views of

those who constructed them. The monuments that were erected in honor of various soldiers and commanders following the Civil War very rarely depicted African American soldiers. The exclusion of African American soldiers from monuments represent another way in which African American soldiers were excluded from Civil War memory.

Shackel argues that in order for a particular vision to become established as public memory, it was be supported by a group that has the resources and power to indorse a particular past.¹¹³ In the decades following the Civil War, African Americans did not have either. Immersed in the Jim Crow Era, African Americans did not have the funds necessary to build many monuments. Many monuments were privately funded, but African Americans largely did not have the funds to erect monuments.

There were, however, a small number of monuments commemorating African American soldiers as successful combatants on the battlefield. One notable monument to African American soldiers is the Colored Soldiers Monument in Frankfort, Kentucky (See Figure 3). Erected by the Woman's Relief Corps No. 8 in 1924, the monument commemorates the African American soldiers from Franklin County (Frankfort) who fought in the Civil War.¹¹⁴ On the monument's front side is a chiseled acronym for the Grand Army of the Republic (G.A.R.). Essentially, the acronym demonstrates a form of recognition of African American soldiers as part of the Union Army's effort in the Civil War. The monument's placement in the Green Hill Cemetery also represents how African Americans died in honor participating in the Civil War. There were few monuments to African American soldiers following the Civil War, but this monument in Frankfort is a capable commemoration.

¹¹³ Shackel, "Public Memory and the Search for Power in American Historical Archaeology," 655.

¹¹⁴ Inscription, Colored Soldiers Monument, Frankfort, Kentucky, 1924.

Despite the few other African American monuments that were created in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the vast majority of monuments and memorials that were erected ignore African American soldiers' contributions. Many of the monuments emphasize the reunification of two warring sides. Other memorials, especially in the South, glorify white soldiers while glossing over the issue of slavery and its relation to the Civil War. Monuments and memorials constructed after the Civil War present contrasting causes of the Civil War, as well as minimize the presence of African Americans in the Civil War as soldiers.

Several monuments constructed in the South by whites glorified the Confederate soldiers and ignored the central cause of the Civil War: slavery. One monument to the Confederate Dead unveiled in 1903 in Austin, Texas depicts the Civil War as one fought over states' rights (see Figure 4). Bronze sculptures of Jefferson Davis and four Confederate military men stand on top of the monument. The inscription on the front of the monument reads, "Died for state rights guaranteed under the Constitution. The people of the South, animated by the spirit of 1776, to preserve their rights, withdrew from the federal compact in 1861."¹¹⁵ The inscription also included estimated numbers of how many soldiers died for both the federal and Confederate forces.

Rather than framing the Civil War as a war fought over the institution of slavery, this memorial presents one of the tenets of the Lost Cause ideology: the South fought the war to maintain states' rights. Jefferson Davis is presented as a noble figure presiding over valiant military men. The monument has the effect of offering a memory of the Civil War as a noble southern effort as glorious and righteous as the American Revolutionary War was to many. Like many other southern Civil War monuments and memorials, the

¹¹⁵ Inscription, Memorial to the Confederate Dead, Austin, Texas, 1903.

Confederate Dead memorial in Texas frames the Civil War as a war to maintain states' rights rather than one over slavery.

One monument constructed in 1895 in Fort Mill, South Carolina portrays African Americans as “faithful slaves” rather than as soldiers (see Figure 5). Funded by a Confederate veteran and approved by the Jefferson Davis Memorial Association, this obelisk depicts an African American slave sitting on a bench under a tree.¹¹⁶ The other side of the monument bears an inscription:

Dedicated to the faithful slaves who, loyal to a sacred trust, toiled for the support of the army, with matchless devotion, and with sterling fidelity guarded our defenseless homes, women, and children, during the struggle for the principles of our Confederate States of America.¹¹⁷

The monument connotes several messages. One is that slavery was not an evil institution, but rather a benevolent one that slaves were more than willing to subject themselves to. Another is that it praises the slaves who stayed on plantations (or rather were restrained from leaving) instead of the hundreds of thousands who fled to the northern states and the 200,000 African American men who took up arms against the South. As a consequence, the idea that slavery was at the root of the Civil War is overlooked, and the causes that African American soldiers fought for in the Civil War are ignored in favor of the “principles of [the] Confederate States of America.” Rather than creating a memory of African Americans in the Civil War as a prominent part of the Union’s war effort, this southern monument depicts a memory of the Civil War in which African American slaves were loyal to their masters and relished in a subservient role to the Confederate States Army.

¹¹⁶ Blight, 288; James W. Loewen, *Lies Across America: What Our Historic Sites Get Wrong* (New York City: The New Press, 1999), 274.

¹¹⁷ Inscription, Faithful Slave Monument, Fort Mill, South Carolina, 1896.

Several northern monuments to white soldiers demonstrate that the white Union cause was more central to the Civil War in northern whites' memory than the emancipation cause. Many monuments praised particular soldiers and regiments for reforming the United States. One inscription on a monument erected in Erie, Pennsylvania reads, "In memory of the soldiers and sailors from Erie County who gave their lives to save the Union."¹¹⁸ Another memorial dedicated in 1871 in Champaign County, Ohio bears the inscription, "To the memory of those brave men of Champaign Co. who died in the War to Save the Union, 1861-5."¹¹⁹ While some monuments in the North did cite emancipation as a primary cause fought for in the Civil War, many others commemorated the reunification narrative of Civil War memory. Consequentially, the cause that African Americans fought for in the Civil War is not as embedded into America's public memory.

Even one of the most famous monuments to African American soldiers perpetuates the reunification narrative and minimizes the presence of African Americans in the war effort. One of the most well known monuments that depict African American soldiers from the Civil War is the Robert Gould Shaw Memorial in Boston, Massachusetts (see Figure 6). Funded mostly by Boston's Brahmin elite and constructed by the white sculptor Augustus Saint-Gaudens and unveiled in 1897, the memorial depicts the white Colonel Shaw sitting up tall on trotting horse with several African

¹¹⁸ Inscription, Soldiers' and Sailors' Monument, Erie, Pennsylvania, 1872.

¹¹⁹ Inscription, Champaign Country Civil War Memorial, Champaign County, Ohio, 1871.

American soldiers of the 54th Massachusetts Regiment in the background shouldering rifles on their shoulders.¹²⁰

Although the monument is currently known as the Memorial to Robert Gould Shaw and the Fifty-Fourth Massachusetts Regiment, it was originally titled the Robert Gould Shaw Memorial.¹²¹ This monument was constructed as a monument to the colonel, not to the soldiers he commanded. Shaw is the one most prominently displayed, while the infantrymen serve as a background. Shaw is more of the subject of the memorial than are the soldiers, and his placement on a horse indicates his higher rank and status. As a consequence, African Americans become less of the subject of the monument than Shaw.

The engravings that adorn the memorial ignore the causes that African Americans fought for in the war and glorify the white Union cause. The Latin inscription on the front, “OMNIA RELINQVIT SEVARE REMPUBLICAM,” translates to “He left behind everything to save the Republic.”¹²² The inscription on the back of the monument praises the 54th for their equal pay boycott, and that they were “brave in action” and possessed “the pride, courage, and devotion of the patriot soldier.”¹²³ However, it is described that they “volunteered when disaster clouded the Union Cause.”¹²⁴ The monument offers praise for African American soldiers, but frames their contributions as part of an effort to “save the Union.”

It is difficult to tally how many monuments and memorials were erected following the Civil War, but it is apparent that there were very few African American

¹²⁰ Shackel, *Memory in Black and White: Race, Commemoration, and the Post-Bellum Landscape*, 129.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 18.

¹²² Inscription, Memorial to Robert Gould Shaw and the 54th Massachusetts, Boston Common, Boston, Massachusetts, 1897.

¹²³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

monuments erected, and far more monuments commemorating white soldiers and key figures were erected. The monuments that were erected to commemorate white soldiers of the Civil War promoted the white reunification narrative that would dominate Civil War memory. Consequentially, white monuments undermined the memory of African American soldiers and the causes they fought for.

Conclusion

African American soldiers were key forces in the liberation of millions of slaves and the defeat of the CSA, but their part in the Civil War was excluded from the white mainstream memory. Despite the efforts of African American veterans, their families, and their communities, and despite the concerted effort they made to perpetuate their vision of Civil War memory in newspapers, monuments, and celebrations, their part in the Civil War narrative remained excluded from the white public memory.

One writer for the *Christian Recorder* in 1878 was hopeful that the memory of their contributions would live on:

It is a source of great pleasure to bring to memory many of the scenes that transpired among the soldiers in the Union army in the late war. There were many deeds of heroic valor performed, not only by individuals, but by regiments, worthy to be handed down to posterity through the annuals of history, but which I fear have passes late oblivion, from which the rising generation cannot have the slightest conception. Such undoubtedly is the case with thousands of our colored soldiers, who were willing to lay down their lives in defense of the country's flag, and whose timely presence in the army turned the *tide* in favor of justice and humanity, and brought the rebellion to a successful issue. And though the homes of thousands of them have bleached upon the battle fields [*sic*] in the sunny South, and with their decay their names have been forgotten, and their deeds of heroism alike have been lost in memory, yet we trust eternity shall reveal them as having been bright stars in the constellation of American freedom.¹²⁵

¹²⁵ Geo. B. Westsel, "Reminiscence of the Fifth Mass. Cavalry," *The Christian Recorder*, February 28, 1878, *Accessible Archives, Inc.*
<http://www.accessible.com.offcampus.lib.washington.edu/accessible/print?AADocList=1&AADocStyle=&AAStyleFile=&AABeanName=toc1&AANextPage=/printFullDocFromXML.jsp&AACheck=1.1.1.2.1> (accessed May 15, 2013).

Sadly, African American soldiers' part in the Civil War narrative remained excluded from white public memory in the decades following the Civil War and into the twentieth century well beyond their deaths. Even today, many people do not know that African American soldiers served in the Civil War.

No single form of commemoration was the sole reason for the exclusion of African Americans from Civil War memory. It was all through various avenues that they were excluded from white public memory, including in commemorative holidays, reunions, and monuments. White Americans commemorated the white Union cause, and African Americans soldiers were segregated from Civil War memory.

African Americans' segregation within Civil War memory parallels the segregation they faced in the Jim Crow Era. As Paul Shackel argues, the way a society remembers the past is shaped by present conditions. In the period after the Reconstruction Era, the memory that white society formed was a segregated one with segregated Memorial Day ceremonies, segregated Reunions, and segregated monuments. Emancipation Day celebrations were excluded from the white public sphere into segregated African American neighborhoods. Essentially, Civil War memory became a segregated memory.

Through this segregation, African American soldiers were not remembered in white America's Civil War memory. They were admirable on the battlefield and pushed through extreme prejudice in the Army in order to bring about Emancipation and dispel the notion of racial inequality. They demonstrated that they could fight as noble soldiers, but their stories of hardship and glory were left ignored and forgotten by white

Americans. *The Washington Bee* summed up this trend in an article describing the 1913 Blue-Grey reunion at Gettysburg:

While admitting the sincerity of the Northern projectors of the Gettysburg affair, it would not be amiss to inquire, why this studious avoidance of celebrating events in which the Negro soldier has prominently figured? Is the heroic valor displayed by the Negro, in his fight for freedom and the defense of the Union less virtuous, less meritorious, or less appreciated than that shown by those who fought for disunion and the perpetuation of the infamous blot of slavery? God forbid!!¹²⁶

Despite performing admirably in the Civil War, African American soldiers' participation in the Civil War was excluded from the memory created by white Americans.

¹²⁶ "Anniversary of the Battle of Gettysburg," *The Washington Bee*, May 24, 1913, *GenealogyBank*, <http://www.genealogybank.com/> (accessed May 20, 2013).



Figure 1. Winslow Homer, *The War for the Union, 1862—A Cavalry Charge*, 1862. Printed illustration. Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, Williamstown Massachusetts. *ARTstor*, <http://library.artstor.org.offcampus.lib.washington.edu/library/secure/ViewImages?id=8D1Efjk2Njs%2BPzcuFTx5TnAqWXgn&userId=hTNFdzch&zoomparams=> (accessed May 2, 2013).



Figure 2. Winslow Homer, *The War for the Union, 1862—A Bayonet Charge*, 1862. Printed Illustration. Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, California. ARTstor, <http://library.artstor.org.offcampus.lib.washington.edu/library/secure/ViewImages?id=8D1Efjk2Njs%2BPzcuFTx5TnAqWnwh&userId=hTNFdzch&zoomparams=> (accessed May 2, 2013).



Figure 3. Colored Soldiers Monument, 1924. Limestone column on poured concrete base. Green Hill Cemetery, Frankfort, Kentucky. *Wikipedia.org*, http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/9/91/Colored_Soldiers_Monument_in_Frankfort_1.jpg (accessed May 12, 2013).



Figure 4. Pompeo Coppini and Frank Teich, Memorial to the Confederate Dead. Bronze sculptures on gray granite base. Austin, Texas. *Waymarking.com*, http://www.waymarking.com/waymarks/WM67HC_Memorial_to_the_Confederate_Dead_Austin_TX (accessed May 23, 2013).



Figure 5. Faithful Slave Monument, 1896. Stone obelisk. Fort Mill, South Carolina. *Allotherpersons.wordpress.com*, <http://allotherpersons.files.wordpress.com/2010/01/faithful-slave-monument-v2.jpg> (accessed May 24, 2013).



Figure 6. Augustus Saint-Gaudens, Memorial to Colonel Robert Gould Shaw and the Fifty-Fourth Massachusetts Regiment, 1897. Bronze sculpture. Boston Commons, Boston, Massachusetts. *ARTstor*, <http://library.artstor.org.offcampus.lib.washington.edu/library/secure/ViewImages?id=8CJGbzQuJTE6NjU8ZIN7R3soW3UrffF7&userId=gzdHcjY%3D&zoomparams=> (accessed May 14, 2013).

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