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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

James M. Bartek

The Graduate School
University of Kentucky

2010

THE RHETORIC OF DESTRUCTION: RACIAL IDENTITY
AND NONCOMBATANT IMMUNITY IN THE CIVIL WAR ERA

ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the
College of Arts and Sciences
at the University of Kentucky

By
James M. Bartek

Lexington, Kentucky

Director: Dr. Mark Wahlgren Summers, Professor of History

Lexington, Kentucky

2010

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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

THE RHETORIC OF DESTRUCTION: RACIAL INDENTITY AND NONCOMBATANT IMMUNITY IN THE CIVIL WAR ERA

This study explores how Americans chose to conduct war in the mid-nineteenth century and the relationship between race and the onset of “total war” policies. It is my argument that enlisted soldiers in the Civil War era selectively waged total war using race and cultural standards as determining factors. A comparative analysis of the treatment of noncombatants throughout the United States between 1861 and 1865 demonstrates that nonwhites invariably suffered greater depredations at the hands of military forces than did whites. Five types of encounters are examined: 1) the treatment of white noncombatants by regular Union and Confederate forces; 2) the fate of noncombatants caught up in the guerrilla wars of the border regions; 3) the relationship between native New Mexicans, Anglo Union troops and Confederate Texans; 4) the relationship between African American noncombatants and Union and Confederate forces; and 5) the conflict between various Indian tribes and Union and Confederate forces apart from the Civil War.

By moving away from a narrow focus of white involvement in a single conflict and instead speaking of a “Civil War era,” new comparisons can be drawn that illuminate the multi-faceted nature of American warfare in the mid-nineteenth century. Such a comparison, advances the notion that there has been not one “American way of war,” but two – the first waged against whites, and the second against all others. A thorough study of the language soldiers employed to stereotype explains how the process of dehumanization functioned and why similar groups of men behaved with restraint in one instance and committed atrocity in another. Though the fates of Hispanic, black, and Indian noncombatants have generally been obscured by the “greater” aspects of the Civil War, they are integral to understanding both the capacity of mid-nineteenth century Americans to inflict destruction and the importance of race in shaping military responses.

Ultimately, the racist assumptions of white soldiers served to prevent atrocities against white noncombatants, while the desire to maintain white privilege virtually guaranteed the implementation of harsh tactics against nonwhites.

KEYWORDS: Civil War, Total War, Noncombatants, Race, Dehumanization

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THE RHETORIC OF DESTRUCTION:
RACE AND NONCOMBATANT IMMUNITY IN THE CIVIL WAR ERA

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Section 1

Introduction:

American Ways of War

This study will explore how Americans chose to conduct war in the mid-nineteenth century and the relationship between race and the onset of “total war” policies. It is my argument that enlisted soldiers in the Civil War era selectively waged total war using race and cultural standards as determining factors. A comparative analysis of the treatment of noncombatants throughout the United States between 1861 and 1865 is revealing, and will demonstrate that nonwhites invariably suffered greater deprivations at the hands of military forces than did whites. Five types of encounters will be examined here: 1) the treatment of white noncombatants by regular Union and Confederate forces; 2) the fate of noncombatants caught up in the guerrilla wars of the border regions; 3) the relationship between native New Mexicans, Anglo Union troops and Confederate Texans; 4) the relationship between African American noncombatants and Union and Confederate forces; 5) the conflict between various Indian tribes and Union and Confederate forces apart from the Civil War.

By moving away from a narrow focus of white involvement in a single conflict and instead speaking of a “Civil War era,” new comparisons can be drawn that illuminate the multi-faceted nature of American warfare in the mid-nineteenth century. By such a comparison, I hope to advance the notion that there has been not one “American way of war,” but two – the first waged against whites, and the second against all others. A careful examination of the interactions between enlisted men and noncombatants in all theaters will demonstrate how this process functioned. It will also reveal that the destructive wars of the twentieth century did not stem from Sherman’s policies toward Southern civilians, but rather from policies directed toward the racial “other.” During the Civil War the fate of noncombatants frequently depended upon their perceived race and the combatants’ recognition of their basic humanity. Quite often, soldiers did not offer that recognition. The process of dehumanization, and the indiscriminate killing that it encouraged, is a significant part of this study.¹

¹ The notion of an “American” way of war, which initially looked to victory through the climactic battle and later shifted to entail annihilation of the enemy’s resources, was first posited by historian Russell F.

Though historians have rather casually labeled the Civil War as the first of the modern “total wars,” the characterization is problematic at best and does not stand close scrutiny. Not only is the term anachronistic – its origins date from the First World War – it is also subjective. The distinguishing characteristic of total war is generally acknowledged as the willful and gross disregard of the boundary between combatants and noncombatants, with the Second World War frequently cited as the closest approximation. With important exceptions, the destruction of the Civil War cannot be compared to the devastation of that later conflict. Yet the analogy between Sherman’s March and the “strategic bombing” campaigns of Japan and Germany is often, and erroneously, made. Historians have usually viewed the Civil War too narrowly in their attempts to characterize its destructiveness, focusing primarily on the policies of white combatants toward white civilians as if they were the sole participants (or victims). If the actions of whites against other whites are the only determinant in assessing the totality of the conflict, however, then clearly the Civil War was not total. Contrary to legend, commanders generally targeted only property and did not intentionally kill noncombatants. Though escalation and retaliation had significantly eroded noncombatant immunity by 1863, the depredations committed by Lee’s men during the Gettysburg campaign and Sherman’s bummers in Georgia and the Carolinas were still surprisingly “limited” in scope; soldiers burned and plundered, but did not embark on a policy of mass rape and murder. Determining why military restraint prevailed in these situations but failed elsewhere is of supreme importance, and ultimately hinges on the question of race.²

Weigley in *The American Way of War: A History of United States Military Strategy and Policy*, (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1973). A discussion of the limitations of this interpretation can be found in Mark Grimsley’s essay, “‘Rebels’ and ‘Redskins’: U.S. Military Conduct toward White Southerners and Native Americans in Comparative Perspective,” in *Civilians in the Path of War*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), 137-161.

² For a definition of total war, see Roger Chickering, “Total War: The Use and Abuse of a Concept,” in Manfred F. Boemeke, et al, eds. *Anticipating Total War: The German and American Military Experiences, 1871-1914*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 13-28; For discussions of “total war” in relation to the American Civil War see, Mark Grimsley. *The Hard Hand of War: Union Military Policy toward Southern Civilians, 1861-1865*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Charles Royster. *The Destructive War: William Tecumseh Sherman, Stonewall Jackson, and the Americans*. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991); James M. McPherson, “From Limited to Total War in America,” in *On the Road to Total War: The American Civil War and the German Wars of Unification, 1861-1871*. Stig Förster and Jörg Nagler, eds. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Mark E. Neely, Jr., “Was

Of course, a glaring and important exception to the “civilized” warfare waged among whites can be found in the guerrilla wars of the border states. Here occurred some of the most brutal and merciless fighting of the entire war. As guerrilla tactics violated the accepted rules of conflict, irregular forces when captured were subject to summary execution regardless of race. The rhetoric of vengeance inspired by this form of warfare could be startling. Everyone, regardless of age, seemed to be a potential target – especially blacks and ethnic groups such as Germans. Arriving in Lawrence, Kansas in the aftermath of guerrilla chieftain William Quantrill’s infamous raid, the Ohio cavalrymen who had briefly pursued his gang listened with horror to stories told by survivors. “He [Quantrill] seemed particularly spiteful against the black inhabitants,” commented one trooper, “they were hunted and shot like dogs.” Pro-Southerners in Concordia, Missouri terrorized their staunchly Republican German neighbors, according to one citizen. “A band of guerrillas dashed into this town one Sunday when people were coming out of church, murdered a dozen peaceful citizens without any provocation, and after they robbed what suited them, left the place,” he recalled. Still, a semblance of restraint could be found among the combatants, even when they were at their worst. Specifically, white women were generally exempted from physical harm. In a war where those involved sometimes reveled in bloodshed, gleefully abandoned civilization for savagery and delighted in destroying all societal norms, racial affinities continued to hold sway.³

Yet, as I have suggested, the Civil War was not an exclusively white conflict. In late 1861, while much of the divided nation was preoccupied with events east of the Mississippi River, an army of Confederate Texans invaded New Mexico Territory triggering a campaign which devastated much of the Socorro Valley region between Mesilla and Albuquerque. Neither the invading Texans nor the Anglo Union defenders

the Civil War a Total War?” *Civil War History*, 37 (1991), 5-28, as well as Neely’s latest work, *The Civil War and the Limits of Destruction*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007).

³ Hervey Johnson to “Folks at home,” 29 August 1863, in *Tending the Talking Wire: A Buck Soldier’s View of Indian Country, 1863-1866*, William E. Unrau, ed., (Salt Lake: University of Utah Press, 1979), 40; Gert Goebel, “Laenger als ein Menschenleben in Missouri,” manuscript, translated by M. Heinrichsmeyer, [1956], Missouri Historical Society; On the limits of guerrilla violence, see Michael Fellman, “At the Nihilist Edge: Reflections on Guerrilla Warfare during the American Civil War,” in *On the Road to Total War: The American Civil War and the German Wars of Unification, 1861-1871*. Stig Förster and Jörg Nagler, eds. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 530-531.

of the territory paid much heed to the plight of native New Mexicans, who they denounced as an inferior and decidedly un-American people. “This valley if settled by *white citizens* . . . would be one of the richest Valleys in the world,” declared one Texas volunteer, “but if it remains peopled by this degraded race of Mexicans . . . it will forever remain in its present condition.” The implications of such a statement were unsettling, but it was an opinion evidently shared by Union volunteers, as well. “[New] Mexico is much more a foreign country than is generally supposed,” decided a Colorado soldier. “The country is dry, rude and unfinished, and must have been designed by nature for a race but slightly removed from the brute beasts that perish.” Both armies, in effect, became occupiers of a “foreign” land populated by a “degraded” race, and although Union and Confederate volunteers alike claimed to be acting as “liberators,” their behavior toward the liberated was more reminiscent of conquerors enjoying the spoils of war. They foraged and plundered with impunity, abusing the population in general and women in particular. In many ways, the destruction in New Mexico presaged Sherman’s march through Georgia two and a half years later, but also superseded it. Not only were civilians directly attacked, but so completely had the armies stripped the region of resources that a *literal* famine (as opposed to the hyperbolic claims of starvation in Georgia) effectively halved the population of Socorro County in the months after the Confederate retreat.⁴

The ambiguous status of African-Americans in combat zones likewise offers an excellent example of the influence of race in war. Black civilians, in most instances slaves or refugees, were particularly vulnerable to the caprices of Southern civilians as well as Union and Confederate volunteers. Though not as defenseless, black troops too were frequently the object of special abuse and violence – even by fellow Union soldiers. Confederate soldiers sometimes refused to take black prisoners in combat. Olustee, Fort Pillow, Saltville, and the Battle of the Crater all were scenes of racially motivated massacres. One Confederate trooper, puzzled over the frequency of rifle fire after the rebel victory at Olustee, was told by an officer that his men were “[s]hooting niggers Sir.

⁴ Frank Starr to “Dear Father,” 6 May 1862, in “New Mexico Campaign Letters of Frank Starr, 1861-1862,” David B. Gracy, ed. *Texas Military History*, Vol. 4, (Fall 1964), 184; Ovando J. Hollister, *Colorado Volunteers in New Mexico, 1862* (originally published as *History of the First Regiment of Colorado Volunteers*), Richard Harwell, ed., (Chicago: The Lakeside Press, 1962, c.1863), 247.

I have tried to make the boys desist but I can't control them." The language used by Confederate troops in describing African-American soldiers, which differed markedly from that used to describe their white counterparts, helps to explain the greater propensity for a massacre among blacks in Federal uniform. As intense as rebel hatred for the "Yankee invaders" and "abolitionist hordes" could be, rarely did Southerners regard them as anything less than human (albeit humans with flawed political beliefs). Black soldiers, however, were relegated to an entirely different category, as the statements of a Virginian infantryman viewing them for the first time across the trenches suggests. "They really seemed the blackest of all black animals I ever beheld," he wrote. "Strict orders were issued against firing else several of them would have gone to keep John Brown company"⁵

While New Mexicans were rudely pushed aside and blacks risked summary execution on the battlefield, the fate of American Indians adds yet another dimension to the conflict and the military-noncombatant relationship. It also says much about the potential for Americans to wage destructive war when it suited them. Women and children were regularly targeted in a manner wholly absent from Northern policies in the South. In the 1863 Bear River campaign, for instance, California troops slaughtered over 250 Shoshone Indians and took 160 women and children captive. Soldiers raped many of the women, even the dying. As with black noncombatants, it is evident that American soldiers tended to mete out rough justice to the Indians they encountered. Merely describing atrocities, however, does little to explain why they occurred. Volunteers drew upon a long history of Indian-hating rhetoric and literature dating to the colonial era. Soldiers incorporated these negative images into their own repertoire, and built upon and intensified them as a result of personal contact and battle. "There are about fifteen hundred of the *red devils* about the country here, and about two hundred hanging around the fort all the time," wrote an Iowa infantryman from Fort Randall. "They are the dirtiest, laziest, lousiest, set of creatures I ever saw; I don't see how they live at all." Soldiers commonly referred to Indians as "vermin," "pests of the frontier," "human

⁵ William Penniman reminiscences, quoted in David J. Coles, "'Shooting Niggers Sir': Confederate Mistreatment of Union Black Soldiers at the Battle of Olustee," in Gregory J.W. Urwin, ed., *Black Flag over Dixie: Racial Atrocities and Reprisals in the Civil War*. (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2004), 74; James Thomas Perry Diary, 24 December 1864, James Thomas Perry Papers, Virginia Historical Society.

tigers,” “red devils,” “devils incarnate,” “fiends incarnate,” and “imps of hell.” Such characterizations go well beyond dehumanization. It is one thing to declare a people lazy and animal-like, quite another to view them as an evil that *must* be destroyed. As the ideas of an Ohio cavalryman suggest, many soldiers followed these notions to their logical conclusions. “The only way to ‘cure them out,’” he insisted, “will be to send out here about fifteen thousand men, to go into their villages, and plunder burn and kill, without regard to age or sex.” To be sure, not every soldier was an advocate of extermination, but the infusion of race into the equation did not bode well for noncombatants. Dehumanized by the men who fought against them, Native Americans experienced the full capacity of white Americans to wage indiscriminate war.⁶

Comparing the relative treatment of noncombatants – white, brown, black, and red – will serve several purposes. Juxtaposing the fates of blacks and Indians to the conditions experienced by white noncombatants will cast doubt upon the totality of the Union’s “total war” policy against the South. Simply put, white noncombatants escaped the violence that was often enacted with fury upon native New Mexicans, African-Americans, and Indians. Even in the most brutal guerrilla warfare, whites refused to fully plunge into the abyss of total war when confronting other whites. Basic rules of engagement, however twisted or weakened, still existed. Those rules vanished when race became a factor. Through rationalization and dehumanization, soldiers convinced themselves that the excesses they committed in battle were justified by the enemy they faced. A thorough study of the language they employed to stereotype their enemies will help to explain how they arrived at these conclusions, how the process of dehumanization functioned and, ultimately, why similar groups of men could behave with restraint in one instance and commit atrocity in another. Though the fates of Hispanic, black, and Indian noncombatants have generally been obscured by the “greater” aspects of the Civil War, they are integral to understanding both the capacity of mid-nineteenth century Americans to inflict destruction and the importance of race in shaping military responses.

⁶ “W.A.M.” (William A McCaddon) quoted in Iowa City *State Press*, 22 January 1862, (letter signed 28 December 1861), in “Iowa Troops in Dakota Territory, 1861-1865,” Mildred Throne, ed., *Iowa Journal of History*, Vol. 57, No. 2, (April 1959), 106; Hervey Johnson to “Sister Sibyl,” 3 February 1865, in William E. Unrau, ed., *Tending the Talking Wire*, 214.

Section 2: The Regular War

2.1 Introduction

On January 8, 1865, Mollie Mallay, a resident of McLean County in northwestern Kentucky, wrote to her Aunt about events which transpired over the holidays. Some 2,000 Confederate troopers had visited her neighborhood, feeding their horses on whatever grain and forage they could find, imposing on citizens for meals, burning fence rails and coal storage houses to warm themselves against the winter weather, and generally behaving as locusts. They confiscated young Mollie's horse, but as she was acquainted with one of the officers, she managed to retrieve it after a personal plea. Others were not as fortunate. "They just ruined some familys in the neighborhood," she reported. The unidentified Confederate detachment, likely the largest assemblage of armed men the residents had ever seen, soon departed. The citizens' tribulations, however, were but half over. 3,000 Union troops followed close on the heels of the rebel cavalry, consuming whatever the Confederates had not. "I hope that I will never see as many soldiers again," she concluded with an air of resignation. "evry body Suffers whare them big Armys goes through."¹

Nearly four years earlier, in April 1861, statesmen North and South gave speeches promising a short and bloodless war. Men volunteered by the hundreds of thousands, eager to share in the glory before the conflict ended, to punish arrogant "traitors" who threatened to destroy the Union or to smash Yankee "invaders" who dared insult them and sully Southern soil. Citizens sent them off to war with grand parades and stirring speeches. Few foresaw that they themselves would soon become targets of the conflict they so heartily supported, and as the short and bloodless war turned into anything but, they evinced surprise at the degree to which they were pulled into it. In the sectional strife which preceded the war, however, Americans demonstrated in histrionic diatribes a willingness to denounce each other in absolute terms – a phenomenon which contributed to and was in turn reinforced by a host of deplorable events, including the brutal caning of a US Senator in the halls of Congress, a bloody guerrilla conflict in Kansas, a plot (albeit a failed one) to initiate a slave rebellion at Harper's Ferry, Virginia, and eventually

¹ Mollie S. Mallay to aunt, 8 January 1865, Mollie S. Mallay Letter, FHS.

civil war. It ought to have come as no surprise to anyone, then, that Union and Confederate volunteers, immersed in the vituperative language that preceded the war, would have utilized similar rhetoric to demonize not only their military opponents, but the citizens who supported them. The consequences of such objectification were significant. By the end of the war, volunteers were beginning to look upon enemy civilians as they did railroads, bridges, depots, mills and factories – in short, as simply another resource to be exploited or destroyed.²

² Charles Royster's, *The Destructive War: William Tecumseh Sherman, Stonewall Jackson, and the Americans* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991) details much of bitterness and hatred which prevailed from the very beginning of the conflict. Northerners and Southerners early on fantasized of destroying one another, and they very nearly succeeded. Other works have built on this interpretation, including Mark Grimsley's, *The Hard Hand of War: Union Military Policy toward Southern Civilians, 1861-1865*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995). Without trivializing the destruction, he demonstrates that it occurred, at least on the Union side, within prescribed limits. Mark Neely's 1991 essay, "Was the Civil War a Total War?" (*Civil War History*, Vol. 37, No. 1), likewise showed that the Civil War, though destructive enough, ought not to be compared with the devastating conflicts of the twentieth century. His latest work, however, goes too far in minimizing the death and ruin caused by what was America's most bloody conflict. See Mark E. Neely, *The Civil War and the Limits of Destruction*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007). Accompanying the violence of the conflict was a corresponding maliciousness in the denunciation of the enemy – be they civilian or combatant. Particularly illuminating in this regard are studies such as Gerald Linderman's, *Embattled Courage: The Experience of Combat in the American Civil War*, (New York: The Free Press, 1987), Reid Mitchell's, *Civil War Soldiers: Their Expectations and Their Experience*, (New York: Viking, 1988), Randall C. Jimerson's, *The Private Civil War: Popular Thought during the Sectional Conflict*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988), James M. McPherson's, *For Cause & Comrades: Why Men Fought in the Civil War*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), Jason Phillips's, "A Brothers' War? Exploring Confederate Perceptions of the Enemy," in *The View from the Ground: Experiences of Civil War Soldiers*, ed. Aaron Sheehan-Dean, (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2007), and Ritchie Devon Watson's *Normans and Saxons: Southern Race Mythology and the Intellectual History of the American Civil War*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2008). This chapter takes into account all of these works, suggesting that though the war was indeed carried out within "limits," the tendency to denounce, dehumanize, and even racialize the enemy constantly threatened to turn a "brother's war" into something far more cruel and terrifying.

2.2 The North Encounters the South, 1861-1863

2.2.1 Initial Impressions

From the beginning, Union volunteers harbored a desire to punish “the South” for its transgressions, but there was never unanimity on the extent of that punishment or who exactly “deserved” the brunt of it. Much of the animus initially focused on the so-called “ringleaders” of the rebellion – particularly Jefferson Davis and, more generally, the lordly slave-owners. Though volunteers tended to denigrate “ordinary” Southern citizens, they did not initially view them as a legitimate target of war. There were, of course, instances of early depredations such as the raiding of orchards, the stealing of fences for firewood, and the pilfering of chickens and hogs, but throughout 1861 and early 1862, these actions lacked a coherent ideological underpinning. Instead, they were predominantly driven by the common vagaries that accompanied an army on a campaign: necessity, poor discipline, and the natural penchant of men at war to destroy. “The boys will get out in spite of officers bayonets or any thing of the kind,” wrote one Union volunteer of the plundering propensities of his comrades in May 1861. “I dont believe there is a chicken within several miles of this place. The soldiers break guard every night and bring in Chickens by the dozen.” The author, a volunteer in the 16th Ohio, wrote not from the rebellious state of Virginia, but from his regiment’s camp near the state capital of Columbus. These factors continued to inform the actions of Union volunteers throughout the conflict, but by 1862 a marked change in attitude accompanied the increasing destruction: namely, that the Southern people, collectively, bore responsibility for the folly of secession and deserved to be punished as much as did their political and military leaders.¹

The relationship between the Union soldier and the Southern civilian was marked by ambiguity. As reality dispelled whatever romantic notions volunteers may have possessed concerning the “idyllic” South with its images of magnificent plantations, beautiful belles, and dashing cavaliers, a significant number of them came to view the region and its inhabitants with a sense of sectional superiority, condescension, and

¹ Oscar Ladley to “Dear Mother, Sisters, Ann,” 22 May 1861, in Carl M. Becker and Ritchie Thomas, eds., *Hearth and Knapsack: The Ladley Letters, 1857-1880*, (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1988), 4.

outright disdain. For some, the land itself seemed hardly worth the fight. A trooper in the 6th Ohio Cavalry, campaigning in western Virginia in the spring of 1862, was put off by the mountainous terrain. “I tell you what I think,” he wrote his wife. “I don’t think Western Virginia is worth fighting for if it is all like what I have seen, but that is not what we are fighting for & I am glad that it aint.” Southern Tennessee, wrote another, was nothing more than an “insignificant, uncivilized, barbarous country. Indeed I have a very poor opinion of this country.” An Ohio Colonel, writing from northern Georgia in 1863, was similarly unimpressed with what he saw before him. “It is a pity that when we have plenty of fine soil in the North that we have to fight for such miserable land as this,” he remarked. “This war has killed all the romantic feeling we used to have about the South.”²

Disparagement of the Southern landscape, however, had much less to do with the quality of the land than with the people who inhabited it. Southern leaders spent much of the prewar years touting the superiority of the region and its people, and volunteers eagerly wrote of the indolence, ignorance, and poverty which so glaringly contradicted their assertions. “We are in a fine farming country but the natives haven’t *spunk* enough to improve it,” an Ohio volunteer wrote from Tennessee. “As a class, they are the most *shiftless* people I ever saw and will never amount to much anywhere . . .” Whether such “laziness” was inherent to Southerners or, as one Michigander implied, merely the symptoms of a society which relied on slave labor was left undecided. “They might raise good fruit in this country if they would only take pains,” he wrote of western Tennesseans, “but they don’t, too lazy to do it themselves, and of course the slaves won’t any more than they can help, so all fruit is very small and poor compared to ours.” An Iowa volunteer, too, clearly believed that Southerners lacked the Northern sense of industriousness. Helena, Arkansas, he insisted, was one of the “dirtiest holes on the river,” but “if yankees had owned the town in times of peace, they would make a city of it.” As it was, the Mississippi regularly flooded the town, filling it with knee-deep mud. Grading the streets would certainly have improved the situation, but white folks, he

² Thomas M. Covert to “My Dear Wife,” 23 May 1862, Thomas M. Covert Papers, WRHS; Joseph J. Brown to “dearest Rosa,” 14 December 1864, Civil War Time Illustrated Collection, USMHI; Caleb H. Carleton to “My Dear Wife,” 16 July 1863, Caleb H. Carleton Papers, LC.

noted, seemed disinclined to undertake the project. “what the nigger cannot do is not done,” he concluded.³

Indolence, however, was but one part of a much larger problem. “The people are in general very dumb,” wrote a volunteer in the 21st Iowa of those he encountered around Houston, Missouri. “They don’t know what a post office stamp is and they don’t even have a post office here, at least I have not seen one, and I have not seen more than one school house which the people here call an academy.” More scandalous still, he also noted – in apparent earnestness – their shameful ignorance of even the most basic tenet of Christianity: “Some of them are so dumb that they don’t know whether Jesus was a Southern or a Northern man.” An Indiana volunteer expressed similar criticism. “I am certain if I had to live here in the south . . . and had my family with in the bargain, that I should pine away and die from want of a contented mind,” he wrote from Tennessee in January 1864. “The people here do not seam like people. they are shamefully ignorant. there children grow up a great deal like there horses. they are learned to help raise a little something to eat and to go to mill. and that is about all.” A Pennsylvania captain, who found himself battling rebels in the farthest depths of the Confederacy, was likewise unimpressed by the “clay eaters” he observed. “The original inhabitants of Florida are a miserable class of people,” he opined from Jacksonville. “I have come to the conclusion that the country in this state, with all its swamps, alligators, reptiles and mosquitos, is better than the inhabitants. There are white people here who do not know what state they live in, don't know one day from another and do not know how old they are, and scarcely know their own names.”⁴

³ William G. Bentley to “Dear Bro,” 23 March 1864, in Barbara Bentley Smith and Nina Bentley Baker, eds., *Burning Rails as We Pleased: The Civil War Letters of William Garrigues Bentley, 104th Ohio Volunteer Infantry*, (McFarland, 2004), 86; Samuel Henry Eells to “Dear Aunty,” 22 April 1863, Samuel Henry Eells Papers, LC; Charles O. Musser to “Dear Father,” 3 February 1863, in *Soldier Boy: The Civil War Letters of Charles O. Musser, 29th Iowa*, Barry Popchock, ed., (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1995), 24.

⁴ Gilbert Gulbrandson to parents, 29 December 1862, Harrisburg Civil War Round Table Collection, USMHI; J. W. Bartmess to “my Wife,” 3 January 1864, “Jacob W. Bartmess Civil War Letters,” ed. Donald F. Carmony, *Indiana Magazine of History*, Vol. 52, No. 2 (June 1956), 157-158; Capt. Jacob Swartzlander to “Cousin Han,” 8 August 1864, 104th Pa. Volunteer Infantry Home Page, <<http://freepages.military.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~pa104inf/holdhtmls/swtlet/swt8086402.htm>>.

Where indolence and ignorance prevail, poverty is sure to follow, and soldiers described in detail the squalor and destitution which seemed to define the Southern way of life. If dime novels and Southern propagandists had sold them on the mystique of the Southern planter, the ubiquity of “clay eaters” and “poor white trash” must have been a revelation. “There is more of what is called poor white trash than I had any idea of,” insisted an Ohio surgeon from northern Georgia. “They are poor and ignorant.” A Connecticut soldier, writing from Cowan, Tennessee, sniffed at the residents who he obviously considered his social inferiors. “At every house you see so many dogs & dirty ragged youngones [that] any one would infer they are the chief production of Tenn.” A volunteer in the 1st Nebraska expressed shock at what he thought to be unparalleled poverty among the citizens of southeastern Missouri. “It is almost unsettled and what settlers there are are of the poorest class,” he wrote. “There is from six to eight children in every house of all ages and I never saw such poverty. It was worse than ever I saw in Nebraska or in any other place.” Here again, however, the primary problem was not with the area itself, for he speculated that “if it was settled with an enterprising people it would be a rich country.” Even the wealthy seemed poor in comparison to Northern standards. “The only criterion of a man’s wealth is the number of niggers he keeps,” maintained a Michigan officer. “The richest man in this region [Middleburg, Tennessee] lives in a tumble down old log house that we should not consider fit for a barn, but he has a good many negroes”⁵

In contemplating the relationship between wealth and slaves, volunteers also noted the vast economic and social discrepancies which seemed to separate the rich and the poor. The difference was so great, in fact, that non-slaveholding whites – contrary to their own assertions – appeared little better than the slaves over whom they claimed superiority. “Most of the whites are just as ignorant as the slaves,” insisted a Wisconsin volunteer of those he met in Georgia. “You shut your eyes and you cannot tell by their talk which are the blacks.” Nor was he alone in his observation. From Vicksburg, an

⁵ Josiah Dexter Cotton to wife, 5 June 1864, Josiah Dexter Cotton Papers, LC; Rufus Mead to “Dear Folks at Home,” 23 November 1863, Rufus Mead Papers, LC; Thomas Edwin Keen to “My Dear Parents and Brother” 7 January 1863, and to “Dear Sister,” 22 February 1863, in James E. Potter, ed., “‘I Thought It My Duty to Go’: The Civil War Letters of Thomas Edwin Keen, First Nebraska Volunteer Infantry,” *Nebraska History*, Vol. 81, No. 4 (Winter 2000), 148, 152; Samuel Henry Eells to “Dear Aunt & Uncle,” 24 January 1863, Samuel Henry Eells Papers, LC.

Ohioan thought that the “negroes and poor whites here seem to be on an equality, so far as education is concerned and the respect of the better classes.” A volunteer in the 104th Ohio was similarly unimpressed by the people of Frankfort, Kentucky. “The white population speak about the same as the black,” he noted with derision. “You could . . . distinguish them only by their color, and their education I think is very limited, and society very aristocratic. Every house you come into almost, smells of nigger. Well on the whole I do not think they are much inferior to the whites.” These were fascinating observations, as they simultaneously highlighted and demolished one of the fundamental Southern justifications for racial slavery. According to a popular argument first forwarded by US Senator James Henry Hammond of South Carolina, every society required a class of “mudsills,” and enslaving African-Americans merely ensured that no white Southerner would fall to the level of the white “wage slaves” in the North. Equality, therefore, was guaranteed by virtue of skin color. Northerners, of course, found such an argument amusing, as they saw just the opposite: a society filled with would-be aristocrats who intentionally misguided whites so they might enslave blacks – oppressing both alike.⁶

In considering the region in its entirety, Volunteers were struck by how different, even *alien*, the South appeared compared to their own society. Pervaded by ignorance, degeneracy, and aristocratic pretensions, it seemed the antithesis of the enlightened, progressive, egalitarian North. “The people here,” observed a New Hampshire infantryman, “are just one hundred years behind the times.” Union volunteers harbored no illusions as to the source of their backwardness. It was slavery which had made the South what it was, slavery which had retarded its development by a hundred years. Now, slaveholding aristocratic pretenders threatened to tear the entire nation apart. “In the South it has been nearly as bad for the poor whites as the surfs of Russia. If slavery is forever done away with then the poor whites will have a voice in the government and the autocrates loose their power, that is why they howl so.” The conflict, they made clear,

⁶ Chauncey Herbert Cooke to “Dear ones at Home,” 20 August 1864, in *Soldier Boy’s Letters to His Father and Mother, 1861-1865*, (News-Office, 1915), 91; Diary of Osborn Oldroyd, 10 May 1863, in *A Soldier’s Story of the Siege of Vicksburg from the Diary of Osborn H. Oldroyd*, (Springfield, IL: H. W. Rokker, 1885), 13; Nathaniel Gorgas to “Dear father,” 17 February 1863, Nathaniel Gorgas Papers, OHS. James Henry Hammond, Speech before the US Senate, 4 March 1858. Text available at pbs.org, <<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part4/4h3439t.html>>

may not have been inevitable, but it was certainly not a tragedy in the classic sense. It had been brought about neither by trifling misunderstandings, nor by blundering politicians. Volunteers, in fact, understood it as nothing less than a clash between competing and incompatible ideologies. As an Ohio soldier explained in a letter home, “as long as slavery exists, there will be a collision between it and free labor, and that there will be no permanent peace for America until one or the other becomes general. It is better that slavery perish than that freedom perish.” The war, according to another, “was nothing more nor less than a conflict between Aristocracy and Republicanism.”⁷

For free white men, the consequences of a slaveocracy triumphant were visibly evident throughout the South. “I have not seen a single school-house since I have been in Dixie, and I do not believe such a thing exists,” insisted a sergeant in the 20th Ohio. “But this war will revolutionize things, and among others I hope change this state of affairs for the better.” Only by removing the cancer which had allowed an unnatural aristocracy to take root could the South – and thereby the nation – be saved. “Slavery dragged the South down,” wrote a New York volunteer a year after the war, “freedom built up the North. Slavery is dead, and freedom reigns universal, and the South will yet thank the “Yankee horde” who overran their territory, achieving for the South an inestimable victory over their superstitions – a victory which the direful institution of human slavery prevented them from achieving for themselves.” If Union soldiers indeed fought to preserve the Union, their experience in the South brought home to many for the first time just what was worth preserving.⁸

2.2.2 The Failure of Conciliation

Despite a poor estimation of Southerners and their society, a policy of conciliation held sway through the first year of the war and officers, if not the men they commanded,

⁷ John Henry Burrill to parents, 23 April 1865, John Henry Burrill Letters, Civil War Times Illustrated Collection, USMHI; Rufus Mead to “Dear Folks at Home,” 7 October 1861, Rufus Mead Papers, LC; Rob S. Bower to “Dear Uncle and Friends,” 7 May 1863, SoldierStudies.org, <http://www.soldierstudies.org/index.php?action=view_letter&Letter=561>; Henry Henney to ?, December 1862, Civil War Times Illustrated Collection, USMHI; James A. Mowris, *A History of the One Hundred and Seventeenth Regiment: N.Y. Volunteers*, (Hartford: Case, Lockwood & Company, 1866), 191-192;

⁸ Diary of Osborn Oldroyd, 10 May 1863, in *A Soldier's Story*, 13; Abram P. Smith, *History of the Seventy-Sixth Regiment New York Volunteers: What It Endured and Accomplished*, (Syracuse: Truiar, Smith, & Miles, 1867), 186.

generally adhered to it. The policy was based upon the assumption that a few hotheads had managed to hoodwink the common Southerner into supporting secession and that a strong pro-Union sentiment still existed among the majority of the citizens. One Union cavalryman from western Virginia, in describing the residents of Fayette County, Virginia, articulated a view of the average Southerner which continued to resonate even late into the war. “The people [are] remarkable ignorant and have no doubt been duped by men of better information who now use them as mean machines – tools to carry out their nefarious schemes of treason,” he reported. “About all the population . . . had been told and most of them believed that the Yankeys was coming with fire and sword to exterminate men women and children – but since becoming acquainted they think these *terrible Yankeys* pretty clever folks and hundreds have come in voluntarily and taken the oath to support and defend the Constitution.” Accepting the assumption that most Southerners had simply been “duped” into supporting treason, prudence dictated the liberal use of the carrot at the expense of the stick. The military would not molest citizens, private property would be protected, seized supplies would be receipted, and fugitive slaves – unless it could be conclusive proven that the owner actively colluded with traitors – would be returned. Accordingly, commanders often posted guards around private residences and dutifully ordered absconded slaves returned to masters who sought them.⁹

Conciliation, of course, was never popular among enlisted men, and several factors convinced them of the necessity of its abandonment. By 1862, it was painfully obvious that the war would not be a short one. The costly victory at Shiloh in April and the defeats outside of Richmond that summer made it clear that the war was not going to be won quickly, and that rebel soldiers were capable fighters. “If anyone tells you that the rebels will not fight, just tell them to come down to this neck of the country and try them on,” wrote a Pennsylvania volunteer to his family in July 1862 from Virginia. From Arkansas, a soldier in the 22nd Kentucky (US) echoed this sentiment after conversing with rebel prisoners. “I spent over an hour among them . . . and on the word of a soldier they are *men*,” he informed his sister, “and men of the order of the days of ’76, men who have their hearts enlisted in their cause who believe God is with them and ever willing to

⁹ James Abraham to father, 14 December 1861, Civil War Times Illustrated Collection, USMHI.

favor and defend them from the hand of oppression.” The situation left many volunteers, particularly those in the East, temporarily demoralized and questioning the ability of their commanders to effectively wage the war with necessary vigor. “If we only had experienced generals like the rebels,” wrote a soldier in the 55th Ohio, “we might crush this unhappy rebellion pretty soon, but somehow we either have traitors to lead us or generals that ‘know nothing.’ I hope the next campaign may be more successful, for the Rebels deserves a sound thrashing for their wicked course.”¹⁰

Defeat, as the above might suggest, rather than leading volunteers to question the righteousness of their cause, instead imbued them with a new resolve to crush the rebellion, and as they reconciled themselves to the fact that the war would be a hard fought one, they increasingly began to view Southern citizens as the enemy. For many, it had become quite apparent that a policy of conciliation was hopeless, for excluding a few isolated pockets of Southern Unionists there was no one left to conciliate. “What changes [a] year has brot,” wrote the West Virginia trooper who six months earlier referred to Southern civilians as “tools” of nefarious schemers. “What then appeared to be an insignificant effort on the part of a few bad men to overthrow our Government has loomed up to one of the most desperate and determined Rebellions of which the worlds history gives record” A soldier in a Kentucky regiment, writing to his Democratic-leaning brother in Wisconsin, explained that conciliation was a fool’s errand. “The idea of winning these people over with velvet gloves & honeyed words has about exploded,” he insisted in November 1862. “The Government has made a reasonable effort to put down the rebellion without interfering with their domestic institutions, but instead of winning them they grow more & more hostile.”¹¹

Southern citizens, they determined, were not mere dupes of political demagoguery, but active supporters of treason, and coddling them only prolonged the rebellion. “We have treated them as misled long enough,” a disgruntled volunteer wrote from Maryland in May 1862. “Now then let us treat them as the Rebels they are.” An

¹⁰ John T. Harrington to sister, 19 January 1863, John T. Harrington Letters, KHS; Henry Henney to ?, December 1862, Civil War Times Illustrated Collection, USMHI. Mark Grimsley’s, *The Hard Hand of War: Union Military Policy toward Southern Civilians, 1861-1865*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), traces the evolution of “hard war” policy and the piece-meal abandonment of conciliation.

¹¹ James Abraham to “Brother Will,” 7 August 1862, Civil War Times Illustrated Collection, USMHI; Robert H. Earnest to “Mr. J.H. Earnest,” 17 November 1862, Robert H. Earnest Papers, KHS.

Indiana volunteer concurred, taking explicit aim at the policy of protecting “secesh” property, a policy that so many considered absolutely absurd. “This policy will have to be changed ere this war can close and we must make them feel the horrors of war by confiscation,” he wrote in November 1862. “Let our army take all Rebel property needed for good use whenever found, and my word for it, they will soon cry enough and will be eager to come back into the Union, a better and wiser people.” A trooper in the 6th Ohio adamantly agreed. “I am afraid this war will never end till the Government makes some more harsh rules for dealing with rebles,” he wrote with exasperation from Virginia in July 1862. “As long as we guard their property while they are off fighting,” he ranted, “just so long they will fight & I say burn their houses & what property we can’t take. It is hard but what is property to so many lives, it is nothing.” He doubted such a policy would ever be sanctioned by officers, who “seem to think more of secesh property than they do the lives of thare soldiers.”¹²

Confiscating and subsisting on Southern foodstuffs, livestock, and other supplies seemed a logical step, as it prevented their use by the Confederate army and undermined civilian morale. For many, the emancipation of slaves was but part and parcel of the process. Soldiers understood the institution to be at the heart of the rebellion, that it aided the Southern war effort, and early on endorsed its eradication. “The sin of slavery has brought sorrow and desolation throughout our land,” wrote a New York infantryman from Virginia. “For this cause I am far away from home and friends. For this cause so many of our wounded men are in hospitals on beds with pain, and sickness. For this cause many of our brave men have suffered death, and as I returned to Camp I prayed to God to speed the time when slavery would be no more known in our land and our country would be at peace once more.” As the failure to note that the “sin” of slavery also brutally oppressed millions of people suggests, soldiers did not generally view its abolition as a moral good in its own right, but as a necessary component of the war effort. Consequently, even those hostile toward African-Americans and abolitionists could sanction the measure. “I am no Abolitionist,” insisted a West Virginia trooper in January

¹² Rufus Mead to “Dear Folks at Home,” 28 May 1862, Rufus Mead Papers, LC; Alva G. Griest Journal, “Three Years in Dixie: Personal Adventures, Scenes and Incidents of the March,” 30 November 1862, Harrisburg Civil War Round Table Collection, USMHI; Thomas M. Covert to “My Dear Wife,” 15 July 1862, Thomas M. Covert Papers, WRHS.

1862, a full year before emancipation became national policy, “but am opposed to giving aid and comfort to Rebels by catching and returning Nigers. I would also use these Nigers in any way calculated to crush this Rebellion.” On the eve of national emancipation in December 1862, an Ohio volunteer had similarly reconciled himself to the necessity of slavery’s destruction. “I think we have fought long enough to discover that slavery is the radical cause of all our trouble,” he wrote. “Hence, I am in favor of killing slavery. I am no abolitionist – in fact despise the word – yet I can’t see any other remedy for our agonized nation, than the removal of the cause.”¹³

Some soldiers, of course, grumbled about the policy, especially those of Irish descent, an ethnic group historically hostile to blacks, as well as those from the border states where slavery still existed. Rare was the volunteer who abandoned the Union cause in favor of preserving slavery or Southern property rights, however, and the fact that African-Americans might be used as laborers or cannon fodder without being granted social equality made the policy even more palatable. “For my part,” wrote a Nebraska volunteer of the proclamation in April 1863, “I think that it is one of the best things that ever happened and if it had been issued at first and carried out promptly things would look different now to what it does.” Indeed, many soldiers initially hostile to emancipation eventually changed their opinions, and those who continued to speak out against it were denigrated and accused of treason. “I am thoroughly sick of hearing continual slang from the lips of Army officers about Abolition War, niggerism &c &c and cannot believe that these who talk in that way can be very desirous to *subjugate* the Rebels,” proclaimed a New York captain. “‘The Constitutional rights of the South’ is another cant phrase much in use here but I hold that the South has *no rights* Constitutional or otherwise as long as they are in arms against the Government of the country.”¹⁴

¹³ R. Cruikshank to “Dear Wife,” 31 May 1863, Robert Cruikshank Letters, <<http://ehistory.osu.edu/osu/sources/letters/cruikshank/6323.cfm>>; James Abraham to father, 8 January 1862, Civil War Time Illustrated Collection, USMHI; Henry Henney to ?, December 1862, Civil War Times Illustrated Collection, USMHI. On the acceptance of emancipation by Union soldiers, see Chandra Manning, *What This Cruel War was Over: Soldiers, Slavery, and the Civil War*, (New York: Vintage Books, 2007).

¹⁴ Thomas Edwin Keen to “My Dear Sister,” 6 April 1863, in Potter, “‘I Thought It My Duty to Go,’” 154; Captain Benjamin Price to Congressman George M Julian, 29 March 1863, Joshua Reed Giddings Papers, LC.

Among many officers and politicians conciliation died a slow death, but soldiers were quite willing to act on their own accord and to prosecute the war as they saw fit. They ruthlessly seized Southern property, feasted on Southern hogs and chickens, and harbored fugitive slaves – despite orders to the contrary. Try as they might, commanders restrained their men with difficulty, if at all. Those officers who continued to stress the necessity of protecting Southern civilians quickly lost favor, while those who supported the volunteers in their endeavors – or at least looked the other way – were highly popular. The volunteers themselves were instrumental in finally ending the policy, and its abandonment was little more than a post-facto seal of approval on what had already become reality. “Every effort at conciliation has failed – now all measures to crush are to be employed,” rejoiced a member of the 22nd Ohio in September 1862. “Men in arms against the government will be made to feel the consequences of their treason. **CONFISCATION & EMANCIPATION** are to be fairly tested.”¹⁵

2.2.3 Toward a Hard War

Despite Southern rhetoric as to the “barbarous” nature of “Yankee hirelings” and “mercenaries,” the war that volunteers waged against Southern citizens was hardly indiscriminate. Property, rather than human life, was their target. Further, in their eyes not all citizens were equally culpable for the national calamity. If a person’s loyalty could be established, their property warranted protection. When troopers of the 1st New York Dragoons entered Berlin, Maryland in July 1863, they took an immediate liking to the place. “There are very few slaves kept here,” noted one officer, “and the farmers are not ashamed to work themselves.” The men camped on the farm of an impoverished Unionist, whose recently cut wheat was in danger of being trampled. Informed of the situation, the New Yorkers gathered and stacked the crop by hand. “That’s the way we serve the Union people,” the officer glowed. “We don’t treat the rebels in that way however.” Residents of Jefferson, Maryland met the weary volunteers of The 55th Ohio with a warm reception, providing them with food and water. Even so, several unruly soldiers resorted to vandalism, behavior which one member thought deplorably stupid. “I was some demoralized to see some of the soldiers destroy property and pillage everything

¹⁵ Diary of Channing Richards, 2 September 1862, FHS.

that they coveted,” he wrote. “Surely where there is a Union sentiment we should respect private property.”¹⁶

Soldiers were also much more inclined to accost the wealthy – however defined – than those of the lower classes. Whether or not the poor had been duped or had willingly followed their social and economic superiors out of the Union, it was the so-called “rich secesh,” according to volunteers, who had fomented rebellion. It was they, therefore, who ought most to suffer the consequences of that rash decision. “The poor folks,” explained an Ohio cavalryman in Virginia, “are more to be pitied than blamed for the rebellion, but the rich I don’t care how much is taken from them.” A Missouri trooper echoed this antagonism. “The Southern Chivalry is about played out,” he scribbled to his wife. “I think fine old Southern Gentlemen will have to take up the shovel and the hoe and earn the bread he eats or eat none, and their delicate misses and matrons, use the broom and the distaff. With the poor and the orphans of the south I sympathize, but wealthy and intelligent males or females, not in the least.”¹⁷

Plantations, as symbols of Southern aristocratic pretense and arrogance, became special targets of Union wrath. A Massachusetts volunteer described a typical ransacking of a plantation near Brandy Station, Virginia in December 1863. When his foraging party learned it was owned by a “secesh,” they shifted from a collection of foodstuffs to wanton destruction. “The boys commenced sacking the house,” he related. “Bureaus were overhauled, and all they contained stolen or destroyed. Book cases were pillaged or tipped over; furniture smashed or stolen; crockery broken to pieces; mirrors stolen or broken; and a splendid piano in good tune, worth from \$500 to \$700, played on by some of the boys who felt musical till the [foraging] party was ready to return, and then that was smashed too. . . .One of the boys brought off a splendidly executed painting – a portrait of a beautiful woman, probably the lady of the house – and was exhibiting it on the road.” Their work accomplished, the Massachusetts men departed. “It looked sad to destroy so much property, but this is the result of war.”¹⁸

¹⁶ Howard Malcolm Smith to “Dear M—,” 18 July 1863, Howard Malcolm Smith Papers, LC; Henry Henney Diary, 28 June 1863, Civil War Times Illustrated Collection, USMHI.

¹⁷ Thomas M. Covert to “My Dear Wife,” 26 May, 1862; Peter F. Clark to wife, 14 January 1864, Peter F. Clark Papers, Missouri Historical Society.

¹⁸ Edwin O. Wentworth to “Dear Wife,” 16 December 1863, Edwin O. Wentworth Papers, LC.

The ownership of slaves was another defining characteristic of the wealthy, and volunteers early determined that the most effective way to simultaneously undermine the rebellion and cow the rich was to deprive owners of their “property.” They delighted in foiling the attempts of slave catchers and masters to retrieve runaways from Union camps, rarely missing the opportunity to administer a sound beating to those foolish enough to attempt it. Again, they did not endorse emancipation for the sake of slaves, but rather as a method of attacking the traditional authority of those thought to be most responsible for the war. Freeing slaves, especially when done in a dramatic and humiliating fashion, could effectively expose the powerlessness of the ruling class. When several 2nd Ohio troopers encountered a white man in the process of whipping a female slave, they took action. “Now it is true this woman was black,” recounted one, “but still she was a woman. we could not prove he was secesh but we knew it because he struck a woman and that is secesh stile.”

there was three of us. we stoped him and told him it was his turn now. he begged like a coward, as he was, for no brave man will strike a woman. we tied him to a tree as he had the woman. he had about 50 slaves they stood around us and looked wonders. they had never seen their master used so before. he told them to kill us [but] they never moved a hand. we gave him 10 cuts. O did not he begg. we asked him if he would ever whip his slaves again he said he would not.¹⁹

As suggested by the above, Northern volunteers had very gender-specific notions about the proper role of women in society, especially white women, and they were the object of much talk and speculation. Whatever preconceptions Northern volunteers may have had concerning Southern “belles” were quickly laid to rest next to the myth of the Southern cavalier. Not only was the image largely mythical, but rarely did they come in contact with that class of women who most resembled the profile. What soldiers instead discovered were common folk, though they found nothing common about them. The life of a typical rural Southerner was anything but easy, and many volunteers were put off by the “grittiness” of the women they encountered. “The women of the South,” wrote one Union soldier from Mississippi, “I can not call them Ladys for they are far from it . . . for the majority of them chew tobacco. which I think does not become a lady.” Another

¹⁹ Samuel Trescott to “Dear Cousin,” 11 March 1862, Samuel Trescott Papers, OHS.

wrote from Tennessee that “the most common sight is a woman coming into camp on horseback with a cigar or stump of a pipe in her mouth. Of course it is only the poorer class that we meet.” The tobacco chewing propensities of a local pastry purveyor ruined the appetite of one squeamish Ohioan at Chattanooga. “Noticing a well dressed young lady with some pies to sell I stepped across the street to purchase one,” he noted in his journal. “Just as I approached she turned her head from the crowd and fired such a volley of tobacco juice that I instantly fell back nor could I muster courage to again venture for pies today.” An Ohio cavalryman, writing from Pea Ridge, likewise found the females of Arkansas to be a bit rough around the edges, though not on account of tobacco. “The girls and women all swear here worse than the soldiers do,” he reported with astonishment to his cousin, Cordelia. When he playfully asked a “secesh” girl for a kiss, her response stunned him. “She said I would see you in *hell* first. Now Delia dont you think that was rather blunt? Would you answer that way?”²⁰

Not all women behaved in such “unladylike” fashion, of course, and genuine romantic relationships sometimes developed between soldier and civilian, a fact which surprised a Michigan volunteer. “There have been a good many marriages down here in Dixie between the soldiers and Southern girls,” he wrote in mid-1863 from Tennessee. “More than one would expect from the difference in sentiment.” Still, he believed such involvement was not without benefit. “If this war should ever end,” he speculated, “a great many of our soldiers will certainly stay down here, and their being here will undoubtedly help a great deal to keep the country loyal.” It would be a mistake, however, to assume that marriages were a common occurrence. “I don’t now remember that any of the Sixth boys got particularly *stuck* on the place,” wrote an Indiana veteran of his time in Corinth, Mississippi. “Nor did I ever hear of any of them deserting the regiment to remain there on account of being captivated by any of Corinth’s *tobacco-chewing, snuff-rubbing, flax-headed, sharp-nosed, hatchet-faced, yellow-eyed, sallow-skinned, cotton-dressed, flat-breasted, big-footed, bare-headed, long-waisted, hump-shouldered, stoop-necked, bare-footed, straddle-toed, sharp-shinned, thin-lipped, pale-faced, lantern-jawed, hollow-eyed, silly-looking, female damsels.*” More importantly,

²⁰ E.O. Charles to Mary Frances McEwen, 16 August 1863, McEwen Family Papers, MoHS; Rufus Mead to “Dear Folks at Home,” 23 November 1863, Rufus Mead Papers, LC; John Wesley Marshall Journal, 25 February 1864, LC; Samuel Trescott to “Dear Cordelia,” 25 October 1862, Samuel Trescott Papers, OHS.

even should Northern volunteers prove willing to look beyond these imputed “faults,” their would-be partners were generally not as keen on the idea. As the Michigander who reported on the prevalence of marriages later explained in response to a ribbing about Southern ladies taking advantage of love-struck volunteers, “Southern D’s [Delilahs] don’t make much off us. They are too bitter against all Yankees to be very agreeable society.”²¹

Of all the traits Northerners discerned of Southern women, it was their “bitter” outspokenness which struck them as the most salient, unusual, and unladylike. In June 1862 the 36th Pennsylvania, on board a transport in Virginia’s Pamunkey River, experienced early on the Southern hospitality that Union soldiers might expect. As the regimental band played on deck, large crowds of slaves flocked along the banks to witness the spectacle, dancing in joy. A sole white man waved his hat, and in turn received a loud cheer from the soldiers. Two women who approached were unimpressed. “The soldiers cheered them and greeted them with the waving of hats,” reported one volunteer, “but instead of returning the salutation – they turned their backs to us and giving their skirts a significant flit of disdain, advanced in another direction.” The men, however, took the insult in stride. “They received loud, laughing shouts of derision for their painstaking to show us their rebellious proclivities.”²²

Compared to the responses of other women, a flit of the skirt seemed positively quaint. An Ohio trooper who attempted to enter a house in Missouri in search of supplies was met with outright assault by the woman who occupied it. “The other day I went to go in a small house and a girl hit me on the arm with a club,” he reported. “I did not go in. she said if I did she would kill me [and] I did not want to die yet.” He discovered that Kentucky women were no more accommodating to Yankees than those from Missouri. “You say you pity the secesh women and children,” he later wrote to his family from Somerset, “but I pity the secesh soldiers as much as the women because the women use us worse than the men do. we take more abuse from them than the men would dare give us.” Calling at one house, he recounted how he and his compatriots offered to pay for a

²¹ Samuel Henry Eells to “Dear Aunt Sarah,” 10 May 1863, Samuel Henry Eells Papers, LC; Charles C. Briant, *History of the Sixth Regiment Indiana Volunteer Infantry*, (Indianapolis: Wm. B. Burford, 1891), 135; Samuel Henry Eells to “Dear Aunty,” 27 August 1863, Samuel Henry Eells Papers, LC.

²² Jacob Heffelfinger Diary, 11 June 1862, Civil War Times Illustrated Collection, USMHI.

meal only to be bawled out by the matron of the residence. “she called us a few pet names such as cut throats invaders thieves, Yankees . . . then told us if she could save our lifes by giving us something to eat she would not do it.” An Indiana volunteer experienced a similarly unpleasant episode in Alabama after his regiment confiscated supplies from a farmer. “One of his daughters threw some hot water on me,” he wrote with astonishment, “but as she was good looking I forgave her.”²³

Though soldiers might shrug off verbal or physical assaults, some actions clearly tested their forbearance – regardless of the woman’s attractiveness. When a “violent rebel” woman spit on an Illinois soldier in Smyrna, Tennessee, the victim was hardly amused. “He would have soundly boxed her ears had not she run into the house out of his reach,” reported a comrade. “What a disgrace are such things upon the very name of woman. Had I such a sister I could weep tears of blood as it were and deep mortification and would cast her off as a thing too vile to think upon . . .” In December 1862, the 87th Pennsylvania marched through Winchester, Virginia in pursuit of a Confederate cavalry brigade which had attacked them. The town, noted one volunteer, “had many good looking young women, but the most rabid Rebels I have ever seen.” As the regiment passed, citizens jeered them from their porch steps. One woman yelled out, “Now you catch it, you Yankee son’s of _____!” In response, a noncommissioned officer stepped up to the porch and smacked her, knocking her to the ground. “Soldiers will not take and insult like that,” concluded the Pennsylvanian, “even from a pretty Rebel woman.”²⁴

One of the more outrageous examples of chastisement occurred in Meridian, Mississippi in April 1864. A volunteer in the 17th Illinois, taken prisoner sometime earlier, fell sick and was sent to a rebel hospital in the town. While there, he was allegedly humiliated and “shamefully abused” by a young woman who verbally insulted him and had the gall to spit in his face. Eventually exchanged and returned to his regiment, he again found himself in Meridian. With a cohort of fellow soldiers, he paid the young lady and her mother a visit at their home. “She recognized him as soon as she

²³ Samuel Trescott to “My Dear Cousin,” 20 October 1862; to “Remembered Friend,” 30 May 1863, Samuel Trescott Papers, OHS; Alva G. Griest Journal, “Three Years in Dixie,” 17 October 1863, Harrisburg Civil War Round Table Collection, USMHI.

²⁴ Alva G. Griest Journal, “Three Years in Dixie,” 24 February 1863, Harrisburg Civil War Round Table Collection, USMHI; John C. Kesses Memoir, 25 December 1862, Civil War Times Illustrated Collection, USMHI; Samuel Henry Eells to friends, 25 June 1862, Samuel Henry Eells Papers, LC.

saw him and Begged for mercy but they would not hear to it,” reported a comrade of the mob. “They soon piled the furniture up in the parlor & fired it then drove the Old woman and her Daughter out in the street with nothing only what they had on their back.” The women fled through the town, seeking shelter in various houses, only to be burned out by the rabble of soldiers who followed closely on their heels. At last, they found temporary refuge in a tent at army headquarters before being banished outside of Union lines. “Thus may it be with all who descend from their high pedestal of womanhood and disgrace themselves by spitting on helpless prisoners,” concluded another volunteer of the affair.²⁵

As with the wealthy, volunteers clearly desired to humble women who appeared too outspoken – too unladylike. As part of an all-powerful occupying force, however, volunteers need not always rely on violence to rectify an insult. “The women are more demonstrative than the men dare to be,” wrote a surgeon in the 12th Michigan of the residents of Jackson, Tennessee, “but one of them got taken down the other day.” A brigade commander, riding through town accompanied by his staff, met a typical reception. At one house, several women who had been watching from the porch simultaneously turned their backs to the Union entourage, ordering their gawking children to stop staring at the “Yankee fools.” The commander, hearing the remark, ordered the house seized and converted into a hospital. In disbelief, husband and wife called on the commander at his headquarters, begging him to relent. “The Colonel was inexorable for a long time,” reported the surgeon, “but finally yielded to their solicitations on condition that the offending lady should come to him and ask his pardon which she did *on her knees*.” The exemplar of non-violent chastisement, however, might be found in General Benjamin Butler’s infamous General Orders No. 28. Issued against the women of New Orleans in May 1862 in response to their habitual mistreatment of his soldiers, he threatened to deny the status of “lady” to the culprits by having them treated as “women of the town plying their avocation.” Though forever damned as “Beast” Butler for this order, he never had to enforce it. The prospect of being humiliatingly

²⁵ Chauncey E. Barton to “Dear Sister,” 14 April 1864, Chauncey E. Barton Letter, LC; Lucius W. Barber, *Army Memoirs of Lucius W. Barber, Company “D,” 15th Illinois Volunteer Infantry*, (Chicago: J.M.W. Jones, 1894), 137.

labeled as a prostitute or “harlot” was sufficient enough to curb the behavior of the ladies of New Orleans.²⁶

The concept of “chivalry,” of course, was not an explicitly Southern domain, and many Union volunteers expressed unease at the extent to which their comrades targeted women. Indeed, there often developed a tug of war between the traditional notion of protecting women and a keen desire to seek vengeance against them. Ultimately, most soldiers considered their responses to be balanced and appropriate. Women who abided by the expected stereotype of the helpless and frail female deserved respect; those who broke with the rules by descending from their “high pedestal,” either by their outspokenness or unruly behavior, needed to be put in their “place.” The actions taken against them, therefore, might easily be viewed as nothing more than the reassertion of traditional male authority. As they transpired in the context of war, however, such an interpretation misses a greater complexity. As soldiers indicated time and again, they considered Southern women to be more “fanatical” in their support of the Confederacy than the men who did the actual fighting. In such a context, their behavior constituted much more than a simple violation of gender roles. Instead, outspoken women were looked upon not only as abetting treason, but as a primary pillar of moral support for those who would destroy the Union. As “she-devils” and “she-rebels,” they were judged to be as guilty as the men who literally took up arms against the government. Consequently, their “innocence” was forfeit, and they might be imprisoned, exiled, or even physically assaulted. Southerners volunteers naturally considered these incidents outrageous, perceiving them – along with the attacks on slavery – as a part of a concerted effort to undermine the accepted social order. By freeing slaves and “correcting” women for their misconduct, Union volunteers supplanted the patriarchal authority of Southern males.²⁷

²⁶ Samuel Henry Eells to friends, 25 June 1862, Samuel Henry Eells Papers, LC; General Benjamin Butler, General Orders No. 28, 15 May 1862, *OR*, Ser. 1, Vol. 15, 426.

²⁷ On the gendered aspect of the Union volunteers’ war against the South, as well as the implications of Butler’s order, see Reid Mitchell, *The Vacant Chair: The Northern Soldier Leaves Home*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 89-113; Chester G. Hearn, *When the Devil Came Down to Dixie: Ben Butler in New Orleans*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997), 101-109; and Drew Gilpin Faust, *Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 196-219. On the connection between the “war” on Southern women and emancipation, see Manning, *What This Cruel War was Over*, 62-64.

The stripping away of women's traditional immunity was indicative of a greater blurring between "guilty" and "innocent," and the punishment of "rebels" and the punishment of "Southerners," in general. Though volunteers sought to act justly and level punishment accordingly, there were several factors working against such a policy. Inevitably, massive armies caused indiscriminate damage that affected loyal and rebel, rich and poor, men, women, and children, alike. An officer in the 12th Indiana, recounting his regiment's movement through Tennessee in the fall of 1863, understood clearly what war meant. "We had bad rainy weather on the march," he reported, "and nothing to eat except what we foraged from the country through which we passed. The good [Union] people of East Tennessee will long remember our visit for two reasons: First because we delivered them from Rebel oppression and Secondly from the fact that we took all their provisions and livestock and in many instances their wearing apparel and bed quilts, blankets, knives and forks, spoons and any other articles they happened to have on hand." Reflecting on the situation, he came to a sad realization: "The presence of even a friendly army is the greatest curse than can happen to the inhabitants."²⁸

Further undermining attempts to discriminate was the difficulty in determining who exactly qualified as "secesh." While Southern women might make their loyalties known, many civilians who faced an army of occupation were understandable reticent on the subject. Hence, soldiers often had to rely on intuition, alone, and hardened veterans were not always inclined to give citizens the benefit of the doubt. In many areas, particularly in the border regions, they expressed a strong distrust of the people they encountered. "They all profess to be good Union men," wrote a volunteer in the 6th Ohio of the residents of Laurel Hill in western Virginia, "but I have my doubts about the truth of what they say. Nearly all of the Virginians we have met have a mean, sheepish look somehow & [are] the kind of people that you would not like to have anything to do with." Nor did he trust the residents of Spring Hill, Tennessee. "There are some few here . . . that say they are for the Union & have been through thick & thin," he skeptically reported in March 1862, "but no one puts much confidence in what they say, we think they hurrah for which ever army that is nearest to them."²⁹

²⁸ James H. Goodnow to wife, 20 December 1863, James H. Goodnow Papers, LC.

²⁹ Alfred West to wife, 14 July 1861, 25 March 1862, West Family Papers, KHS.

Declarations of neutrality were looked upon with skepticism, while citizens discovered to be hiding supplies could expect retaliatory measures. Those who took the oath of allegiance were given short shrift, as soldiers tended to attribute their motives to a base desire to protect their property rather than a heart-felt love of Union. A soldier in the 22nd Ohio noted that prior to the issuance of liberal foraging orders few Tennessee farmers seemed willing to declare their loyalty, “but immediately after as if by magic ‘Union Men’ became plenty and took the oath in crowds.” He knew that little stock could be placed in such declarations, but did not think them entirely without benefit, for “a man who will take such an oath to save his property will certainly hesitate to do anything which will forfeit it.” As the reaction of the Wisconsin volunteers who occupied Oxford, Mississippi in late 1862 suggests, not even displaying the Stars and Stripes could raise citizens above suspicion. “For the first time since leaving St. Louis our eyes were gladdened with the sight of a Union flag,” wrote one. “Upon the top of a citizen’s house who is the owner of a large plantation a fine flag was flying as we passed. This man has three sons in the Rebel army, so he does it to save his property from pillage. ‘Aint he a shrewd ‘Cuss?’” Given the difficulties involved in determining the sincerity of civilian loyalty, it is not surprising that soldiers often dismissed entire populations as hopelessly “secesh” and treated them accordingly. “The people here are all rebels,” insisted a Massachusetts volunteer of the citizens of White Plains, Virginia. “We have a grand time killing and eating their sheep, cattle, and poultry.”³⁰

Compounding the difficulties inherent in distinguishing friend from foe was the ever-present threat of guerrilla attack, an issue which plagued Northern and Southern armies throughout the war. The barbarism that characterized irregular warfare was astonishing. As guerrillas did not generally wear uniforms (a badge of legitimacy) and adopted the hit and run assault as their *modus operandi*, Union policy officially classified them as “brigands” and “outlaws” who intentionally shunned the accepted laws of war and instead fought as “savages.” Consequently, they were given scant consideration when captured and the guerrillas, for their part, were quite willing to match the violence. Union volunteers who denounced their mode of war generously characterized them as

³⁰ Channing Richards Diary, 2 September 1862, FHS; Joseph Lester Journal, 12 December 1862, Joseph Lester Journal and Letters, LC; Edwin O. Wentworth to “Dear Wife,” 8 November 1862, Edwin O. Wentworth Papers, LC.

“cowards” and “assassins” who were “not worth living.” A Nebraska soldier accused them of being “worse than Mexicans and Indians. They sneak around and shoot our pickets. They won’t meet us face to face like men or an honorable foe.” At its worst, the conflict was marked by almost total dehumanization, with the belligerents viewing each other as thugs and ruffians, beasts and vermin. Soldiers commonly referred to areas as being “infested” with guerrillas and “extermination” was a term bandied about with regularity. As one Ohio cavalryman operating on the Kansas-Missouri border declared in a typical metaphorical juxtaposition, “if it was not for Bush whackers rattle snakes and wood ticks this would be a nice place to live.” In many instances, the brutality rivaled anything that might be found in the savagery of the Indian wars, a development which both sides ostensibly wished to avoid. When a patrol of Missouri volunteers captured three suspected bushwhackers outside of Warrensburg in late April 1863, they disposed of them in a popular fashion. Allowing the prisoners to trail behind on the march back to camp, they patiently waited for them to attempt an escape and then gunned them down. “We spread their blankets over them,” an officer casually wrote to his wife, “and left them for the crows.”³¹

That guerrillas and soldiers – combatants all – could slaughter one another in such a manner was horrific, but what made the fighting truly reprehensible was its focus on civilians. Though guerrilla units might operate in conjunction with regular Confederate forces, and often attacked Union supply lines and depots on their own accord, they targeted citizens as much as they did military personnel. At best, they acted as little more than extra-legal regulators and vigilantes in a brutal contest for hearts and minds, terrorizing citizens they considered to be pro-Union. At worst, they declared loyalty to no one, operating as criminal organizations on the fringes of society, murdering and plundering as opportunity dictated. Though citizens were rightly wary of guerrillas, they were just as concerned with the Union forces that pursued them. As irregular forces

³¹ On official Union policy toward guerrillas, see General Orders No. 100, alternatively known as the “Lieber Code,” *OR*, Ser. 2, Vol. 5, 671-682. James A Congleton Diary, 14 May 1863, LC; Gilbert Gulbrandson to parents, 19 September 1863, Harrisburg Civil War Round Table Collection, USMHI; Thomas Edwin Keen to “My Dear Sister,” 9 September 1861, in Potter, “I Thought It My Duty to Go,” 137; Samuel Trescott to “My Dear Cousin,” Samuel Trescott Papers, OHS; 11 May 1862, Peter F. Clark to wife, 2 September 1863, Peter F. Clark Papers, Missouri Historical Society. For general a study of irregular warfare in the Civil War, see Daniel E, Sutherland, *A Savage Conflict: The Decisive Role of Guerrillas in the American Civil War*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009).

made it a point to blend in with the people, a guerrilla attack provoked in the volunteers a sense of frustration, impotence, fear and rage which easily led to retributive policies against all civilians who happened to be in the vicinity. To soldiers who suffered under the hit and run tactics, it was clear that guerrillas could not operate without the support of the people. As irregular units, they could not officially draw provisions from the government, and looked to the local populace for food, supplies, and shelter. That such “support” was often obtained at the barrel of a gun, however, was frequently overlooked, and consequently few events were as capable of sparking indiscriminate retaliation. One Union trooper, fed up with incessant guerrilla sniping, expressed a popular solution to the issue. “The Bushwhackers are giving us more trouble here than Lees whole army,” he wrote from western Virginia in late 1861. “Has not forbearance nearly ceased to be a virtue with these people – nothing short of driving the whole population out of the country or utter annihilation will stop this cowardly war fare”³²

Entire towns were regularly leveled in retribution for an attack. When guerrillas hit a supply train guarded by the 73rd Ohio near McDowell, Virginia in April 1862, a portion of the regiment was sent to root out those responsible. The detachment, reported one member, was ordered “to destroy every thing they came across and to kill every Secesh that was big enough to *piss* against a wall.” As elements of General William T. Sherman’s army approached the Confederate stronghold of Vicksburg via the Mississippi River in the fall of 1862, bushwhackers on shore periodically fired on the Union flotillas, only to scatter when the volunteers landed to engage them. Invariably, the unseen attackers would regroup, and the process repeated itself. A German-American volunteer in the 3rd Missouri (US), encamped along shore after a day of such skirmishing, witnessed the glow of burning buildings against the night sky, set afire in retaliation. “The wanton destruction of houses and splendid farms,” he wrote in his diary, “not being a ‘military necessity’ but originating merely in a thirst for vengeance, and licentious desire to sack and burn, filled me with sorrow and sad reflections and the sight became to me, only horrible and disgusting; verily thought I, Schillers words are true:

‘Noch der schrecklichsten der schrecken
Ist der mensch in seinem wahn’”

³² James Abraham to father, 24 October 1861, Civil War Time Illustrated Collection, USMHI.

[But the most terrible of terrors,
Is man in his madness.]

What some thought to be madness, however, others considered a model of rationality. “Burning rebels’ buildings and turning their families out of doors in winter may seem rather rough,” admitted a Kansan whose regiment had fired the town of Holden, Missouri in January 1862, “but this is our only resort. If we go into the country with a large force the hounds are all at home to work and pretend to be good Union men. If we go with a small squad, so that they can collect five to one, they will give us fits in the brush and run home and go to work again.”³³

Though guerrilla conflict could be found throughout the South, nowhere was it characterized by more viciousness than in the Missouri-Kansas region. In the late 1850s, Kansas served as a battleground between abolitionist ideologues, many of them emigrants from New England, and pro-slavery “border ruffians” from Missouri. They engaged in a murderous conflict that subsided only briefly before civil war renewed the violence. Kansas “Jayhawkers” staged regular raids into Missouri, wreaking havoc on the civilian population, and Missouri bushwhackers returned the favor. Missouri itself, a slave state which remained in the Union, was wracked by internal violence as Union volunteers and pro-Southern guerrillas struggled for control.

Taking their cue from language used during the Kansas conflict, Union volunteers denounced pro-Southern Missourians as a class of uncivilized, immoral, and debased people worthy of eradication. One soldier insisted they were the meanest, most “degenerated” people he had ever seen, “as a being that has not more than 2 ideas above an oyster.” The contempt easily led to depredations. “The people are poor and live in small log cabins and have for the most part only one cow and a pair of oxen or horses,” reported an Iowa volunteer from Rolla, Missouri in late 1862. “Even so these Republican Soldiers go to their houses and kill their chickens and pigs and calves and what they have to live from and if they have a little garden they ruin it and that is very unjust. . . .The

³³ John Sosman Diary, 26, 28 April, 1862, John Sosman to “Dear Father,” 3 May 1862, Sosman Family Papers, WRHS; Edward Paul Reichhelm Diary, (?) December 1862, Edward Paul Reichhelm Collection, LC; “Jayhawker” to editor, Mishawaka (Indiana) *Enterprise*, 1 February 1862, in Jeffrey L. Patrick, ed., “‘This Regiment Will Make a Mark’: Letters from a Member of Jennison’s Jayhawkers, 1861-1862,” *Kansas History*, Vol. 20, No. 1, (Spring 1997), 57.

people around here are not agitators either. I don't know what they will be like when they dare to assert themselves." Complicating the matter was that many of the troops sent from St. Louis to secure the surrounding rural areas, already despised as abolitionist occupiers, were of German background, and citizens were quick to label them as "Hessians," "Dutch Devils," and more colorfully, "Dutch sons of bitches." They, and pro-Union German civilians living within the state, were a special target of pro-Confederate guerrillas, which sprang up everywhere. In Concordia, Missouri a band of guerrillas entered the town, waited for the German-American citizens to leave church, and opened fire. "[They] murdered a dozen peaceful citizens without any provocation," wrote one resident, "and after they robbed what suited them, left the place." In response, Germans formed their own home-guard units, and German-American soldiers exhibited a propensity to handle Confederate sympathizers roughly. "On the 11th of July last I was forced by a comp[an]y of Dutch Devils at the point of the bayonet to illuminate my house & to hoist a flag," complained a resident of St. Louis to her uncle. "It was to celebrate the taking of Vicksburg, they threatened to burn the house over our heads."³⁴

In Missouri, the traditional brutality of guerrilla conflict was exacerbated by political intolerance and personal vendettas as well as ethnic hatred, leading to atrocious violence which defied all attempts to control it. Guerrillas scalped and mutilated Union volunteers, the volunteers summarily executed guerrillas, while citizens, used as pawns, lived in a perpetual state of fear and paranoia. "Each side," notes one scholar,

³⁴ Henry S. Carroll to mother, 29 April 1863, Harrisburg Civil War Round Table Collection, USMHI; Gilbert Gulbrandson to parents, undated letter (probably late-1862), Harrisburg Civil War Round Table Collection, USMHI; Gert Geobel Memoir, "Laenger als ein Menschenleben in Missouri," manuscript, translated by M. Heinrichsmeyer [1956], MoHS; Eliza Faris O'Flaherty to Uncle (Frederic A. Charleville), n.d. [1864], Benoist-Charleville Family Papers, MoHS. Historically, Missourians who supported slavery were referred to as "Pukes," a term synonymous with "poor white trash." I have not, however, discovered an instance where a Union volunteer actually employed the term. Missourians' intense loathing of ethnic Germans is glaringly apparent within the Provost Marshal records. Indexed copies of the records for Missouri, taken from the larger collection at the National Archives (Record Group 109, War Department Collection of Confederate Records, Microfilm Publication No. 345, Union Provost Marshals file of papers relating to individual citizens) are available at the Missouri State Archives. See, for instance, Washington Crosland to General John Schofield, 4 August 1862, Union Provost Marshals file of papers relating to individual citizens, Missouri State Archives (MSA) microfilm roll F1245; Statement of Louis Weil, 29 August 1862, MSA-F1470; and Doratha McBride to "Brother Henry," 19 March 1863, MSA-F1155; The most thorough study of irregular warfare in Missouri is Michael Fellman's *Inside War: The Guerrilla Conflict in Missouri during the American Civil War*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

“developed a Manichean vision, with themselves cast as the people of Good, and the Others as the sub-people of Evil.”³⁵

The war which afflicted the state and region bred countless atrocities, but none worse than that which occurred in Lawrence, Kansas in the summer of 1863. As the center of the abolitionist movement in the 1850s and staging ground from which Kansas Jayhawkers had raided Missouri, it was a natural target for retaliation. Crossing into the state from Missouri, Confederate guerrilla chieftain William Clarke Quantrill and 450 of his followers occupied the town shortly before dawn on August 21. The guerrillas looted and burned, setting a fire which eventually consumed nearly 200 buildings. More devilish, however, was Quantrill’s order in regards to the population. He directed his band to execute every able-bodied male capable of shouldering a rifle. In a matter of hours, they killed 150 unarmed men, some only teenagers. Many, taken by surprise, were murdered outright as they went about their morning chores. They toyed with others, giving them the faintest hope of survival before dispatching them. “They would order the men to give them a drink of water and as soon as they got the water they would shoot the man down,” testified one resident. “They killed a great many after promising to use them as prisoners of war to get them out of there houses.” A trooper in the 11th Ohio Cavalry, whose regiment fruitlessly pursued the guerrillas in the wake of the attack, was dumbfounded by the destruction. “Men women and children were murdered without discrimination,” he reported with but little exaggeration. “This massacre is without a parallel since the war began, the inhabitants say it was scarcely equaled by the indian massacres in the early settlement of the western country.”³⁶

Though not the cause, the sack of Lawrence was certainly a contributing factor to what was perhaps the harshest retaliatory measure taken against civilians during the war. On August 25, General Thomas Ewing, a native Kansan commanding in Missouri, issued General Orders No. 11, a directive designed to remove what had been the guerrillas’

³⁵ Fellman, *Inside War*, 22.

³⁶ Robert H. Miller to “Honored friend,” 20 April 1866, Knox Family Papers, Duke U; Hervey Johnson to “Folks at home,” 29 August 1863, in *Tending the Talking Wire: A Buck Soldier’s View of Indian Country, 1863-1866*, William E. Unrau, ed., (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1979), 39-40. On the sacking of Lawrence, see Thomas Goodrich, *Bloody Dawn: The Story of the Lawrence Massacre*, (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1992). On Quantrill himself, see Edward E. Leslie, *The Devil Know How to Ride: The True Story of William Clarke Quantrill and His Confederate Raiders*, (New York: Random House, 1996).

greatest resource. The citizens of four western Missouri counties, regardless of their sympathies, were to be deported. Enforced by vengeful Kansas troops, it was a predictably harsh undertaking. Public outcry eventually forced Ewing to rescind the order, but not before considerable damage had been done. Troops plundered and burned 20,000 homes, destroyed thousands of acres of crops, and displaced untold numbers of citizens. “We have seen these refugees passing though our streets,” wrote one Missouri editor, “ill clad, often times barefooted, leaving their only shelter, and their only means of substance during the approaching winter – the crops now maturing – in numerous cases without money to buy food or pay rent going they know not whether.” What made the situation particularly tragic, as the paper reminded its readers, was that the order had been issued by a Union officer, carried out by Union soldiers, and directed against citizens of a Union state. Even those who had supported the order blanched when they witnessed the consequences. “It is heart-sickening to see what I have seen,” reported one officer. “A desolated country of women and children, some of them almost naked. Some on foot and some in old wagons. Oh, God.”³⁷

In many respects, the guerrilla wars were a world apart from the regular war. Commanders, it has been suggested, adopted extreme measures only in response to extreme circumstances. They fought “outlaws” in one manner, while engaging conventional forces in a more “civilized” fashion. For this reason, it is sometimes treated as an aberrational, if bloody, sideshow of the Civil War, inconsequential to the greater conflict. To do so, however, is problematic for several reasons. Firstly, it minimizes the true extent of guerrilla activity as well as the enormous toll it exacted from civilians. Though conspicuously rampant in Missouri, guerrillas plagued every Southern state from Arkansas to Kentucky to Virginia as well as most of Appalachia. Indeed, guerrillas followed Union armies wherever they went. Strategically, the guerrilla wars may have

³⁷ On the specifics of General Orders No. 11, see *OR*, Series 1, Vol. 22, Pt. 2, 473. See also, Charles R. Mink, “General Orders, No. 11: The Forced Evacuation of Civilians during the Civil War,” *Military Affairs*, Vol. 34, No. 4 (December 1970), 132-137, and Albert Castel, “Order No. 11 and the Civil War on the Border,” in *Winning and Losing in the Civil War: Essays and Stories*, (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1996). Quotes: Lexington (Missouri) *Union*, 5 September 1863, found in Mink, 133; Colonel B.F. Lazear to wife, 10 September 1863, in Vivian K. McLarty, ed., “The Civil War Letters of Colonel Bazel Lazear,” *Missouri Historical Review*, 44 (July 1950), 390.

been inconsequential to the greater conflict, but for citizens caught in their crossfire, they were a harsh reality.³⁸

Treating the guerrilla wars as aberrational also presents something of a false dichotomy, compartmentalizing a conflict which in actuality possessed significant implications for civilians everywhere. While volunteers might distinguish between guerrillas and regular Confederate forces on the battlefield, granting quarter to the latter while executing the former, they were not so discriminating in their dealings with citizens. Guerrillas generated fears out of all proportion to their actual numbers, and irregular warfare went far in poisoning soldier-civilian relations. The mere rumor of an attack was enough to cause volunteers to look askance at a seemingly mild-mannered farmer, who may or may not have been plotting against them, and was but another reason to deal with all citizens harshly. When a report circulated among the 2nd Vermont in August 1864 that three of their comrades had been found dead outside of Charlestown, Virginia, their throats cut and mouths stuffed with wool, it sent the regiment into a rage. “The boys cared but little how they treated citizens that were guilty of such outrages upon soldiers,” reported one Vermonter. “They would actually rob and abuse citizens when they had not the excuse of its doing them any good.” Lastly, as with the piecemeal abandonment of conciliation and adoption of “hard war” tactics in the regular war, Union policy in relation to guerrillas did not immediately begin as a predetermined exercise in exterminationism against civilians, but arrived there after a twisted journey of escalation and failed strategies. Moreover, many of same factors which motivated Union soldiers to abuse citizens and burn towns in response to guerrillas – fear, wantonness, vengeance, military necessity, and the demonization of the enemy – were clearly visible among all soldiers, a further indication that the guerrilla conflict and the regular war were following parallel rather than divergent paths.³⁹

³⁸ Mark E. Neely, in *The Civil War and the Limits of Destruction*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), argues that guerrilla violence was exceptional to the war, and that Missouri itself was an exception to the exception (pp. 41-71). His assertion that guerrillas were of peripheral importance has drawn criticism, most notably from historian James McPherson (See “Was It More Restrained Than You Think?” in *The New York Review of Books*, February 14, 2008, 42-44). McPherson points out that Confederate guerrillas forced the Union to devote considerable resources to combating them. Daniel E. Sutherland’s new work, *A Savage Conflict: The Decisive Role of Guerrillas in the American Civil War*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), makes a similar argument, but posits that the Confederate guerrilla movement, far from aiding the Southern cause, actually hastened its failure.

³⁹ Wilbur Fisk Diary, 21 August 1864, Wilbur Fisk Papers, LC.

Vengeance and wantonness, for instance, which went hand in hand, seemed to accompany the army as closely as did its supply trains. Even when soldiers were not provoked by shadowy guerrillas, they informed to a significant degree the destruction wrought. Some destroyed not because they were bent on vengeance against guerrillas or the people who may have supported them, but for reasons as disparate as a woman's insult, a secesh hiding supplies, a comrade killed in battle, the alleged abuse of prisoners, or a hatred of the South for tearing apart the Union. Others, driven by baser but no less human motives, destroyed because they were drunk, naturally incorrigible, or simply because it amused them and they possessed the power to get away with it. Often, a combination of these factors was at work, as was likely the case at Fredericksburg, Virginia when it was briefly occupied by Federal troops on the eve of the battle there in December 1862. A volunteer in the 8th Ohio, arriving late, was thoroughly impressed by the scene. "What a sight – a city left to the ravages of enraged soldiers. Every house is ransacked and pillaged." Following the battle, a South Carolina volunteer also surveyed the destruction left behind. "I have often read of sacked and pillaged towns in ancient history, but never, till I saw Fredricksburg, did I fully realize what one was," he wrote with astonishment. "The houses, especially those on the river, are riddled with shell and ball. The stores have been broken open and deprived of every thing that was worth a shilling. Account books and notes and letters and papers both private and public were taken from their proper places and scattered over the streets and trampled under feet. Private property was ruined. Their soldiers would sleep in the mansions of the wealthy and use the articles and food in the house at their pleasure. Several houses were destroyed by fire. Such a wreck and ruin I never wish to see again." That Fredericksburg had not been destroyed in response to guerrillas surely made little difference to its residents.⁴⁰

Confederate civilians and soldiers often labeled Union soldiers as vandals and thieves, as did one Kentucky woman in mid-1862. "I often wonder what can inspire the Federal army with courage," she pondered. "It can be but for the sake of the Booty they

⁴⁰ Charles H. Merrick Diary, 12 December 1862, Charles H. Merrick Papers, WRHS; Tally Simpson to "My dear Sister, 25 December 1862, in Guy R. Everson and Edward H. Simson, Jr., eds., *Far, Far from Home: The Wartime Letters of Dick and Tally Simpson, 3rd South Carolina Volunteers*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 169.

get in pillaging private citizens, for so far as their vandal hordes have penetrated our country devastation and plundered houses and farms have marked their course.” Unfortunately, there was some truth in the charge. “You would shudder if you knew half the wickedness that is carried on in the army,” an Ohio volunteer complained to his wife in September 1862. “I don’t know but all armies are so, but I did not used to think so of our army, in the old Revolutionary times by reading of it. Our officers from the highest to the lowest are more than half of them thieves.” Officers, of course, tended to shift the blame to their men. A particularly egregious example occurred in Sherman’s army in November 1862, when a squad of Illinois foragers stole a four-horse carriage from a citizen. Careening through camp, their joy-ride ended abruptly when it drew the attention of the commanding general, who ordered them to dismount immediately. One of them, failing to recognize the officer (and apparently indifferent to the rank insignia on his shoulders), petulantly informed him that he would obey no order but that of his own company officer. “You may imagine how much Sherman was enraged,” reported a subordinate who witnessed the affair. “He seized a gun from one of the men and had it been loaded he would have shot the fellow. He then made the party unhitch the horses, take off the harness, - and putting it on themselves he made them draw the carriage back to the owner more than two miles.” Some soldiers, he concluded, “seem to be possessed with the idea that in order to carry on war men must throw aside civilization and become savages.”⁴¹

What some decried as wanton destruction and plundering, however, was increasingly viewed by many volunteers as a necessary extension of war, and in this regard their thinking mirrored that of the guerrilla fighters. Certainly, no soldier considered himself a thief, vandal, or arsonist, and to be labeled as such brought shame. One volunteer who was caught shooting hogs attempted to rationalize his actions as a “military necessity” but was clearly embarrassed by the consequences. “It was rather mortifying,” he wrote in his diary, “to have our names taken down at every headquarters as thieves and plunderers.” He was especially indignant that his captain had dared to lecture him, for “if we had come across captured pork and had not got captured ourselves

⁴¹ Mary E. Van Meter Diary, 1862-1863, [n.d., but probably spring 1862], p. 15, UK; Thomas M. Covert to “My Dear Wife,” 22 September 1862, Thomas M. Covert Papers, WRHS; James W. Denver to wife, 29 November 1862, Harrisburg Civil War Round Table Collection, USMHI.

[he] would have been as pleased as any of us.” Revealingly, what troubled him was not the act of stealing, but being branded as a thief.⁴²

When it came to depredations against private property, the line which separated criminal vandalism from legitimate acts of war was slowly being obliterated. True Unionists, so went the thinking, should be grateful to give up their supplies for the Union. Those labeled as “secesh,” meanwhile, deserved confiscation. Fighting for liberty against traitors, volunteers often assumed a moral mandate to smash and grab. Taking their cue from the existence of official foraging parties, they assumed rebel property to be fair game, and gave little thought to foraging “on their own hook.” “I have seen some things since I have come to the army that have pained me sorely,” an Iowa lieutenant lamented. “Many of these soldiers here claim that in pillaging the houses of citizens indiscriminately, they are doing a splendid work for Uncle Sam, though their pockets get all the perceptible benefit, that at the sacrifice of conscience.” His men did not share his qualms. On one expedition, he reported that “the boys caught a great many chickens, besides thieving a great many little things contrary to my orders. Some of the men in Co. B. were the most ungovernable, insubordinate fellows I ever saw, and as I told them, would be willing to sell their hopes of heaven for a few geese.”⁴³

As soldiers pressed the limits of “civilized” warfare, officers struggled to control the destructive tendencies of their men. “You folks at home in the peaceful North haven’t the least idea [of] the real horrors of war,” insisted a Michigander from Boonville, Arkansas. “No personal outrages are committed I am glad to say for the honor of the army, but everything else is done that could be done, and the strictest orders can’t prevent it, though a good commander can restrain it considerably.” The problem, however, was that the definition of a “good” commander was changing. Soldiers never hesitated to show support for an officer who refused to pamper Southerners. They lauded commanders like John C. Frémont, John B. Turchin, Grenville Dodge, and John Pope, not for their military genius (which was nonexistent) but for the hard line they took against civilians. Among his first orders of business Pope, a Western general chosen to lead the Union Army of Virginia in the summer of 1862, insulted the demoralized

⁴² Wilbur Fisk Diary, 21 August 1864, Wilbur Fisk Papers, LC.

⁴³ Edwin A. Van Cise Diary, 13, 19 August 1864, Edwin A. Van Cise Papers, LC.

soldiers of his new command. In a rather intemperate speech, he unfavorably compared them to his victorious soldiers in the West and all but accused them of cowardice. Nevertheless, his orders suspending the protection of Southern property and promises to collectively punish civilians endeared him to the Eastern volunteers. “Just read Maj. Genl. Pope’s orders published in the papers,” insisted a soldier in the 73rd Ohio to his sister, “and if you are not convinced after reading them that he is one of *the* best then I will have to note you down as being a very strange person.” A Pennsylvania volunteer responded with similar enthusiasm. “We are now in Pope’s great army of Virginia,” he crowed. “The men have great belief in him and his energetic policy, and all desire and expect that he will soon give us a chance to distinguish ourselves. We all regard his late stringent orders as just the thing, and all are down on slow coach [General George B.] McLellan” Many troops in Pope’s former command desired to accompany him, while those who suffered under the restraints of more “conscientious” commanders longed for a leader with his kind of aggressiveness. “I like Gen’l Pope’s late order, and only wish our generals had half as much sense,” grumbled one from Tennessee. “The soldiers all go for hurting the enemy as much as possible”⁴⁴

Increasingly, commanders tended to indulge the whims of their men, and complaints abound of line officers, most of whom were also volunteers rather than professional soldiers, acquiescing to if not outright encouraging destructive behavior. Writing from Richmond, Kentucky in late 1862, an Illinois volunteer explained that as the state was still considered to be in the Union, soldiers were ostensibly prevented from confiscating food stuffs. All the same, squads of men slipped out of camp every night and returned before sunrise loaded down with pilfered provisions. “I *guess* no one cares,” he reported of the nocturnal raids, “as many a chicken and fine piece of honey

⁴⁴ Samuel Henry Eells to “Dear Friends,” 3 September 1863, Samuel Henry Eells Papers, LC; John Sosman to “Dear Sister,” 28 July 1862, Sosman Family Papers, WRHS; William Kindig to Henry A Bitner, 21 July 1862, Valley of the Shadow: Two Communities in the American Civil War, Virginia Center for Digital History, University of Virginia <<http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/etcbin/civwarlett-browse?id=A0001>>. General George B. McClellan, commander of the Army of the Potomac, though a brilliant organizer, had a reputation for being overly timid and cautious. More importantly, he advocated leniency in dealing with Southern noncombatants. Edward A. Webb to “Sister Libby,” 20 July 1862, Edward A. Webb Papers, WRHS; Samuel Henry Eells to “Friends,” 28 July 1862, Samuel Henry Eells Papers, LC. For Pope’s announcement to the officers and soldiers of the Army of Virginia, see *OR*, Vol. 12, Pt. 3, 473-474. For the specifics of General Orders Nos. 5, 7, 11, and 13, see *OR*, Vol. 12, Pt. 2, 50-52 and Pt. 3, 509. See also, Daniel E. Sutherland, “Abraham Lincoln, John Pope, and the Origins of Total War,” *The Journal of Military History*, Vol. 56, No. 4 (October 1992), 567-586.

comb, can be seen at various times upon the officers tables.” As the 12th Indiana marched through northern Mississippi in late November 1862, its route was marked by burning fences and outbuildings. “The order prohibiting burning and plundering was very strict and most of the officers tried to assist in enforcing it,” insisted the regiment’s Lieutenant Colonel, “but enough officers winked at the thing to disgrace us.” A Virginia farmer who requested a guard for his property in 1863 was in turn requested to take the oath of allegiance. He declined, and men from the 151st New York rapidly stripped his corn fields. “Secesh will have an opportunity to muse over his folly on an empty stomach during the coming winter,” reflected the regimental chaplain. “We are so far into the heart of secessia now that we don’t try to restrain the men much but let them forage to their hearts content.” Even Sherman, who had earlier threatened to shoot some of his free-booting soldiers, seemed ambivalent on the matter. After a day of heavy foraging somewhere around Vicksburg, Mississippi in December 1862, one Illinois volunteer proudly reviewed his take: two loads of corn and fodder, nine sheep, twelve hogs, one barrel of molasses, half a barrel of salt, five bushels of sweet potatoes, and several chickens. “Pretty good days work,” he concluded. “Gen. Sherman and staff saw us butchering, but said ne’er a word.”⁴⁵

All of these factors – the unintended destruction of war, the inability to distinguish friend from foe, guerrilla activity, vengeance, wantonness, military necessity, lack of leadership – virtually guaranteed that the heartache of war would surely be visited upon the innocent. Soldiers dealt with this quandary in a time-honored fashion: they blamed the victims. In a growing number of instances, they looked upon the destruction with a strange *mélange* of pity, guilt, and callousness. Though they regretted that the war necessitated such harsh measures, they increasingly espoused the idea that Southerners, collectively, had only themselves to blame for the misery which engulfed them. “I often meet a farmer who mourns over the sad state of affairs and hopes sincerely the war will soon be over,” a volunteer reported from Virginia in the spring of 1862. “So do I, but I cannot sympathize with them very much as it is reaping the fruit of their own folly.” An

⁴⁵ Cyrus Stockwell to parents, 3 November 1862, Cyrus Stockwell Papers, WRHS; James H. Goodnow to wife, 1 December 1862, James H. Goodnow Papers, LC; See also, Moses D. Gage, *From Vicksburg to Raleigh: A Complete History of the Twelfth Regiment Indiana Infantry*, (Chicago: Clarke, 1865), 30-32; Lemuel Thomas Foote to wife, 20 September 1863, Lemuel Thomas Foote Papers, LC; George R. Lee Diary, 8 December 1862, Civil War Times Illustrated Collection, USMHI.

Ohioan gazing on the ruined remains of a plantation near Murfreesboro, Tennessee expressed similar sentiments. “It looks hard,” he noted, “but as Artemas Ward says, ‘they needn’t have seceshed.’ Our sympathy for anything that bears that worse-than-Ichabod title ‘Southern’ has about dried up and we have only ‘gizzards filled with gravel’ for the rebels.”⁴⁶

By the end of 1863, a growing number of soldiers viewed the war not simply as an effort to restore the Union as it was, but as a crusade to punish the sins of treason and slavery, and their rhetoric increasingly reflected it. While some invoked Christian morality to decry depredations, many countered that Christian morality *demand*ed nothing less. “I say to you that it is fun,” an Iowa volunteer wrote of his experiences in foraging and destroying Southern property. “One thing is certain, that God had determined that the Sin of Slavery shall be revenged in this way, and they will surely get revenge for the great convenience they have had.” A Vermont soldier was of the same opinion. “. . . God does not love slavery; there is no slavery in Heaven. God does not love rebellion; rebellion could not live there. . . There is no other way, - there can be no other, for peace or for prosperity, - but to fight out this rebellion to the bitter end, subjugate and destroy it.” Here was a line that was starkly drawn, limned by rhetoric that betrayed no hint of compromise or concession. Whether such intransigent language would be accompanied by a corresponding level of violence, as it was in Missouri, was yet to be seen.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Rufus Mead to “Dear Folks at Home,” 5 April 1862, Rufus Mead Papers, LC; Wilbur F. Hinman to “Dear Ones at Home,” 20 February 1863, Wilbur F. Hinman Papers, WRHS.

⁴⁷ Gilbert Gulbrandson to parents, 28 January 1863, Harrisburg Civil War Round Table Collection, USMHI; “Anti Rebel” (Wilbur Fisk) to editor, Montpelier (Vermont) *Green Mountain Freeman*, 19 April 1863, Wilbur Fisk Papers, LC.

2.3 “A Terrible Punishment upon Our Enemies”: Confederate Retaliation and Reprisals

2.3.1 Unionists and Guerrillas

Though Southern soldiers delighted in contrasting their chivalric behavior with that of the barbarous and dishonorable Yankees, their behavior toward civilians did not substantially differ from their Northern counterparts. They showed little mercy to Southern Unionists, for example, terrorizing so-called “tories” and driving them from their homes. Though Union sympathizers everywhere were subjected to harassment, those in the Appalachian region, in particular, suffered horrendously. When the 16th Ohio arrived in Grafton, Virginia in May 1861, the people greeted them as liberators. “[The rebels] had taken possession of the town and driven all the inhabitants away from their homes, they being all Union men that live here,” reported one soldier. “The people were overjoyed when they saw us coming in town, they ran down to meet us by hundreds, men, women and children, waving the stars and stripes, which a few days before they dared not show, if they did it was at the peril of their lives.”¹ Another Ohioan, encamped near Lexington, Kentucky in late 1862, witnessed the arrival of several hundred Unionist refugees from East Tennessee, forced to flee through the mountains. “Some of them [were] entirely barefoot and all ragged and almost worn out,” he remarked. “They were driven from their homes by the rebels and came to get arms to defend themselves. . . . I pity the poor fellows. I wonder how some our neighbors would like such treatment.”²

The war in Appalachia divided communities and literally pitted neighbors against one another, imbuing the struggle with an exceptional savagery. No one appeared safe,

¹ Oscar Ladley to “Dear Mother and Sisters,” 1 June 1861, in Becker and Thomas, *Hearth and Knapsack*, 7.

² William G. Bentley to family, 2 November 1862, in Smith, *Burning Rails as We Pleased*, 19. Important works on the war in Appalachia include Kenneth W. Noe, ed., *The Civil War in Appalachia: Collected Essays*, (Knoxville: UT Press, 1997), Noel C. Fisher, *War at Every Door: Partisan Politics and Guerrilla Violence in East Tennessee, 1860-1869*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), John C. Inscoe and Gordon B. McKinney, *The Heart of Confederate Appalachia: Western North Carolina in the Civil War*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), John C. Inscoe and Robert C. Kenzer, *Enemies of the Country: New Perspectives on Unionists in the Civil War South*, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2001), and Brian Dallas McKnight, *Contested Borderland: The Civil War in Appalachian Kentucky and Virginia*, (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2006).

as Hiram C. Marcum, a Unionist sympathizer in Scott County, Tennessee discovered. His underground activities, which included funneling like-minded men across the border into Kentucky where they could join the Union army, drew the ire of his pro-Confederate neighbors. In the early morning hours of September 7, 1861 a squad of soldiers who had been laying in ambush paid him a visit. "They came to our house, broke the door open with bayonets on their guns and said there was 36 men around who had come to kill Marcum and would kill all the women and burn us all in the house," reported his daughter, Julia. The girls stalled them long enough for their father to escape, but their ordeal had just begun. Though the vigilantes had left the house, they apparently remained in the area, and one of them returned intent on doing someone violence. Prodding them around at bayonet-point, he briefly battered around their mother, but took a greater interest in one of the daughters who he chased upstairs while threatening "to cut her throat and burn us all in the house." Julia, rushing to her sister's defense, grabbed an axe and struck the attacker in the face and chest. "I knocked the gun from his hands," she testified. "He staggered around and around and said 'don't chop me anymore.' But I did not stop." The soldier, blindly grabbing at his rifle, ran the bayonet through her left eye and shot off one of her fingers before Hiram Marcum, drawn by the screams, arrived and shot him down.³

Given such persecution, it is not surprising that many Unionists officially tendered their services to the Northern war effort, enlisting in specially created regiments which simultaneously allowed them to fight rebels while carrying out personal vendettas. An Indiana volunteer described the regular shootings of pro-Southern bushwhackers near Tullahoma, Tennessee in mid-1864. "These are every day occurrences and have almost ceased to be talked about," he wrote with some concern. "The two Regts of Tenn. Cav. that are camped here, which bring in these fellows, kill a great many of them on the spot where they are captured without any form of trial what ever. The most of them are East Tennesseans, and have had their property destroyed and their friends slain by the Rebels. If they had their way about it they would show no quarter but they are restrained in some degree by their officers." Others took to the bush, forming guerrilla bands of their own to

³ Julia A. Marcum memoir, 7 August 1926, KHS. See also, U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Report No. 1786, 48th Congress, 1st Session, 7 June 1884 - a report recommending that Julia Marcum be granted a military disability pension for her injuries.

harass Southern forces. As Confederate policy toward guerrillas mirrored that of the Union, they could expect little mercy when captured. In late October 1862, soldiers of General Braxton Bragg's Army of Tennessee netted sixteen suspected guerrillas in the wake of an ambush along the Cumberland River. "This morning they were hung," reported one Texan. "It is said that they are paid by the Lincoln government to bushwhack the stragglers of our army, and are considered by the yankees as soldiers – be this is as it may we never treat them as prisoners of war when we catch one but swing them to the first limb we come to."⁴

The hard line taken against guerrillas also lent itself to the same indiscriminate retaliation. The 4th Kentucky Cavalry (CS), participants in an 1863 campaign to clear out several eastern Kentucky counties of pro-Union guerrillas, engaged in tactics reminiscent of the Union effort in Missouri. "The Bushwhackers are shooting," recorded one trooper, "and we are burning there houses." In Owsley and Wolfe counties, alone, at least forty-three houses were torched. "This is fiery retribution," reported another. "The General says this shall be our country or nobodys. Such warfare is speedily rendering it nobodys." One of the more notorious incidents of retaliation occurred in Madison County, North Carolina in January 1863. Residents of Shelton Laurel, a small mountain community, suspecting that pro-Confederate officials in the county seat of Marshall were withholding supplies as punishment for their pro-Union sympathies, staged a raid on the town, seizing salt and other provisions as well as ransacking houses. In response, elements of the 64th North Carolina were sent on a retributive operation. That the regiment's colonel had a personal stake in the matter, his home having been pillaged and family terrorized by the raiders, did not bode well. On the march to Shelton Laurel, bad weather and unseen snipers hindered the advance. When they finally reached the community they found not bushwhackers but women and children. A few women were tied and whipped to extract information. At least one – a grandmother in her seventies – was fitted with a noose and repeatedly hoisted in the air. After several days of such tactics, they had managed to round up fifteen men and boys, the youngest all of thirteen.

⁴ Harvey Washington Wiley Diary, 16 June 1864, Harvey Washington Wiley Papers, LC. John K. Street to "Dear Ninnie," 20 October 1862, John K. Street Papers, SHC, UNC.

Two of the captives eventually escaped; the remainder were taken into the woods, forced to kneel, and shot.⁵

The region's reputation for disloyalty and guerrilla activity undoubtedly soured Confederate opinions of it, but outsiders were also quick to stereotype and denigrate its people for their "backwardness." One of the volunteers who reported on the Confederate house burning operations in Kentucky also noted the "greasy" cabins which dotted the region and the vulgarity of the population. "Shall never forget the little infant girl – not three years old who *swore oaths* that would shock the nerves of a strong man," he noted of his stay in Salyersville. As his comrades burned communities out of house and home, all his horror fixed on the victims. "Devils must stand amazed at wickedness, so transcendent – and unmatched. Angels must weep tears of blood at depravity so unfathomable and so very shocking." Similar appraisals came from East Tennessee. "It is impossible to describe the country more correctly than [Richmond *Examiner* editor Edward] Pollard did when he made use of the expression, 'It abounds in hills, rocks, poverty and *ignorance*' more especially the last," sniffed one South Carolinian. "There is not what you might call a beautiful woman, in the whole of East Tenn. to my knowledge. I have no doubt but [there] may be some here but they've never blessed my sight by coming within its range. But in speaking of these females the worse thing I can say about them is, they will chew and smoke tobacco, which I can't tolerate in any woman. It is enough to keep them out of heaven." The volunteers, who clearly looked upon the traitorous mountain folk of Tennessee as a class of Southern untouchables, treated them accordingly.⁶

Though Confederate volunteers ran roughshod over Unionists, they were hardly respectful of private property even when operating amidst more "civilized" and "loyal"

⁵ A.C. Dicken Diary, 5 April 1863, KHS; Diary of Edward O. Guerrant, 6 April 1863, in William C. Davis and Meredith L. Swentor, eds., *Bluegrass Confederate: The Headquarters Diary of Edward O. Guerrant*, (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 2005), 245. Phillip Shaw Paludan's *Victims: A True Story of the Civil War*, (Knoxville: UT Press, 1981) remains the definitive history of the Shelton Laurel massacre.

⁶ Diary of Edward O. Guerrant, 20 March 1863, Davis and Swentor, *Bluegrass Confederate*, 234-235; John V. Townsend to "My Dear Cousin," 4 March 1864, Soldier Letter Collection (Livingston Letters), MOC. Edward A. Pollard, editor of the Richmond *Examiner*, wrote a multi-volume "Southern" history of the war, the first installment of which was published in 1861 or 1862. The quote mentioned is from Pollard's second volume entitled, appropriately enough, *The Second Year of the War*, (Richmond: West & Johnston, 1863), 211. Joseph Banks Lyle Diary, 5-6 December 1863, Joseph Banks Lyle Papers, VHS. Longstreet's Corps, absent George Pickett's division, was comprised of regiments from South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Missouri, Arkansas, and Texas.

citizens. When the Army of Northern Virginia invaded Maryland in September 1862, Lee prevented his men from foraging or otherwise disturbing citizens, hoping to woo support for the Southern cause. Though the orders appear to have been generally heeded by his men, the tactic ultimately failed, and little support from the populace materialized – a fact which many soldiers bitterly recalled when they again marched north less than a year later. “There is one thing sure, if I go back there again, I am going to live well,” wrote one disgruntled Georgian of his experience in Maryland. “I only took rations and apples [during the campaign], but they are no friends of ours and I am not going to suffer while I can find anything there to eat.”⁷

A simultaneous drive into Kentucky by General Braxton Bragg’s Army of Tennessee resulted in a decidedly different outcome. Hoping to persuade the citizens to throw in with the Confederacy, he proclaimed to the people that he had come to rid them of a “despotic ruler”:

We come not as conquerors or as despoilers, but to restore to you the liberties of which you have been deprived by a cruel and relentless foe. We come to guarantee to all the sanctity of their homes and altars, to punish with a rod of iron the despoilers of your peace, and to avenge the cowardly insults to your women. With all non-combatants the past shall be forgotten. I shall enforce a rigid discipline and shall protect all in their persons and property. Needful supplies must be had for my army, but they shall be paid for at fair and remunerating prices. Believing that the heart of Kentucky is with us in our great struggle for constitutional freedom, we have transferred from our own soil to yours not a band of marauders, but a powerful and well-disciplined army. . . . Will you remain indifferent to our call, or will you not rather vindicate the fair fame of your once free and envied State?⁸

In fact, most Kentuckians, content within the Union, remained quite indifferent to Bragg’s call, and failed to turn out in large numbers to join his army, as he had hoped. But, if the people failed to meet the standards set forth in his proclamation, so too did Bragg and his army. In contrast to Lee’s army in Maryland, widespread foraging and confiscation occurred, and reimbursement seems to have been discretionary, at best. A

⁷ W.R. Stilwell to “My dear Molly,” 8 June 1863, in Ronald H. Moseley, ed., *The Stilwell Letters: A Georgian in Longstreet’s Corps, Army of Northern Virginia*, (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2002),173.

⁸ Proclamation of General Braxton Bragg, 14 September 1862, *OR*, Ser. 1, Vol. 16, Pt. 2, 822-823.

resident of Taylorsville reported the presence of several hundred Texas rangers around the town, “foraging through the country taking cloth and provisions wherever they could find them paying in Southern Scrip which is worth about as much as Brown paper here.” He claimed to have personally lost 88 barrels of flour, which they “payed for about half of it in their Money and the balance did not pay for at all.” He was unequivocally pleased to learn of their eventual defeat. “The rebels have again left the State as I hope for ever,” he reported in late October. “They took away right smart from our country” A Havilandsville man who lost a substantial amount of cattle to the rebels fared somewhat better. He was eventually reimbursed – though not quite to his liking, and only after tracking down a quartermaster more intent on fleeing the state than honoring receipts. Traveling to Lexington in search of his promised payment, he found the city bustling with an army on the retreat. Eventually, he located the quartermaster, “and oh he was in a hurry paying off the Bills as presented.” The agent handed him \$2206.00 in Confederate scrip. “He called it money,” he complained, “but I find it is not, for after I got the *stuff* I could not find any one who would give 30 cents to the Dollar for it.” Still, he was thankful, for he discovered that the Federal soldiers who followed in the wake of the Confederate withdrawal were decidedly less “lenient” in their dealings with civilians. What he actually meant, however, was not that Confederates had behaved particularly well, but that Union soldiers were far less discriminating. “The rebles only took from the *Union* folks, but the others don’t spare neither Union nor Secesh.”⁹

The Southern soldiers who marched into Kentucky thought quite highly of themselves, coming as they did to liberate an “oppressed” people. One volunteer, noting the trepidation among the citizens he met, dismissed their fears in a rather contemptuous tone. “Poor fools,” he remarked, “the Yankees treated them so badly, they thought we would do the same. They soon found out that there is a great difference. The Yankee army is filled up with the scum of creation and ours with the best blood of the grand old Southland.” Good breeding, however, did not equate to less eating, and Bragg’s “well-disciplined army,” contrary to his decree, did a bit more marauding than he cared to admit. While it is impossible to ascertain what might have transpired in Kentucky had

⁹ Thomas W. Taylor to “Dear Sister,” 25 October 1862, Thomas W. Taylor Letters, LC; Henry Haviland to “My Dear Sue, 3 November 1862, Scrogin/Haviland Collection, KHS.

the Confederate army prevailed, a Tennessee captain, in reviewing the strategic consequences of the army's defeat, made clear that civilians would have had cause to regret such a development. "The field of operations in the West has materially changed since I last wrote," he explained a month after the army's defeat at Perryville. "We were then in the Northern part of Ky with the prospect as we thought of maintaining our position there during the winter enabling us to draw Supplies of forage and clothing from a State rich in such stores, from the land of plenty, of 'milk and honey,' But a sad disappointment is all that we realized." Notably omitted was the fact that most Kentuckians did not support the Confederacy, conspicuously failed to supply much in the way of recruits during the army's brief stay, and were generally relieved to see the rebels leave the state. They had been at best half-hearted hosts, and how exactly the army intended to retrieve supplies during an extended occupation remained cryptically unanswered.¹⁰

Intentionally and unintentionally, Confederate volunteers displayed a knack for creating havoc among *Southern* civilians. Ideologically and psychologically, this was obviously problematic. Reckless behavior threatened to alienate supporters of their cause, while deliberate reprisals against those considered deserving of punishment ultimately failed to strike at the true source of their hatred. The 1862 Maryland and Kentucky campaigns, ostensibly undertaken to liberate those states from a Northern foe, could hardly serve as practical outlets for their rage, and persecuting traitorous Southern Unionists, though satisfying, did little to counter the humiliation and sense of impotence soldiers felt at seeing their own homes pillaged and families terrorized by Yankee "vandals." Soldiers could and did vent their frustrations directly against Union volunteers, but this too seemed to miss the mark, for at the base of nearly every soldier's fantasy was a desire to retaliate *in kind* against the Northern home front. One homesick Virginian, in randomly firing at Federal soldiers across a picket line, clearly hoped to do more than kill a hated enemy. "When I get *very* blue," he wrote to his sweetheart, "I contrive to transfer *my* blues to some Northern family." Another, attempting to reconcile the Christian precept of forgiveness with the actions of the Yankees, found it quite

¹⁰ Diary of George W. Jones, 10 September 1862, quoted in Bell I. Wiley, *The Life of Johnny Reb: The Common Soldier of the Confederacy*, (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1943), 310; W.J. Crook to cousin, Hattie, 12 November 1862, Lewis Leigh Collection, USMHI.

difficult. “How can one forgive such enemies as we are contending against? Despoiling us of our property, driving us from our homes & friends and slaying our best citizens on the field are hard crimes to forgive,” he complained. One thought, in particular, soothed his being: “At any rate let me have a chance to retaliate & *then* I can forgive with a better grace.” He was not alone in his desire. Confederates wanted to do more than simply repel or punish the “mercenaries” who ravaged their land. They wanted to punish those who hired them, to make them feel the horrors of war as did their own families. “I believe that one more campaign will end the war,” predicted an optimistic cavalryman in February 1863, “and I believe in the next campaign God will make his hand visible in dealing out a terrible punishment upon our enemies for their awful cruelties and wanton destruction of our homes, and our loved ones. I believe they will feel in their homes what we have felt in ours.” A South Carolina trooper harbored similar hopes – even though his own state was largely spared until the conflict’s final months. “War is a curse,” he wrote to his mother in early 1864, “but I want the Yanks to realize its horror in their own boundaries.”¹¹

Rare was the opportunity to invade the North, but most relished the chance when it came, as did General John Hunt Morgan of Kentucky. In the summer of 1863, he was granted permission to lead a diversionary cavalry raid with the purpose of relieving Union pressure on General Bragg’s command in Tennessee. Casually disregarding orders not to venture beyond Kentucky, he and his force of 2,500 troopers were soon rampaging across Indiana and into Ohio. For Morgan, the operation was never foremost a simple diversion. According to one of his lieutenants, he planned to terrorize the Northern population. “This expedition into the Northwestern States had long been a favorite idea with him,” he insisted, “and was but the practical development of his theory of the proper way to make war, to-wit: by going deep into the country of the enemy.” Morgan’s men shared his sentiments. One trooper, in preparing to cross the Ohio River into Indiana in July 1863, could scarcely conceal his delight at the prospect. “Wake up old Hoosier,” he declared. “We intend to live off the Yanks hereafter, and let the North

¹¹ Henry V.L. Bird to “My own beloved Darling,” 17 September 1864, Bird Family Papers, VHS; Quoted in Bell I. Wiley, *The Life of Johnny Reb*, 308; Elliott Stephen Welch to “Dear Mother,” 14 February 1864, Elliot Stephen Welch Papers, Duke U; William Burnett to “Dear Ma,” 25 February 1863, Civil War Letters Collection of George H. Sullivan, MOC.

feel, like the South has felt, some of the horrors of war. Horses we expect to take wherever needed, forage and provisions also. . . .I guess the citizen Yanks are somewhat alarmed up North. Well they may be. This will be the first opportunity of the Northern people seeing Morgan and they'll see enough. I just imagine now how the women will bug their eyes out at seeing a rebel army."¹²

Morgan's men caused considerable damage, and those citizens in their path certainly saw enough. "They eat as if the sole purpose of their visit to Indiana was to get fat upon Hoosier bread and meat," complained one farmer whose homestead they raided. Unfortunately, acquiring bread and meat was not their sole purpose. Morgan's men robbed banks and citizens, looted government stores and ransacked private shops, burned bridges and buildings and mills, stole thousands of horses, and created an atmosphere of mayhem wherever they went. At one point, a procession of stolen goods two miles long trailed behind them, containing everything from clothing to canaries to ice-skates, and giving the column the appearance of a traveling circus. The malicious vandalism that often accompanied the pillaging bespoke not of playful antics, however, but of soldiers bent on vengeance.¹³

Citizens were often accosted, forced to hand over money or valuables, made to host meals, and kidnapped to serve as guides. Generally, they were not physically harmed – but there were exceptions. At Corydon, Indiana, they compelled an elderly woman to carry buckets of water to them up a steep hill, forcing her to drink from each one to ensure that they had not been poisoned. She later died from the strain. At Jasper, Ohio, a village in the south-central part of the state, they captured several citizens who had been manning a barricade. Prior to this point, the raiders' standard procedure had been to parole civilian prisoners after forcing them to swear an oath not to hinder them again. On this occasion, however, one of the captives became particularly insulting and provoked their ire. Pulling the unarmed man from the line-up, they led him to a riverbank, executed him, and then set fire to the town.¹⁴

¹² Basil Wilson Duke, *History of Morgan's Cavalry*, (Cincinnati: Miami Printing and Publishing, 1867), 410; Henry Stone to "Dear Father," 8 July 1863, Stone Family Papers, KHS.

¹³ For details of the raid, see James A. Ramage, *Rebel Raider: The Life of General John Hunt Morgan*, (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1995), 170-182; and Lester V. Horwitz, *The Longest Raid of the Civil War*, (Cincinnati: Farmcourt Publishing, 1999). Quote is from Ramage, *Rebel Raider*, 170.

¹⁴ Horwitz, *The Longest Raid*, 67-68, 174-175.

Though Morgan's men were content to harass most all citizens, they reserved an intense hatred toward those who proclaimed to be "Copperheads" and Southern sympathizers. At best, the Kentucky troopers, like Union soldiers in the South, dismissed their claims as little more than a ploy to protect property. At worst, they took the sentiments at face value, condemning their would-be supporters as traitors and cowards because they refused to fight for the South. One Ohioan, seeking the return of three confiscated horses, discovered this too late. Chasing down Morgan's command in his wagon, he drove straight into the middle of the departing brigade, loudly professing himself to be a Democrat and sympathetic to the Southern cause. Morgan responded by confiscating both his wagon and his boots, forcing him to march along in stockings until the column at last made camp. Blistered and weary, to his dismay he learned his ordeal had not yet ended. The men forced him to dance and sing ("I'll bet ten cents in specie, that Morgan'll win the race") before finally sending him scurrying back to town on a broken down nag.¹⁵

Morgan's foray into the heart of "Yankeedom" may have earned him everlasting fame in the South (and perpetual damnation in the North), but compared to the simultaneous incursion into Pennsylvania by the entire Army of Northern Virginia, it was a minor affair. Although militarily unrelated, the two events shared important ideological underpinnings. Both clearly sprang from the desire of military leaders to carry the war into the North. More importantly, both were undertaken by Southern soldiers who desired to exact retribution from Northern civilians. Like Morgan's Kentuckians, the men that Robert E. Lee commanded had watched as invaders devastated their homes, insulted their women, destroyed their crops, and threatened to unleash a servile insurrection by tampering with slavery. At long last, here was their opportunity to strike back in earnest – not with a raiding force of 2,500 troopers, but with an army of 75,000 bitter and battle-hardened volunteers. A Virginia infantryman, on approaching the Mason-Dixon line in late June, expressed a common sentiment. "the wrath of southern vengeance will be wreaked upon the pennsylvanians & all property belonging to the

¹⁵ Ramage, *Rebel Raider*, 173; Henry Howe, *Historical Collections of Ohio*, (Columbus: Henry Howe & Son, 1889), Vol. 1, 458-459.

abolition horde which we may cross,” he vowed. “we will try & pay them for what they have been doing to the innocent & helpless in our southern land.”¹⁶

2.3.2 The Gettysburg Campaign

Not as well known as Union depredations in the South, but certainly recorded in as great as detail by its participants, was Lee’s invasion of the North in the summer of 1863. The conduct of Lee’s men during the Gettysburg campaign has received nowhere near the analysis of Sherman’s march through Georgia and the Carolinas, yet the activities of Confederate soldiers on Northern ground bear a striking similarity to those of the most depraved bummers who rampaged through the South a year later. Taken in its entirety, it is abundantly clear that Southern soldiers, given the opportunity, were every bit as willing and capable of carrying on a destructive and vengeful campaign against enemy non-combatants. Despite General Lee’s well-publicized General Orders No. 72 and 73 prohibiting individual plundering and destruction of private property, many Southern soldiers found the opportunity for retribution too tempting to let go.

Following an improbable victory at Chancellorsville in May 1863, the commanding general of the Army of Northern Virginia began to remove his forces from the fortified heights around Fredericksburg. Few in the army knew their destination. Some guessed Ohio; others thought Pennsylvania the target. As the three corps marched northward, however, soldiers realized the long awaited invasion of the Union was at last underway. Lee’s gamble served several purposes – the most important of which is still being debated. If a major victory could be won in the North, so it was reasoned, international recognition would be forthcoming and the Union would be forced to sue for peace. Also, by relieving Virginia farmers of the onerous burden of feeding both Union and Confederate armies, time would be allowed for the countryside to recuperate after years of destruction that had left many areas a virtual wasteland. Rather than drawing forage from empty Southern granaries, Lee’s army would take what was needed from Northern farms. Another factor, closely related to the collection of provisions and forage, was the desire to carry the conflict into Union territory. Forcing Northern civilians, whom many Southerners believed to be untouched by the internal strife, to experience the

¹⁶ William H. Routt to “My Dear Bettie,” 23 June 1863, Soldier Letter Collection, MOC.

pain of war had been advocated throughout the Confederacy since the outbreak of hostilities two years earlier. At the very least, then, the Confederate leadership hoped the campaign would leave the army well supplied with enemy provisions, and perhaps turn Northern opinion against the war. Though conscious of the greater strategic and political implications of the raid, soldiers in the ranks had their own agenda. Terrorizing the civilians of Pennsylvania, rather than confronting the Federal army, was their priority.¹⁷

When Southern troops crossed the Pennsylvania line in June 1863, it was not at all certain how they would react toward the citizens they encountered. Nor could they be sure how civilians would greet them. Soldiers equated their excursion to the North with an invasion of a foreign nation – especially in those areas with heavy concentrations of Germans or “Dutch.” Marching through the heart of the state, soldiers had ample opportunity to observe the relatively egalitarian Pennsylvania social order first hand and, inevitably, compare it with their own rigidly hierarchical and racist society. Frequently, concepts and ideals that Southerners most valued in their own culture were sometimes found to be absent in this unfamiliar environment.

¹⁷ It is doubtful that any one campaign has received more attention than Gettysburg. There are hundreds, perhaps thousands, of published works on the battle itself. Some of the more important studies include: Bruce Catton, *The Battle of Gettysburg*, (1963), Edward B. Coddington, *The Gettysburg Campaign: A Study in Command*, (1968), the three-volume series by Harry W. Pfanz, *Gettysburg: The Second Day*, (1987), *Gettysburg: Culp’s Hill and Cemetery Hill*, (1993), and *Gettysburg: The First Day*, (2001), as well as the collections of essays edited by Gary W. Gallagher, *The First Day at Gettysburg: Essays on Confederate and Union Leadership* (1992), *The Second Day at Gettysburg: Essays on Confederate and Union Leadership* (1993), and *The Third Day at Gettysburg and Beyond* (1994). Traditional accounts, including Noah Andre Trudeau’s admirable *Gettysburg: A Testing of Courage* (New York: HarperCollins, 2002), posit the idea that Lee hoped to win a battle of annihilation against the Union army and bring the war to a speedy close. In contrast, Kent Masterson Brown, in his meticulously researched *Retreat from Gettysburg: Lee, Logistics, and the Pennsylvania Campaign* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005), argues that Lee’s primary goal was to gather sorely needed supplies for his army. Consequently, he views the Gettysburg campaign as a tactical defeat on the battlefield but a strategic success in escaping with an enormous amount of equipment, forage and livestock. Charles Royster, in *The Destructive War*, emphasizes the roles that vengeance and retaliation played in driving the escalation of violence, generally. From the beginning, he argues, Northerners and Southerners sought to annihilate one another. None of these studies, however, concentrate specifically on military-civilian relations during the Gettysburg Campaign. Trudeau admits that there was a “dark foundation” (91) behind seemingly legitimate actions of confiscations, but does not further explore the notion. Brown recognizes the widespread foraging that occurred, but denies that rebel troops maliciously targeted private property or that vengeance played a significant role in their actions. Royster, closer to the mark in his assessment, does not explicitly discuss Gettysburg. Probably the best analysis of the military-civilian relationship during the campaign comes from Reid Mitchell in his *Civil War Soldiers* (New York: Viking Penguin, Inc., 1988). “The Gettysburg campaign,” he notes, “reveals that had they had the chance, Confederates would have rivaled [Sherman’s men] in the work of destruction.” (157) Mitchell’s vignette is compelling, and highlights the retribution soldiers wished to exact at the expense of Northern civilians.

Soldiers exhibited mixed reactions to Northern civilians. Most speculated on the “loyalty” of particular towns, and always looked for friendly faces. Surprisingly, some citizens professed their support, though not always openly. “I have seen one Confederate flag in this state which was shown very slyly,” remarked one soldier. Soldiers could never be sure, however, if such displays of support were sincere or simply a ruse to protect property. More commonly, soldiers were greeted as one would expect an invading army to be greeted – with despair and anger. “I often felt as if I was amidst heathen,” wrote a member of the 44th Virginia. “[The people] all looked grim and angry not a wave of handkerchief was made for us after we left Maryland.” One Southern diarist noted that the people of Greencastle all looked “serious.” Another described them as “mad” and “sullen” at the appearance of the rebel army. Yet another remarked that the people of Chambersburg appeared “very sour and crestfallen though they hope we will get whipped at the capital. I think not.”¹⁸

Soldiers invariably commented on the Dutch population, and tended to view them as a blot on an otherwise pristine countryside. Though one soldier found Chambersburg aesthetically impressive it was, he concluded, “a perfect dutch town.” Typical is the statement of a trooper in the 16th Virginia Cavalry: “Penn is the pretiest country I ever seen or ever expect to see. Mostly dutch, though.” An officer from South Carolina similarly concluded that “Pensilvany is a fine country as I ever saw the people is all duch and very ignorant[.]” Southerners hailing from an ethnically homogenous culture considered the Pennsylvania Dutch somewhat exotic. Disarmed by their incomprehensible language or heavily accented English, soldiers found them more laughable than threatening. Interactions between troops and Germans were frequently cordial, as a North Carolinian attested. “I tried to buy some of that standard Penn. Product, Apple-butter, but without success,” he wrote. “Some of the others were more fortunate. Alec got on the good side of an old lady by talking german with her, and wheedled her out of some ‘latwerg.’” Unlike in other areas of the country, particularly in

¹⁸ Julius Joyner to his mother, 29 June 1863, Joyner Family Papers, SHC, UNC; Martin Diller Coiner to George Marion Coiner, 25 June 1863, Coiner Family Papers, VHS; Ronald H. Moseley, ed. *The Stilwell Letters: A Georgian in Longstreet's Corps, Army of Northern Virginia*. (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 2002), 179; Thomas Frederick Boatwright to “my Darling Wife,” 9 July 1863, Thomas Frederick Boatwright Papers, SHC, UNC; Charles Edward Lippitt diary, 27 June 1863, SHC, UNC; Thomas Ware diary, 27 June 1863, SHC, UNC; T.G. Pollock to father, 30 June 1863, A.D. Pollock Papers, SHC, UNC; Moseley, 182.

Missouri where Germans invited retributive responses from pro-Southern forces because of their staunch Republicanism, the Germans of Pennsylvania, as will be seen, were not singled out for reprisals during Lee's occupation of the state. In fact, many soldiers tended to conflate the Germans with native-born Pennsylvanians, describing all citizens generically as "Dutch." The indifference of many Confederates in distinguishing between the two groups partly stemmed from their provincialism. As they did not live among the ethnically diverse Pennsylvanians, the troops that followed Lee into the state were never presented with an opportunity to form long-standing enmities, quite unlike the native-born Americans who literally lived next door to Republican-supporting Germans in war-torn Missouri. It is doubtful such animosity would have developed in any case for, as a Louisianan remarked, "The people in this section . . . call themselves Copperheads." If anything, the Germans encountered by soldiers made themselves conspicuous primarily by the perception that most supported the Democratic party, which also led to accusations of cowardice and treason by other Northerners after the invasion. Of course, not all Pennsylvania Germans professed to be Democrats; many supported the Republican Party. Few soldiers bothered to differentiate, however, nor made the connection between Copperheadism and Democrats. Whether Germans actually sympathized with the South or instead professed neutrality owing to differences with the Republicans, the ease with which Confederates confiscated their property was all that mattered to the soldiers. The inability of the Germans to defend themselves effectively, as they did in Missouri by fortifying towns and creating all-German military units, would come to haunt them a year later at Chambersburg.¹⁹

Women, too, were the subject of much discussion. The characteristics that soldiers assigned to females said more about their own preconceptions than anything else. "I never saw the like of Dutch girls in my life, and they are horrid ugly," confessed one soldier. "The women are all gross and sinewy," commented another on the women of Chambersburg. "The men speak of them invariably as the women, and say they have no

¹⁹ Moseley, 182; Isaac V. Reynolds to "Dear Wife," 20 July 1863, Isaac V. Reynolds Papers, Duke U; Turner W. Holley to "Eliza," 10 July 1863, Turner W. Holley Papers, Duke U; Julius A. Lineback diary, 27 June 1863, Julius A. Lineback Papers, SHC, UNC; *Franklin Repository*, 15 July 1863; William Britton Bailey, Jr. Diary, 23, June 1863, Harrisburg Civil War Round Table Collection, USMHI; Michael Fellman. *Inside War: The Guerrilla Conflict in Missouri During the American Civil War*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 39-40.

ladies here, - they are all women. The women call them the men.” The blurring of gender roles, implicitly criticized in this statement, explained for many Southerners the cause behind the “inferior” nature of Pennsylvania’s female population. An officer who procured dinner at a farm in Shippensburg observed disapprovingly that the owner employed no servants. “His wife and daughters did the cooking, washing &c, for him & his farm ‘help,’” he noted. As a result, “they were coarse-featured, large handed & awkward. I saw not half as many evidences of education of information as would have been found in the corresponding grade of Southern life.” In describing the number of small farms in the state, a private in a North Carolina regiment perhaps unknowingly hit upon what many Confederates, especially officers who tended to come from wealthy backgrounds, found so detestable: “People live near on an equality [here]” A Virginia officer expanded on this observation. “I see no signs of social refinement,” he wrote in his diary. “All seems to be on a dead level, like a lot of fat cattle in a clover field. Except in the towns I saw no signs of social distinctions and a common dollar mark seemed to place all on a common plane.” The extremes of Southern economic life, which allowed for the cultivation of gentility and civility (as the elite defined them) appeared to be absent in southern Pennsylvania. Such was not actually the case, and numerous soldiers remarked upon the poorer classes they encountered, but the perception of a classless society persisted among a segment of the army. Upper class Southerners, especially, tended to view such egalitarianism as a threat to their societal positions. North of the Potomac, they witnessed what might occur should their racial society crumble.²⁰

Not all soldiers harbored such negative views, as the comments of a Georgia volunteer suggest. “I saw more girls [at Chambersburg] than I have ever seen at any one time before, some very good looking ones,” he remarked. A North Carolinian writing from Carlisle Barracks also complimented the women in that town. “I not having seen a pretty lady after leaving Maryland until I arrived at this place where I saw some very pretty ones,” he admitted. At Fayetteville a soldier conversed with a Union woman who

²⁰ Charles Edward Lippitt, 28 (?) June 1863, SHC, UNC; Julius Joyner to mother, 29 June 1863, Joyner Family Papers, SHC, UNC; Florence McCarthy to “Pa,” 10 July 1863, McCarthy Family Papers, VHS; Campbell Brown diary, n.d., SHC, UNC; Samuel W. Eaton diary, 24 June 1863, SHC, UNC; Charles Minor Blackford III, ed., *Letters from Lee’s Army: Memoirs of Life In and Out of the Army of Northern Virginia during the War between the States*. (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1947), 184.

considered herself a Copperhead. “I would not mind being bitten by her a few times,” he wrote suggestively. Comments such as these were far more frequent among enlisted men than officers, and it is very likely that class played a significant role in determining the relative attractiveness of the opposite sex.²¹

Even the landscape itself seemed alien to many soldiers. Small farms – rather than plantations – dotted the countryside. Most trees had been cleared, and in contrast to the rural emptiness predominate throughout the South, the heavily populated area of southern Pennsylvania gave the appearance of a single sprawling village. Even if troops had few compliments for the civilians, all admired their farms. Despite the limited acreage, many troops were surprised at the agricultural prosperity of the region, especially when compared with the devastated Virginia countryside. Approaching the Pennsylvania line, a member of the 9th Alabama marveled on the contrast. “Everything on the road looks strange to us coming as we do from the desolate fields of Virginia,” he penned in his diary. “Here we see houses, barns filled with grain, fine stock etc.” Wrote another soldier to his brother, “This is the finest country I have saw yet. Everything looks fine.” A Virginia officer writing from outside of Chambersburg echoed these observations, finding that “the country is very thickly settled and seems one vast scattered village. The most magnificent wheat, clover, & hayfields meet the eye on every side. The mountains are cultivated to the very top.” Somewhat ominously he added, “We are living off the fat of the land now, and find this a 2nd Canaan.”²²

That the Confederate leadership intended to strip supplies from the surrounding countryside there can be no doubt. According to Lee’s General Orders No. 72, issued on June 21, the process was to be an orderly one and troops were to be on their best behavior. Hoping to promote the image of a morally superior Southern army defending the honor of a wronged people, Lee prohibited soldiers from plundering private property and accosting citizens. Forage and the procurement of horses, mules and cattle were left to the Quartermaster and Commissary departments and paid for with Confederate scrip,

²¹ Thomas Ware Diary, 27 June 1863, SHC, UNC; George Whittaker Wills to “dear Sister,” 28 June 1863, George Whittaker Wills Letters, UNC, SHC; John G. Barrett, ed. *Yankee Rebel: The Civil War Journal of Edmund DeWitt Patterson*. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1966), 112.

²² Barrett, 109-110; Martin Diller Coiner to George Marion Coiner, 25 June 1863, Coiner Papers, VHS; Thomas Ware Diary, 28 June 1863, UNC, SHC; W.R. Aylett to “My Darling Wife,” 30 June 1863, Aylett Family Papers, VHS.

duly receipted. Citizens refusing to sell to the Army, or found to be concealing supplies, would forfeit their property. “While in the enemy’s country, the . . . regulations for procuring supplies will be strictly observed, and any violation of them promptly and rigorously punished,” he warned.²³ Many veterans of the army agreed with the policy, and often commented on the surprise with which incredulous Pennsylvanians greeted them. Marching from Quincy to Turkstown, an officer in the 1st Louisiana described the people he encountered: “The inhabitants along the route were very badly scared and brought forward provisions of all kinds and distributed them among the soldiers. . . . Several ladies asked if we intended to burn the town, but their fears were soon quieted by assuring them that we did not enter Pennsylvania for the purpose of destroying private property or warring against women and children.” That this officer explicitly denounced the policy of attacking noncombatants is significant, for such a comparison was made in attempts to show the differences in tactics between chivalrous Southerners and “savage” Yankees. From Woodville another soldier wrote of the initial fear exhibited by the residents which eventually turned to relief. “The people seem to be very much surprised at our men being so good to them,” he mused. “They say they did not know what they would do when they heard of us coming. They expected us to burn, steal & kill every thing we com across but they found it quite different. They all speak very high of our conduct.”²⁴

Some citizens did, in fact, speak of the restrained conduct of Southern troops in their towns, though they often did so with a degree of trepidation and did not seem to expect such magnanimity to last. A resident of Churchtown who fled from the approaching army wrote to his parents concerning the Confederate occupation. “They have there Head quarters at my farm, useing things as they see proper.” Though the mills and horses had been commandeered for use by the army, he admitted “thus far they have not disturbed private property or families.” A citizen of Shippensburg observed similar actions at the end of June. Appalled at the thousands of enemy combatants that marched

²³ *War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, 128 vols. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1880-1902), Ser. 1, Vol. 27, Part 3, 912-913. Referred to hereafter as “OR.”

²⁴ William Britton Bailey, Jr. diary, 24 June 1863, Harrisburg Civil War Round Table Collection, USMHI; Campbell Brown diary, n.d., SHC, UNC; Martin Diller Coiner to George Marion Coiner, 25 June 1863, Coiner Papers, VHS.

past her house and the confiscation of public property, she breathed easier when the intentions of the troops became clear: “Private property has thus far been respected - that is, our dwellings and gardens.” A local druggist reported comparable activity in Shippensburg a day earlier. After Confederate forces swept away the Union militia, the town lay exposed to the Southern army. “A Surgeon came in & took about 250\$ worth of drugs,” he noted. “Paid in Confederate scrip.”²⁵

Many soldiers also attested to the good behavior of the army and the sacrosanct order issued by Lee. Troops often reveled in the fear caused by their presence, but they genuinely believed their actions – especially compared with those of Federal troops in the South – were beyond reproach. As a Virginia officer explained to his father, all foraging was done “regularly and in good order. I have heard of no case of outrage against person or property. Such is Genl Lees order. I enclose you the last, and what Genl Lee orders the army does down to the lowest private because they say ‘I reckon he knows.’ The perfect reverence the soldiers feel for his orders is only equaled by their faith in him.” Near Greencastle a surgeon in the 57th Virginia offered a more revealing statement about soldiers’ attitudes toward the citizens before them. “Here the men are sullen and the women obsequious, bowing even at a distance as if to conciliate,” he jotted in his diary. “All seem afraid we will injure them knowing how well they deserve it, but Lee has issued orders against anyone taking or injuring private property excepting the C.S’s [commissary] and Q.M’s [quartermaster]”²⁶

Lee prohibited soldiers from independent foraging to preserve discipline and efficiency and to prevent unnecessary altercations with civilians – with mixed results. Citizens seldom differentiated between the abuse received by “authorized” foraging parties and individual plunderers, and in many cases it is unclear which was more destructive. Procuring supplies for the army was ostensibly left to the quartermaster and commissary branches, and they did their work with zeal and élan. So well did they accomplish their mission, in fact, that would-be foragers following in the path of a quartermaster train found little left. One North Carolinian discovered himself in such a

²⁵ C.B. Niesley to parents, 1 July 1863, Harrisburg Civil War Round Table Collection, USMHI; Eunice Stewart to parents, 26 June 1863, Harrisburg Civil War Round Table Collection, USMHI; J.C. Attick diary, 24 June 1863, Civil War Times Illustrated Collection, USMHI.

²⁶ T.G. Pollock to father, 30 June 1863, A.D. Pollock Papers, SHC, UNC; Charles Edward Lippitt diary, 26 June 1863, SHC, UNC.

situation at the end of June. “We could buy nothing along the road, and were afraid to ‘press’ even had their been an opportunity,” he wrote in his diary. “The Q.M. & Commissary departments pretty well cleaned up everything as they went.” As Confederate foraging parties spread out through southern Pennsylvania, many citizens fruitlessly tried to conceal their property. Soldiers quickly discovered supplies and livestock hidden away in valleys, on mountains, and in woods. As one Virginian noted, “Our commissaries and quartermasters are constantly bringing in innumerable horses, beeves, sheep &c The people hide them as we did, but they haven’t got as extensive woods as we have, & they are very easily found. Everywhere we go, the people get rapidly very sick of the war.” By one estimate, Lee’s army seized over 35,000 head of sheep, nearly 50,000 head of cattle, and roughly 20,000 horses and mules while in Maryland and Pennsylvania. Coupled with the tens of thousands of pounds of forage required to subsist the animals each day, the confiscations stripped bare the areas of Pennsylvania traversed by the army. As one despairing resident declared, “Everything looks destroyed. Some farmers bear very heavy loss of cattle and grain and horses and wagons . . . and everything they could find[,] the confederates have taken thousands of horses a great many farmers had not one horse left.”²⁷

While details of men scoured the countryside, others ransacked towns in search of supplies. Soldiers seized shoes, clothes, and other sorely needed articles and paid in Confederate money – which citizens considered tantamount to confiscation. “Our money is not good here though they are forced to take it,” explained a Virginian to his wife. In Gettysburg and Chambersburg, “the Confederate authorities opened the stores and compelled the merchants to sell out their stocks to soldiers at the regular prices and for Confederate money But the advance troops as usual got all the plunder,” another soldier wrote disgustedly. Though Lee ordered that store owners be reimbursed with Confederate funds, this veneer of civility must have worn thin with the citizens of York. General Jubal Early, later to gain notoriety for the destruction of Chambersburg, levied a tribute of \$100,000 on the city. Failure to comply would result in the burning of all

²⁷ Julius A. Lineback diary, 29 June 1863, SHC, UNC; W.R. Aylett to “My Darling Wife,” 30 June 1863, Aylett Family Papers, VHS; Charles A. Lippitt diary, 30 June 1863, SHC, UNC; Julius Joyner to mother, 29 June 1863, Joyner Family Papers, SHC, UNC; Kent Masterson Brown. *Retreat from Gettysburg: Lee, Logistics, and the Pennsylvania Campaign*. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 28; G.F. Winter to “Cousin,” 27 July 1863, Robert L. Brake Collection, USMHI.

public buildings. The demand served its purpose, as a Louisiana affirmed. “They paid \$53,000 and gave bonds payable after the war for the balance,” he wrote. “[General Early] also seized all the clothing, boots, shoes and hats in the city and distributed them to his troops.” The windfall of stores encountered by shabby soldiers resulted in bizarre scenes. One Union woman could not help being impressed by Confederate troops after they seized goods in Gettysburg: “Some of the men had a pile of hats on their heads looking comical, strings of muslin and other goods trailing on the ground, the blankets, quilts and shawls were piled up on their horses, shoes tied to the stirrups, altogether forming a laughable picture.”²⁸

Citizens victimized by the invaders hardly considered the experience laughable, however. An elderly resident of Shippensburg, writing his son six days after the battle of Gettysburg, described the chaos caused by Lee’s army. “You never seen such scedadling of folks men women & children all fleeing beyond Harrisburg,” he recounted. The situation differed little in other towns. With the Army of the Potomac struggling to stay between Lee’s army and Washington and only ineffective state militia troops left to protect them, residents were subject to the caprice of whatever Confederate force occupied the area. At Mechanicsburg, General Albert Jenkins entered the city and ordered rations to be supplied for his 1500 troopers. “It was very humiliating and amusing to see persons walk up with these baskets of Ham, bread, butter and whatever else they [chose] to bring,” stated one resident who was forced to provide dinner for the gray-clad cavalymen. The next day, an artillery officer rode in and demanded rations for 150 of his men, as well. Another Shippensburg resident reported the arrival of the Confederate advance guard as “so many devils yelling like hell-hounds.” In preparation for the main body of troops following close behind, the advance troops forced stores to open. They announced reassuringly that all goods taken from shops would be paid for in

²⁸ Thomas Frederick Boatwright to “my Darling Wife,” June 1863, Thomas Frederick Boatwright Papers, SHC, UNC; Florence McCarthy to “Pa,” 10 July 1863, McCarthy Family Papers, VHS; William Britton Bailey, Jr. diary, 28 June 1863, Harrisburg Civil War Round Table Collection, USMHI; Gettysburg *Compiler*, 4 July 1906.

Confederate money, while supplies discovered to be concealed would be confiscated. For residents of Shippensburg, as elsewhere, neither option was appealing.²⁹

Soldiers searched stores as well as houses, seizing anything deemed useful to the army. Barrels of flour, sugar and molasses disappeared. Goods hidden away usually turned up during surprise return visits, when residents thought the danger had passed. One soldier estimated that subsisting on the enemy's soil saved the Confederate government \$200,000 daily. "Our Army will not cost the confederacy a great deal as long as we remain in Pa.," he concluded. The unpredictability of the army's movements kept townspeople on edge. In part, the seemingly random comings and goings of bodies of troops resulted from lack of direction from commanding officers. Lee had no geographical goal in mind when he entered Pennsylvania. Militarily, his plan was simple: gather as many supplies as possible before entering a decisive and climactic battle. The wanderings of his men reflected this strategy. The carnival-like atmosphere enjoyed by many troops – replete with laxity of rules, abundant food, and new clothing – only heightened anxiety among citizens who never knew when or where a substantial body of men might present themselves.³⁰

In gathering livestock, Confederates did not limit themselves strictly to draft animals. As one cavalryman's letter to his wife suggests, the army sought more than just captured horses: "Enemy left [Chambersburg], get something to eat, stay on main street until morning the 16th [June]. Saddle up, go half mile and camp. Boys capturing negroes & horses." As it became evident that Confederate forces intended to capture "runaway" slaves – many of whom were in fact free people and lifelong residents of Pennsylvania – a wave of panic set in among the African-Americans residing in their path. Some managed to conceal themselves with white acquaintances, hoping to ride out the storm. "Every Street and alley in town is guarded and we are Prisoners in our own homes,"

²⁹ John Stumbaugh to son, 9 July 1863, Harrisburg Civil War Round Table Collection, USMHI; C.B. Niesley to parents, 1 July 1863, Harrisburg Civil War Round Table Collection, USMHI; Eunice Stewart to parents, 24 June 1863, Harrisburg Civil War Round Table, USMHI.

³⁰ Benjamin Lyons Farinholt to "Lelia," 1 July 1863, Benjamin Lyons Farinholt Papers, VHS; Eunice Stewart to parents, 29-30 June 1863, Harrisburg Civil War Round Table, USMHI.

lamented a Shippensburg resident. “I have four colored persons concealed in my house. We keep all the lower part locked and sit up stairs.”³¹

Closely connected with the gathering of supplies for the army was the destruction of state and public property. If it could be used as part of the enemy war effort, it was targeted for destruction. Railroads, bridges and iron foundries, like those in the South, were put to the torch where encountered. At Carlisle a soldier commented on the imminent fate of the United States Army barracks located in the town. “They are in splendid style and show a good deal of taste,” he wrote admiringly, “it looks like a pity to destroy such pretty property, but as it is government property, suppose it will be.” At Greencastle, the 15th Georgia destroyed a train depot and several miles of track. Nearing Shippensburg the regiment went to work again, foreshadowing a process Sherman would later make famous. “Our Reg’mt . . . with others of the Div[ision] Sent to tear up & burn the R.R. We tore up all the ties & piled the Iron on it and burnt 4 miles,” reported one soldier. “We [then] burnt the bridge across the river at Scotland Station 5 miles of Shippensburg” Though insisting the army had “burnt no houses and no barns as the enemy do,” a Virginia soldier plainly admitted the destruction of public property. “We have burnt some larger iron works, foundries, &c and are tearing up their Rail Roads by whole sale,” he wrote from Chambersburg. The Army of Northern Virginia cut a wide swath through southern Pennsylvania. Behind it were desolated farms and pillaged towns; before it fled all manner of livestock and terrified civilians.³²

Lee’s orders, coupled with the efficiency of the quartermaster and commissary in gathering supplies, limited to an extent the destructive tendencies of his troops. In other instances, troops were still denied the excuse of individual plundering not because of orders or the stripping of an area by the quartermaster, but because terrified citizens simply presented food and supplies to soldiers wherever they camped. “We are amongst the Black Dutch,” commented a North Carolinian. “The North American Indian could not have been more surprised or frightened when Columbus landed, than these people.

³¹ Isaac V. Reynolds to “Dear Wife,” 9 August 1863, Isaac V. Reynolds Papers, Duke U; Ted Alexander. “A Regular Slave Hunt: The Army of Northern Virginia and Black Civilians in the Gettysburg Campaign,” *North and South*, Vol. 4, No. 7, Sept., 2001, 82-89; Eunice Stewart to parents, 26 June 1863, Harrisburg Civil War Round Table, USMHI.

³² George Whitaker Wills to “dear Sister,” 28 June 1863, George Whitaker Wills Letters, SHC, UNC; Thomas Ware diary, 27-29 June 1863, SHC, UNC; Benjamin Lyons Farinholt to “Lelia,” 1 July 1863, Benjamin Lyon Farinholt Papers, VHS.

They agree to any proposition – grant any request – take confederate money – give provisions. Hurrah! for General Lee and Jeff Davis.” Another enlisted man in the 43rd North Carolina also mentioned the docile nature of some of the civilians his regiment encountered near Carlisle. “The people up here, to hear them talk, are all copperheads,” he wrote to his sister. “They are afraid we will imitate their soldiers and destroy all their property, and for that reason are perfect submissionists, they will give away all they have in the world to spare without being asked for it those that supper in the right places fare splendidly.”³³

It is likely the political proclivities of many south-central Pennsylvanians mitigated the treatment they might otherwise have received at the hands of hungry and oftentimes vengeful Rebel troops. Whether soldiers ever made a connection between the prevalence of “Black Dutch” and “Copperheads” in their midst is unclear, for usually only one or the other was mentioned with the emphasis primarily on the cultural foreignness of the German population – which reveals the xenophobia common in the nineteenth century but little about political observations. In the end, it mattered only that they rarely resisted, and in some cases willingly provided for, the Rebel army. Their actions undoubtedly prevented them from becoming conspicuous targets of reprisals, other than as the butt of jokes in letters home. As a Virginia officer described the situation, “The Dutch farmers say Take de horses take de cattle take eberything put don’t purn the purn don’t purn the house & don’t hurt de wife and leetle one.” While in Carlisle another officer encountered what struck him as a surreal interaction between citizens and soldiers as he watched “two buxom Dutch girls” serve bread and apple butter to weary infantrymen. “A very lean and ragged North Carolinian stood . . . with his gun in the hollow of his arm, an immense slice of bread in one hand & his mouth crammed full, holding out the other hand for another slice,” he wrote in his diary. “[The] Carolinian seeing me looking on generously offered me the next turn – which I declined with thanks.” Riding with General Jeb Stuart, Lee’s cavalry commander on the campaign, one trooper gleefully described the reaction of Germans he encountered: “While at every home the whole family would turn out and standing in a line would busy

³³ John McLeod Turner to “Emilie,” 28 June 1863, John McLeod Turner Papers, VHS; George Whitaker Wills to “dear Sister,” 28 June 1863, George Whitaker Wills Letters, SHC, UNC.

themselves cutting slices of bread and buttering it, then spreading apple butter an inch thick on top of it it would be handed out to us to eat, the fat dutch girls jabbering all the time – yah, yah, not kill us – that is nize, very good, so much better ach good, ha, ha[.]” He left no doubt as to the cavalry’s activities in the state, proud of the fact that “we stript the fat valley of the Cumberland of every fat horse, loaf of bread, pound of butter & crock of apple butter that we could lay our hands on & yet . . . no mal harm was done at all. I had no idea our troops were under such good control, & all went well.”³⁴

Submissive behavior may have spared civilians from physical retaliation, but it was viewed with disdain by Southerners and Northerners alike. After the Confederate retreat, area newspapers continued the recriminations and accusations of cowardice that began during the occupation. New York papers took their shots at Pennsylvanians, as well, suggesting that they demonstrated insufficient patriotism during the invasion. In response to such criticisms, the *Franklin Repository* could offer only a lame reply. “Our people generally did their duty, but they were required in their respective neighborhoods to picket and protect, in some degree, their stock. A concentration of our men at Chambersburg, or Greencastle, or Mercersburg, would have left 25,000 people with their propperty entirely defenceless,” the editor explained.³⁵

Confederates cared little for internal squabbles, but they noted the behavior in question. One Virginian described Pennsylvanians as “the most cringing mean-spirited people on earth.” After watching a father and son clear debris from a road allowing the troops an easier march, he mused, “They tell us that they are sorry for us, being in a strange land, and are willing to do all they can for us. They will do anything to save property or their hides.” Another commented that “the people are very submissive and comply, meekly, with the demands made on them.” Soldiers also observed – some with amazement, others with varying degrees of contempt – the number of male civilians they encountered in Pennsylvania. For an army that resorted to conscription a full year before Federal forces followed suit, the ubiquity of un-enlisted men and discharged soldiers they came across was sometimes disheartening. How was victory to be achieved against a nation that did not bother to utilize so many able-bodied men, especially during an enemy

³⁴ Charles Edward Lippitt diary, 26 June 1863, SHC, UNC; Campbell Brown diary, n.d., SHC, UNC; Nimrod H. Fitzhugh to sister, 16 July 1863, Montgomery D. Corse Papers, SHC, UNC.

³⁵ *Valley Spirit*, 15 July 1863; *New York Times*, 24 July 1863; *Franklin Repository*, 8 July 1863.

invasion of the heart of the country? A Georgian in Chambersburg, describing the people there, wrote that it was “crowded with citizens & young men dressed up & all just out of service. So the country & towns are full of young men not in service”³⁶

Derision and scorn, however, were the more common sentiments. Soldiers denigrated military age males not in uniform, and mocked the militia thrown together by authorities to slow the rebel approach. That men would not fight – or at least fight effectively – when their families and homes were threatened was incomprehensible to Southerners. This was, after all, the ostensible justification for why so many Southern men took up arms against the Yankees. “You invaded our rights, and we would not be worthy of the name of men if we had not the courage to defend them,” explained an officer to a Chambersburg resident. “A cowardly race is only fit for contempt.” Others described the impotence of Union opposition they encountered. “A few shots fired at Early’s column en route for York, comprised the sum total of the resistance offered . . . to our advance,” wrote one officer. “We passed immense numbers of able-bodied young men on our line of march – but they all seemed very well pleased to be at home & not molested by us.” A North Carolinian found Chambersburg “a very nice place,” but offered one qualification. “In thare I found a good many disbanded soilders from the yankes army the militia heare is going to fight us I suppose but we will not stop for them[.]” A battalion of Jeb Stuart’s cavalrymen, gathering forage and supplies, met “resistance” from mounted Pennsylvania home guard. The troopers scattered their would-be captors with dispatch. “It makes me laugh now when I think of the appearance they presented when Stuart ordered the charge & at them we went with our peculiar yell, - some holding on to their horses necks & some the saddle bow & others tumbling off all yelling ‘don’t shoot us,’ ‘take us prisoners,’” recalled one Confederate. “our fellows had no use for prisoners, they being too much trouble so they did whack away at the scamps until the bugle recalled us”³⁷

³⁶ Florence McCarthy to “Pa,” 10 July 1863, McCarthy Family Papers, VHS; Augusta County: Jedediah Hotchkiss to Sara A. Hotchkiss, June 24, 1863, Valley of the Shadow: Two Communities in the American Civil War, Virginia Center for Digital History, University of Virginia (<http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/etcbin/civwarlett-browse?id=A4041>); Thomas Ware diary, 27 June 1863, SHC, UNC.

³⁷ Diary of Philip Schaff, 18 June 1863, quoted in Edward L. Ayers, *In the Presence of Mine Enemies: War in the Heart of America, 1859-1863*. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2003), 396; Campbell Brown diary, n.d., SHC, UNC; John Fuller Coghill to “Pappy Ma and Mil,” 25, June 1863, John Fuller

Though few men dared openly resist the military occupation, women often expressed their disapproval candidly. The pedestal upon which females of the nineteenth century were placed doubled as a podium. Where men risked retaliation by protesting, women frequently and forcefully lashed out at Confederate troops confident they would not be mistreated. Some soldiers admired their courage, satisfied that not every Pennsylvanian would stand idly by while their property was seized. “Some few of the Pennsylvania people in town showed some spirit,” remarked one. “One old woman beat our men out of her garden with a stick. A girl in [Chambersburg] took water and a broom and washed the pavement where our men had laid their haversacks.” Others simply dismissed these minor demonstrations. Women also protested in more subtle ways, such as pinning American flags to their bonnets while Confederates occupied their town. “Such natural and innocent indications of loyalty to their government, our soldiers would of course scorn to object to,” wrote a Virginian from Greencastle. “It would be a matter of indifference to me if every woman in Pa. had one on her person, and every house one floating from its roof.”³⁸

Some men, however, found nothing amusing about their behavior. Behind a mask of civility, many seethed at their impertinence. Women could not irritate soldiers with impunity, for the traditional exemption from physical harm had limits which at times they came dangerously close to exceeding. An Alabamian, for instance, found women in Chambersburg to be so irksome that he fantasized about burning the city. “The females of Chambersburg seem to be very spiteful, make faces, sing ‘Rally round the flag,’ wave their little banners, etc.,” he wrote with frustration. “I think if they had a hole burned out in their town about the size and extent of that which the Yankees burned in Florence or Athens, Alabama, these patriotic females would not be quite so saucy.” His wish would come true a year later. As civilians quickly discovered, they faced an impossible predicament. To resist only invited reprisals and confiscation of property. Submission resulted in contempt which encouraged further depredations. One woman grasped the

Coghill Papers, SHC, UNC; Nimrod H. Fitzhugh to sister, 16 July 1863, Montgomery D. Corse Papers, SHC, UNC.

³⁸ Florence McCarthy to “Pa,” 10 July 1863, McCarthy Family Papers, VHS; Charles Edward Lippitt diary, 29 June 1863, SHC, UNC; Augusta County: L. M. Blackford to Wm. M. Blackford, June 28, 1863, Valley of the Shadow: Two Communities in the American Civil War, Virginia Center for Digital History, University of Virginia (<http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/etcbin/civwarlett-browse?id=A0001>); Blackford, 185.

difficulty of the situation: “Cousin Erwina has had to open [her] house and cook for [soldiers] ever since Saturday. Her husband says it is very galling but cannot be helped. We are in their power and of course refuse nothing they ask.”³⁹

Even if civilians met no “mal-harm” at the hands of the quartermaster and commissary thousands of Confederate troops, despite orders to the contrary, went foraging “on their own hook.” Lee issued his first orders before the majority of the army had entered Pennsylvania; they read much like an instructional manual, laying out in detail how troops would seize and confiscate civilian property – efficiently, civilly, and with few hitches. But reality always upsets the best theories. Southern soldiers had their own agenda and treated civilians as they saw fit. Issued a week after the first set of guidelines, General Orders No. 73 bore a decidedly different tone. Now Lee appealed directly to the consciences of his men. Commending them on the success of the campaign, he nevertheless expressed concern over their destructive tendencies. “There have . . . been instances of forgetfulness, on the part of some,” he remarked with considerable understatement, “that they have in keeping the yet unsullied reputation of the army, and that the duties exacted of us by civilization and Christianity are not less obligatory in the country of the enemy than in our own.” He enjoined his men to take the moral high road, for, “no greater disgrace could befall the army, and through it our whole people, than the perpetration of the barbarous outrages upon the unarmed and defenseless and the wanton destruction of private property, that have marked the course of the enemy in our own country.” Soldiers, he concluded, should with “scrupulous care” abstain from unnecessary destruction of private property. Officers witnessing transgressions were authorized to summarily punish offenders.⁴⁰

Most men acknowledged the order, then promptly disregarded it. Not only did they continue to press draft animals, clothing and foodstuffs they also looted and destroyed plenty of private property. The impetus behind such actions cannot be dismissed simply as the excesses of an army in a severe state of deprivation. Many have attested to the impeccable performance of the quartermaster in stripping areas of forage and food; the army lived well in Pennsylvania. Rather, the soldiers who crossed the

³⁹ Barrett, 111; Eunice Stewart to parents, 24 June 1863, Harrisburg Civil War Round Table Collection, USMHI.

⁴⁰ *OR*, Ser. 1, Vol. 27, Part 3, 942-943.

Mason-Dixon line in June 1863 carried with them marked desires for retaliation and revenge against an opponent that had laid waste to their homes (literally in many cases). The appeal of terrorizing Northerners heretofore untouched by the war motivated many of Lee's troops, and the depredations committed during the invasion are eerily prescient of Sherman's March a year later. An officer of the 82nd Ohio, wounded and captured during the first day of battle at Gettysburg, later reported overhearing a discussion between Confederate soldiers while awaiting transport to a field hospital: "Now was the time to 'pay the Yankees back,' they said, and pay them in kind for all the devastation they had wrought in the Shenandoah Valley." Although the nature and extent of the destruction varied from regiment to regiment, the desire for vengeance was widespread. An Alabamian noted in his diary for June 28 that it was "rather a hard matter to restrain our troops when they remember the devastated plains of Virginia, and the conduct of the Federals in other portions of the country" A member of the 44th Virginia, writing to his wife of his experiences in Middleburg and Greencastle, revealed the same sentiment among other troops. "The people thought we came to murder and rob but not so for the order from General Lee is not to touch a thing that belongs to private individuals . . . which I think is all right though our men seem very anxious to be let loose[.] if they ware all would be burned out of homes in this country" ⁴¹

Destruction of some property occurred as a matter of course and was not necessarily malicious, though troops who witnessed such events usually applauded them. A Virginia surgeon, for example, wrote approvingly that the men of his regiment were not required to struggle along muddy roads in Chambersburg. Instead, they marched through the adjacent wheat fields – crushing the harvest in the process. Yet another Virginian commented on the destructive tendencies of a large army in motion. "There are many beautiful residences in this country, with lovely yards and enclosures, but the hand of war is in many instances removing their beauty," he wrote to his wife. "A field of wheat so thick that I saw it bear a cot when thrown upon it, vanished under the tread of a column of infantry, which turned out of the road to avoid the mud." Fence rails – excellent for fuel and easily obtained – were noticeably scarce following a night's

⁴¹ *Lippencott's Magazine*, July 1883, "Reminiscences of the Gettysburg Battle,"; Barrett, 110; Paul Turner Vaughan diary, 28 June 1863, SHC, UNC; Thomas Frederick Boatwright to "my Darling Wife," June 1863, Thomas Frederick Boatwright Papers, SHC, UNC;

encampment. As one Georgian recounted, “After leaving [Greencastle] we had the plain mud road to march, very muddy, but we marched through fields of wheat & corn tearing down fences & not respecting scarcely any thing.” Reaching camp that night, exhausted troops tore down rails for firewood and repeated the process next day. “We made the fences fly.”⁴²

Inevitably, men resolved to bring the war to Northern civilians even if it meant blatantly disobeying orders. In many instances officers acquiesced in the behavior of their men, if not actually encouraging destructive behavior then certainly doing little to put a stop to it. Foraging in the manner that Union troops perfected in the South comprised a significant portion of depredations against Pennsylvania civilians. To be sure orders against independent foraging were issued by commanders, but officers were unable (or unwilling) to supervise every man every hour of the day. A Confederate captain writing from Fayetteville described the propensity of his men for gathering forage. “Genl Lees orders are that private property must be respected,” came the popular refrain. “During the day while we are marching every man remains at his post, but where we camp for the night there is not much, that the soldiers call ‘luxuries,’ such as butter, chickens, eggs, milk & honey left.” Generals were as guilty as company officers in yielding to their men. “We caught two or three hens and an old rooster in the presence of the general today,” admitted a soldier in General James Longstreet’s Corps. “He wanted to know what we was going to do with the old rooster, we told him make soup, it diverted him very much.” At times, it was unclear whether Lee took his own orders seriously. At one farm, a South Carolinian watched as dozens of soldiers snatched up everything with feathers with no intentions of reimbursing the owner. As a woman from the nearby farmhouse hopelessly tried to chase the men away, Lee passed by and witnessed the spectacle. Infuriated, the woman demanded that he stop his men, but rather than intervening the general nodded his head, said “Good morning madam,” and rode on.⁴³

⁴² Charles Edward Lippitt diary, 28 (?) June 1863, SHC, UNC; W.R. Aylett to “My Darling Wife,” 30 June 1863, Aylett Family Papers, VHS; Thomas Ware diary, 27, 29 June 1863, SHC, UNC.

⁴³ J.R. Manson to mother, 30 July 1863, Manson Family Papers, VHS; Julius Joyner to mother, 29 June 1863, Joyner Family Papers, SHC, UNC; Ronald H. Moseley, ed. *The Stilwell Letters: A Georgian in Longstreet’s Corps, Army of Northern Virginia*. (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 2002), 182; Guy R. Everson and Edward H. Simpson, Jr., eds., *Far, Far from Home: The Wartime Letters of Dick and Tally Simpson, 3rd South Carolina Volunteers*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 262.

Soldiers, regardless of their love for the commanding general, did not share his supposed sentiments of noncombatant immunity. Numerous letters attest that troops began seizing property as soon as they entered Pennsylvania. Descriptions of excesses committed were usually bracketed by statements acknowledging Lee's orders, and that the acts were committed "against," "in spite of," or "in disregard" of them. For many soldiers the need for revenge prevailed over the fear of military punishment. "Some of the boys have been 'capturing' chickens," a soldier wrote from Fayetteville. "It is against positive orders, but I would not punish one of them, for as Joe McMurray says it's not half as bad as they did, [to] his mother and sisters in Alabama" Other troops reported like incidents soon after they entered the state. One officer admitted that his men "would go off alone to a distance of several miles from the line of march in search of forage or provisions, without being in the slightest uneasiness." The impotence of Lee's order was glaringly apparent to one artilleryman posted near Chambersburg. "Our men have strict orders to take nothing without paying, but they do just as they please, which is not a twentieth part as bad as [Union forces] did in Virginia," he wrote his wife. "The fences, chickens hogs and vegetables are being consumed rapidly. The crops in some places will be ruined by camps and by stock, but we have not hurt them enough to talk about. All their public property . . . has been destroyed that we could destroy." The response of one Georgian, caught pilfering vegetables by an "old dutch woman," is illuminating. "I made her no reply, but yes'em," he wrote. "Remember Fredericksburg and the young ladies; silks torn from their wardrobe, yes'em, yes'em."⁴⁴

For a number of soldiers, witnessing the distress caused by the damage and ruin that accompanied any large army – which included foraging and impressments of war materiel – was satisfaction enough. "The [Dutch] are very much terrified at our presence, and think it horrible that we should invade Pennsylvania," recorded an officer of the 53rd Virginia. "Indeed they have Known nothing of the war heretofore, and I believe unless we do bring it home to them in this manner they would be willing to carry it on indefinitely." The opportunity to turn Northern opinion against continuing the war by carrying it the doorsteps of hapless civilians was a key component of the Gettysburg

⁴⁴ Barrett, 111; Julius A. Lineback diary, 26 June 1863, SHC, UNC; Campbell Brown diary, n.d., SHC, UNC; Samuel Argus Firebaugh diary, 25 June 1863, SHC, UNC; Thomas Ware diary, 28 June 1863, SHC, UNC; Florence McCarthy to "Pa," 10 July 1863, McCarthy Family Papers, VHS; Moseley, 181-182.

campaign. As one Georgian remarked with unintended irony, “We are now making the greatest movement of the war *and will make Yankedom howl* [emphasis mine] and I hope to God, make them cry out ‘Peace, peace.’” The similarity between this comment and the rationale offered by William T. Sherman a year later when pleading his case for a march through Georgia is striking. Explaining that he could “make Georgia howl” by a destructive campaign through the heart of the state, his move succeeded brilliantly and doubtless helped close the war. An identical mindset drove Confederates into Pennsylvania. Though failing where Sherman prevailed, it was not for lack of effort. “Our [commander] has issued such strict orders about straggling and plundering that the people have not suffered from us, but there are some troops that leave their mark behind them,” admitted a Virginian. “[Brigadier General Carnot] Posey’s [Mississippi] Brigade are letting the people know what war in the South is, and I expect that the Louisians are not far behind them in plundering.” Another Virginian remarked with satisfaction of the civilians that “their horses, cattle, meat &c have been seized for the support of our Army & they begin to learn something of the devastating influences of a great Army. They have all become warm advocates of *peace*.” If, as a trooper in the 16th Virginia Cavalry pointed out, “the Dutch never knew anything of the war until we invaded them and fought all round them and stoled their horses and cattle,” the presence of tens of thousands of Rebels in their midst certainly removed the scales from their eyes. As one infantryman contentedly explained in a letter home, “They have at last found out that the war has commenced & that war is a terrible calamity at best.”⁴⁵

Hinted at in many of the previous statements is the fact that unknown numbers of soldiers committed depredations beyond the commonly accepted foraging and burning of fence rails. Plundering smokehouses and vegetable gardens, even if done with a sense of retribution, still served a specific purpose. Hunger served as a rationale and justification for many excesses troops committed. In other cases, however, their actions were purely and plainly motivated by vengeance. In some instances even revenge ceased as an excuse, with soldiers appearing to delight in the ability to vandalize, destroy, and pillage

⁴⁵ Benjamin Lyons Farinholt to “Lelia,” 1 July 1863, Benjamin Lyon Farinholt Papers, VHS; Moseley, 180; *OR*, Ser. 1, Part 39, Vol. 3, 162; John McLeod Turner to “Emilie,” 28 June 1863, John McLeod Turner Papers, VHS; W.R. Aylett to “My Darling Wife,” 29 June 1863, Aylett Family Papers, VHS; Isaac V. Reynolds to “Dear Wife,” 20 July 1863, Isaac V. Reynolds Papers, Duke U; Julius Joyner to mother, 29 June 1863, Joyner Family Papers, SHC, UNC.

with little chance of being called to account or having charges referred against them. What is most interesting about such cases is the reticence, or embarrassment, of some soldiers in discussing them. Typical was the statement of a Mississippian camped near Chambersburg, who on July 27 recorded in his diary the reading of Lee's order to his regiment. The next day he witnessed the response of troops to the command, confessing that "the Souldiers are committing some depredations on private property." In fact, the ragged veterans of Lee's army had personal scores to settle, and many of these cases are well documented. A private in the 57th North Carolina clearly understood the significance of destroying an iron foundry near Chambersburg owned by Congressman Thaddeus Stevens, "a bitter enemy to the South[.]" Empty houses, deserted by citizens fleeing from the approaching army, were plundered by soldiers. "All of the people seemed to be very much alarmed," observed a Virginia infantryman, "some left home all such the soldiers took every thing from them even striped their house; though it was against orders still they did it." A resident of Shippensburg confirmed the inclination of soldiers to ransack private dwellings within their reach, especially homes deserted by their owners. "Some few families left their homes and will have reason to regret it," she wrote while confined in her home by rebel troops. "Such houses were plundered and all destroyed." From her viewpoint, the destruction increased the longer the occupation lasted. "Every party that has come in has treated us more severely in the way of plunder though the appearance of Officers is generally courteous." She insisted, however, "We know the malice that is in their hearts and they cannot always restrain it."⁴⁶

Others reported more personal altercations. One resident resignedly described the destruction of his neighbor's property: "At George Lowers they took the horses in the house and fed them out of the bureau drawers and tore and broke everything to pieces and some places took and tramped silk Dresses in the mud another hung them on the fence and many other things." The use of horses to despoil homes appeared to be a favorite Rebel tactic, at least according to citizens. Examining an abandoned home in the wake of the army, one recalled that the soldiers "did all kinds of mean tricks. Carried window

⁴⁶ Robert A. Moore, *A Life for the Confederacy*, James W. Silver, ed., (Jackson, Tenn.: McCowat-Mercer Press, 1959), 152; Samuel W. Eaton diary, 26 June 1863, SHC, UNC; Thomas Frederick Boatwright to "Darling Wife," 9 July 1863, Thomas Frederick Boatwright Papers, SHC, UNC; Eunice Stewart to parents, 30 June 1863, Harrisburg Civil War Round Table Collection, USMHI.

blinds, pictures, etc. up to the woods. They used the doughtray to feed horses and a drawer of the sideboard to mix dough They opened a jar of black cherries, poured it down the stair steps, then cut a chaff bed open and spread it over them.” Pennsylvanians still searching for meaning behind the destruction could literally find it written on a wall: “Done in retaliation for what was done in the South.” Even legitimate military actions sometimes devolved into mayhem. When General Stuart’s cavalry reached Carlisle, the local militia refused to surrender and sniped at the troopers from within the town. His demands rebuffed, Stuart ordered his artillery to open fire, shelling the city for more than two hours. He had in fact followed standard protocol. Given the chance to hand over the town, the refusal of the defenders to do so signaled their willingness to continue the battle. Stuart obliged, but as one officer commented, his enthusiasm over the “frightful” bombardment of the town betrayed ulterior motives: “I thought several times that the General meant to pay them back for our Fredericksburg: night came on while were at work on Carlisle and the sight was of the grandest character. the immense Military Barracks was set on fire by the shelling & was completely destroyed, also a portion of the town was burned.” Artillery and small arms fire thoroughly battered Gettysburg, as well. Confederate soldiers, occupying the town while the battled raged, destroyed much of what the exploding shells had missed. “Stores were ransacked and emptied of their contents but in many such articles as could not be used were destroyed and buildings abused and defiled,” reported a local newspaper. “Dwellings too were entered and where men’s clothing could not be procured, that of women and children was taken into the streets and roads, torn into fragments and cast aside. The houses of some of the professors in the educational institutions hereabouts shared the same fate; and from one store here even the clocks were taken out and destroyed.” If the devastation strengthened the resolve of some Pennsylvanians, it humbled many others whose property bore the brunt of Southern retaliation. “Some times i thought this war would be over but I believe the worst is yet to come,” wrote one. “For it has been reported oftentimes that the south would have to give it up But it did not look so a few weeks ago for every place you might look you could see some rebels every where some places everything is destroyed but what they had on.”⁴⁷

⁴⁷ G.F. Winter to “Cousin,” 27 July 1863, Robert L. Brake Collection, USMHI; Sue K. Black Recollection,

In contemplating the actions of the army during its respite in Pennsylvania, thoughtful soldiers managed to express regret and sympathized with civilians unfortunate enough to fall prey to the insatiable appetite of the Southern war machine. “I was made sorry at times,” wrote a member of the 44th Virginia, “for some who looked so innocent and so much alarmed they had concluded that we would burn houses and strip them of every thing they had.” Another soldier who endorsed hard war against the Northern populace still could not help feeling some remorse over the destruction set in motion by the invasion. Though denying the ruin of private property, he nevertheless acknowledged the extensive amount of damage. “We are tearing up their railroads, & destroying all public property – sparing private property as far as possible – not taking more than the army needs but that is bad enough treatment,” he wrote. “Really, I cannot help feeling sorry for the people, bad as they have done us. They seem so frightened and woe begone. The scourges of war are indeed terrible & these people are more vulnerable than we are under invasion, because they are so thickly settled.” A Virginia captain, plainly embarrassed by the actions of the soldiers, expressed his exasperation thusly: “I felt when I saw how our men were going on that nothing but disaster would follow and in truth I was associated with an armed mob with the broadest license and not with a disciplined army such as General Lee has had under his command.” The unruliness of the men, which threatened to explode into anarchy, so disturbed him that he could only hope the army would be kept in the South until the war ended. Others expressed desires to remain in Union territory and had no remorse about the damage done to civilians. “I think General Lee is going to fight the Yankees all this summer on their own land and make the people feel the effects of war,” speculated a Georgian a week after Gettysburg. “We made them feel it wherever we went.”⁴⁸

It is important to see that the orgy of foraging, confiscation, plundering, and destruction took place within specific limits. For the most part, soldiers did not physically abuse civilians. Altercations between troops and citizens occurred, but such incidents were rare, and in some cases little more than rumors. “‘Tis said one murder

n.d., Robert L. Brake Collection, USMHI; Nimrod R. Fitzhugh to sister, 16 July 1863, Montgomery D. Corse Papers, SHC, UNC; *Lancaster Daily Express*, 10 July 1863.

⁴⁸ Thomas Frederick Boatwright to “Darling Wife,” 9 July 1863, Thomas Frederick Boatwright Papers, UNC, SHC; W.R. Aylett to “My Darling Wife,” 30 June 1863, Aylett Family Papers, VHS; J.R. Manson to mother, 30 July 1863, Manson Family Papers, VHS; Moseley, 185.

was committed by a southern soldier,” an officer dutifully recorded in his diary while at Chambersburg, “but as the parties were drunk I did not here what was done with them.” An enlisted man in the 26th North Carolina recorded a row between citizens and soldiers that occurred near the end of June, but gave few details: “Last night some Missourians got into trouble with citizens in town, and Co. E. of our reg’t was sent to quiet the disturbance.”⁴⁹

Fantasizing of revenge, Confederate soldiers more often contented themselves with the destruction of property in proportion to what they believed had been inflicted on their own homes. They did not rape and murder. The tendency to dehumanize the enemy, so prevalent in wartime and a necessary precondition of atrocity, is simply not manifest in the letters and diaries of soldiers as they approached and entered Pennsylvania. The massacre of unarmed civilians is more easily accomplished, after all, when the target can be readily dismissed as the “Other” by assigning convenient, and usually animal-like, characteristics (“skulking,” sneaking,” “lurking,” “low-lived,” and “serpent-like,” for example, were often used by western troops to describe Native Americans). Such tendencies are grounded in ignorance – often willfully. Similar preconceptions that Southern soldiers may have held toward Northerners when they entered Pennsylvania, however, were usually dispelled when reality intervened. While encamped at York, a Louisianan (to whom Pennsylvania must have been little more than a rumor before he arrived) explained that “the soldiers behaved very well . . . and treated the citizens with great respect and in return received the same treatment from them.” By “respect,” he could have only been referring to a refrain from physical mistreatment, for this same soldier had witnessed Early’s threat to burn the city the day before. Also at York, a private in the 57th North Carolina remarked that the women “appear to be very kind & have a great curiosity to talk with the rebels.” Conversely, while in Chambersburg an officer admitted that some of the women were very “impudent,” but still he looked on approvingly as several of his men quietly exchanged hats with citizens. “You may believe that the people was very near skerd to death but we treated them with respect,” wrote another. The humanizing aspects of personal contact worked in both

⁴⁹ Charles Edward Lippitt diary, 28 (?) June 1863, SHC, UNC; Julius A. Lineback diary, 28 June 1863, SHC, UNC.

directions, serving to mitigate Northern opinions of Southern soldiers, as well – at least for those civilians not completely plundered of all their property. On June 26 outside of Gettysburg, a group of Confederate cavalymen who had just rounded up several horses for confiscation paused to talk with a woman who stood watching them. “One of them asked her what she thought the Rebels were like, whether they had horns,” recalled a relative, “and she replied she was frightened at first but found them like our own men.”⁵⁰

The submissive behavior of many civilians undoubtedly perplexed soldiers and prevented the formation of harsher beliefs, at least temporarily. Had the populace fought back or engaged in widespread guerrilla activity, no doubt the Confederate response and corresponding epithets against the Germans would have been much worse. Paradoxically, the same actions that mitigated one possible negative stereotype only resulted in another. Soldiers instead generalized the people as “ignorant,” “cringing,” and “spiteful;” views that similarly led to contempt. They considered the men cowardly, the women ugly, and both perhaps of a race altogether different from Southerners. Still, though soldiers may not have regarded Pennsylvanians as fellow Americans, especially the Germans, there is no evidence they ever believed them subhuman. A North Carolinian, describing the people of Pennsylvania as “the meanest looking white people” he had ever seen, acknowledged a significant racial bond between occupiers and civilians that would likely prevent serious atrocity until the military situation escalated considerably. That Confederates thought them (and by inference all Northerners) to be inferior, however, did not portend well for the future.⁵¹

When rebels invaded the state in June 1863 they marched in at the peak of Confederate military power and remained for a relatively short duration. They could afford to be magnanimous and chivalrous – even if this meant plundering abandoned rather than occupied homes. Should they return again, more desperate and wrathful, soldiers now held in their repertoire of stereotypes the confirmed image of an “inferior” people incapable of self-defense, whom they held responsible for the continuing destruction of their homes. As terrifying as the first full-scale Confederate occupation

⁵⁰ William Britton Bailey, Jr. diary, 29 June 1863, Harrisburg Civil War Round Table Collection, USMHI; Samuel W. Eaton diary, 28 June 1863, SHC, UNC; Charles Edward Lippitt diary, 28 (?) June 1863, SHC, UNC; John Fuller Coghill to “Pappy Ma and Mil,” 25 June 1863, John Fuller Coghill Papers, SHC, UNC; Gettysburg *Compiler*, 23 August 1905.

⁵¹ James Peter Williams to Father, 28 June 1863, James Peter Williams Papers, SHC, UNC.

had been for residents of Pennsylvania, subsequent military incursions were likely to be much worse. For the time being, however, the interaction between Southerners and civilians was defined by a fragile mutual respect. As the kidnapping of African-Americans suggests there were important racial exceptions to this relationship. While Anglos and Germans feared for their property, blacks feared for their personal freedom.

By 1863, the nature of the war had clearly changed, and what was most disturbing about the actions of Lee's men was their typicality. North and South, competent commanders understood that victory, elusive as it had been for two years, required more than attacking the enemy's army with foolish frontal assaults. A significant component of success lay beyond the battlefield, which became more evident with the Pennsylvania Campaign. The home-front, with its connotations of safety and security, would no longer be exempted from the cataclysm. In a conflict among democrats, the demoralization of civilians was a prerequisite for military success. Soldiers, more so than officers, were early on willing to take the steps necessary to ensure that success. The ramifications of this "shift" in the nature of the war had serious implications. For the moment, civilian property rather than civilian lives would remain the primary target of the armies. Complete dehumanization of the enemy had thus far been staved off. As the destructiveness of military campaigns increased, however, so too did the coarsening of the soldiers who fought in them. An expanded war would necessitate more killing, and the rationalization of that killing through the dehumanization and brutalization of the enemy could quickly be expected to follow. In a war marked by escalating retaliatory policies and fought by men compelled to mete out their own brand of "proportional" retribution – even if it meant blatantly disregarding orders – how civilians would fare if the conflict continued was anyone's guess. The destruction caused by Lee's army was limited, but only because his weaknesses prevented him from carrying out more extensive operations in the North. William Tecumseh Sherman would not be hindered by such limitations in the South.

2.4 Hard War in Earnest, 1864-1865

2.4.1 Chambersburg

In the year that followed the Confederate retreat from Gettysburg, the Southern cause suffered enormous setbacks. Vicksburg had fallen, Union forces threatened Atlanta, and the great Army of Northern Virginia which had marched triumphantly into Pennsylvania was now fighting for survival outside of Richmond. As part of his strategy to capture the Confederate capital, General Ulysses S. Grant ordered his lieutenants to take control of Virginia's Shenandoah Valley, a region rich in provisions and repeatedly used as an invasion route by Confederate forces. Controlling the Shenandoah would cut off a major source of supplies to Lee's army, bringing the Union one step closer to victory.¹

The task was too much for the men initially charged with it. General Franz Sigel, directed to destroy the railroad at Lynchburg, was defeated by a combined force of Confederate volunteers and Virginia Military Institute cadets at the battle of New Market in May 1864. His replacement, General David Hunter, fared little better – though he undertook the campaign with significantly more zeal and a penchant for destruction. To counter a surge in guerrilla activity, he held citizens responsible for attacks that occurred in their vicinity, enacting retributive policies against villages and towns. In reprisal for the actions of the Virginia cadets against his predecessor, he burned the Military Institute to the ground. For Confederates, one of his more galling actions concerned the destruction of the homes of three prominent Southern sympathizers in Jefferson County in what was now West Virginia – including one owned by his cousin, Andrew Hunter. While Hunter justified his earlier actions as responses to specific attacks, he appears to have put these homes to the torch solely because of the political proclivities of the owners.

¹ Grant's decision would touch off the 1864 Valley Campaign, a military struggle for the region which would last well into the fall. See Jeffrey D. Wert, *From Winchester to Cedar Creek: The Shenandoah Campaign of 1864*, (Carlisle, PA: South Mountain Press, 1987); Thomas A. Lewis, *The Shenandoah in Flames: The Valley Campaign of 1864*, (Alexandria: Time-Life Books, 1987); Benjamin Franklin Cooling, *Jubal Early's Raid on Washington: 1864*, (Baltimore: Nautical & Aviation Publishing Company of America, 1989); and Gary W. Gallagher, ed., *The Shenandoah Valley Campaign of 1864*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

Despite his harsh tactics, Hunter failed to achieve his objective. In mid-June, advance units under General Jubal Early defeated his army at Lynchburg, forcing him to retreat. Pursuing Hunter's men up the Valley, the Confederates gawked at the destruction left behind. At one mansion, nothing remained but charred and blackened walls. "These still stand, silent witnesses of the ruthlessness of those who would win us back to the bond of brotherly love," sourly remarked an officer in the 8th Virginia Cavalry. "And yet when we get into the country of these inhuman fiends, there is an order issued 'private property must be protected.' Will our authorities never learn that the shortest avenue to a Yankee's heart is thro' his pocket?" A blatant swipe against the restraints placed on the army a year before (and Northerners for their supposed avariciousness), he need not have been concerned. Jubal A. Early was no Robert E. Lee, and certainly did not share his superior's purported moral concerns when it came to Northern civilians.²

General Early's appearance in the Valley surprised his Federal opponents. Lee, hoping to draw off some of the Federal forces besieging the army around Richmond, had ordered him to sweep the Shenandoah of Union resistance and, if possible, threaten Washington, itself. In the course of his raid, Early assessed levies against several towns in Maryland. Most paid in full, but some were allowed to negotiate a lower settlement. In contrast to his behavior with these quasi-Southern areas, he demonstrated a notable lack of flexibility in dealing with a town farther north. On July 28, Early ordered a detachment of cavalry under General John McCausland to cross into Pennsylvania and occupy Chambersburg, instructing his lieutenant to extort a hefty ransom: \$100,000 in gold or \$500,000 in cash. Fair compensation, he thought, for the destruction caused by General Hunter in the Valley. If no payment was forthcoming, McCausland was "to lay the town in ashes." In fact, there was very little money in the town to be gotten, as the community's bankers, learning of the rebel advance, had already fled with their assets. Early, however, never expected the enormous ransom to be paid. "A number of towns in the South, as well as private country houses, had been burned by the Federal troops," he

² J. Kelley Bennette Diary, 20 July 1864, SHC, UNC. By all accounts, Jubal Early served almost as the anti-Lee, his combative, profane, and irascible behavior contrasting sharply with his commander's much-lauded self-control. See Charles C. Osborne, *Jubal: The Life and Times of General Jubal A. Early, C.S.A., Defender of the Lost Cause*, (Chapel Hill: Algonquin Books, 1992).

later wrote of his decision. “I came to the conclusion it was time to open the eyes of the people of the North to this enormity, by an example in the way of retaliation.”³

On July 30, McCausland and his troopers entered Chambersburg and presented Early’s impossible demands. As expected, they received no definitive response from the town’s leaders, who refused to even meet with the invaders. After several hours of delay, McCausland made good on the threatened consequences, ordering the place put to the torch. Many of the townspeople had doubted the earnestness of the threat. Apparently, so too did some of McCausland’s men. Colonel William E. Peters of the 21st Virginia Cavalry flatly refused to carry out the order – and was arrested for his disobedience. For others, cowing the haughty residents of the town was satisfaction enough. An officer in the 4th Virginia, knocking on the door of one residence, courteously informed the owner of his intentions. “I’ve come to burn your house,” he warned. “I do not propose to burn the inmates.” The man cried and pleaded with the officer, informed him of a sick wife and child within, and attempted to bribe him. The Virginian, though put off by what he considered typical Yankee cravenness, eventually relented and decided to spare the house. The owner, in what must have been a gratifying display of subservience, dropped to the ground and embraced his knees.⁴

Most of the troopers proceeded as ordered, breaking down doors, tossing out the occupants, and setting their homes and businesses ablaze. At least half of the rebels had visited the town during the Gettysburg campaign, and Chambersburg, a “Dutch” village

³ Jubal Anderson Early, *Autobiographical Sketch and Narrative of the War Between the States*, ed. R.H. Early, (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1912), 401. See also, Everard H. Smith, “Chambersburg: Anatomy of a Confederate Reprisal,” *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 96, No. 2, (April 1991), 432-455. Smith presents an intriguing and illuminating examination of the role ethnicity played in the burning of Chambersburg and the advent of “total war.” Though he thoughtfully, and correctly, determines why the city was singled out for destruction he does not consider the “whiteness” of residents in explaining why they ultimately were allowed to live.

⁴ General John M. McCausland, “The Burning of Chambersburg,” in *The Annals of the War Written by Leading Participants North and South*, ed. Alexander Kelly McClure, (Philadelphia: Times Publishing, 1879), 770-774; J. Kelley Bennette Diary, 30 July 1864, SHC, UNC; Quote is from Francis Chamberlayne Memoir, Chamberlayne Family Papers, VHS. See also, James McChesney Memoir (14th Virginia Cavalry), Lewis Leigh Collection, USMHI. Confederate partisan Colonel John S. Mosby, a prewar acquaintance of William Peters, spoke highly of his actions at Chambersburg. “Peters refused to obey the order,” he wrote, “for which he is entitled to a monument to his memory. Reprisals in war can only be justified as a deterrent. As the Confederates were holding the place for only a few hours, while the Northern armies were occupying a large part of the South, no doubt, aside from any question of humanity, Peters thought it was bad policy to provoke retaliation.” See John Singleton Mosby, *The Memoirs of Colonel John S. Mosby*, ed. Charles Wells Russell, (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1917), 23-25.

full of cowardly men and spiteful women, held a special place in their hearts. In 1863, most had laughed at the insults. Now, they laughed at the town's destruction. As the inferno grew, officers lost control of their men. Whiskey made an appearance, and drunken troopers ran through the streets, blatantly robbing citizens who moments before had been thrown from their homes. Some Confederates attempted to carry off women. At one home, they locked a woman in an upstairs bedroom and set a fire below. Neighbors fortunately were able to rescue her in time. At another, they poured a pile of gunpowder beneath an elderly invalid, swearing that they would teach her how to walk. Even the dead found no peace, as troopers interrupted a funeral to burn a house, forcing the mourners to bury the body in a garden to save it from the flames.⁵

The scale of the blaze and resultant chaos impressed even those who had set it in motion. "The conflagration at its height was one of surpassing grandeur and terror," wrote an incendiary in the 14th Virginia, "and had the day not been a calm one, many would have been licked up by the flames in the streets. Tall, black columns of smoke rose up to the very skies; around it were wrapped long streams of flames, writhing and twisting themselves into a thousand fantastic shapes. Here and there gigantic whirlwinds would lift clothing and light substances into the air, and intermingled with the weird scene could be heard the shrieks of women and children. Cows, dogs and cats were consumed in their attempt to escape. It was a picture that may be misrepresented, but cannot be heightened, and must remain forever indelibly impressed upon the mind of those who witnessed it." A trooper in the 37th Virginia Cavalry Battalion agreed. "I never witnessed such a site in all my life," he insisted. "The poor wimmen and children and also gray heard men was runing in every direction with a little bundle of cloths under there arms crying and skreaming."⁶

Early's command reduced much of Chambersburg to a smoldering heap of brick and ash. Nearly half of the 6,000 residents were left homeless. Twelve blocks of the town center had been destroyed. An unknown amount of livestock and personal property was lost to the flames and rebel pillaging. Total damage approached two million dollars.

⁵ Smith, "Chambersburg," 435-437; Scott C. Patchan, *Shenandoah Summer: The 1864 Valley Campaign*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007), 281-284.

⁶ J. Scott Moore, "A Southern Account of the Burning of Chambersburg," *Southern Historical Society Papers*, Vol. 26, 319; M.T. Norman to Nancy Norman, 9 August 1864, in Smith, "Chambersburg," 437.

Significantly, there were no civilian fatalities – a statistic which can only be attributed to chance.⁷

The men responsible generally approved of the destruction, at least in retrospect. If they harbored any regret, it was not that the town had been burned, but that the burning had been *necessary*. Arriving at this position, however, required a substantial exercise in moral gymnastics, for the chivalrous Southern soldier – protector of home and family, of women and children, of the defenseless and innocent – had just attacked everything for which he ostensibly fought. He had, in fact, behaved just as the hated Yankee. “The burning of Chambersburg,” wrote one Virginia trooper who struggled to justify his actions, “was generally condemned by our Regt. *at first* when all the sympathies were all aroused, but when reason had time to regain her seat I believe that they all thought as I thought at first; that it was Justice, & Justice tempered with Mercy. That *burning per se* is wrong no one can deny; and the bare idea of turning out of doors upon the cold charities of the world unprotected women & unoffending children is sufficient to cause the feelings to rebel. But there may be circumstances under which it is not only *justifiable* but becomes a duty.” Those circumstances, he insisted, had been brought about not by the cavalymen who torched the city, but by the Yankees who made retaliation necessary. It was they who initiated attacks against the defenseless, who forced Confederates to act as they did, and who bore responsibility for the consequences. Burning Chambersburg, according to this rather distorted reasoning, was a morally justifiable retaliation. “We are in this war to defend the *women*,” he asserted, “[and] if we try one expedient and it fails we are recreant to our duty if we persevere in that expedient instead of changing the prescription.” Unable to view the destruction for the crime that it was, they instead interpreted it as a moral necessity. Indeed, even when Confederates burned the homes of citizens, Southern chivalry, he made certain to point out, still shone through: “Instead of snatching from the hands of the ladies what they had saved from their burning houses & throwing it back into the flames as the yankees did in [the Valley], or stealing & destroying it . . . our men could be seen all over the city

⁷ Smith, “Chambersburg,” 437-438.

checking the fire or carrying trunks, bundles &c. for the ladies. How beautiful the contrast!”⁸

Whether Southern volunteers were any more “humane” in how they went about burning citizens out of their homes is debatable. That most felt it deplorable, while also believing it to be necessary and right, is certain. More importantly, there existed a wide consensus on the necessity of further retaliation. “I think if we or our Cav. do go into Pa. again they will do more even than burn Chambersburg or another town,” thought a North Carolinian. “I hate the necessity very much and have always been opposed to it but begin to believe retaliation, to the letter, the only way to prevent these deprivations.” A South Carolina officer concurred, though he expressed none of the moral reservations prominent among his comrades. “I long to hear,” he wrote upon learning of the events in Chambersburg, “that we are paying the Yankees off in the same coin we have been enduring for 4 years – burn! and slay! Until Ft. Pillow with all its fancied horrors shall appear as insignificant as a schoolboy’s tale.”⁹

The burning of Chambersburg similarly roused Union volunteers, and many were fully prepared to answer the challenge in kind. In some instances, soldiers attempted to retaliate directly. For veterans of the Valley campaigns, Winchester, Virginia seemed an obvious target for reprisal. Intermittently occupied by Northern forces since the start of the war, Union soldiers came to consider it – as Southerners did Chambersburg – a town with a particular obnoxious populace. When two regiments of Pennsylvanians passed through in mid-August 1864 disaster was narrowly averted. “Some of the boys tried to set it on fire in retaliation for Chambersburg,” wrote one, “but the fire was put out before any damage was done.” For others, the invocation of “Chambersburg” served less as a rallying cry than as a psychological crutch to support the rationalization of the destruction they wrought. In many instances, they invoked the specter of Chambersburg to deflect their own sense of guilt, as did an Ohioan who described the burning of a town in middle Tennessee in December 1864. “Only a few scattered buildings (Union, I suppose) remain to tell where a pretty village stood,” he reported. “It looks hard to see such destruction,

⁸ J. Kelley Bennette Diary, 30 July 1864, SHC, UNC.

⁹ George Whitaker Wills to “dear Sister,” 18 August 1864, George Whitaker Wills Letters, SHC, UNC; Eldred Simkins to Eliza Trescott, 8 August 1864, in James M. McPherson, *For Cause & Comrades: Why Men Fought in the Civil War*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 151.

but such is war and we can't help feeling that it's no more than justice to destroy such a place after the burning of Chambersburg, PA."¹⁰

Soldiers on both sides readily embraced retaliation. With few exceptions, however, most did not appear overly concerned with the implications of that decision. Retaliation, as some noted, was problematic because it was difficult to enact against those who were directly responsible for the event which initially provoked it. The residents of Winchester, it might be pointed out, had not burned and pillaged Chambersburg, nor had the citizens of Chambersburg personally ravaged the Shenandoah Valley. Yet, a Virginia trooper was able to say with certainty that, though he was opposed to retaliation, "it was nothing but what they deserved." Why exactly "they" deserved to be punished for an act of which they were innocent was left unstated, but General Early, himself, shed light on the matter, claiming that he targeted Chambersburg simply because it was the only sizable town accessible to his troops, "and *for no other reason.*" Northern troops who destroyed in retaliation for Chambersburg could easily offer the same explanation. Citizens were not punished because they were personally responsible for depredations, but because they supposedly represented those who committed them. In other words, they were held accountable simply because they were deemed Northerners or Southerners, Unionists or Rebels, Yankees or Secesh. The citizens of these towns served as surrogates, viewed by their attackers as representatives of a hated people and imbued with their worst attributes. The burning of Chambersburg, insignificant in a strictly military sense, nonetheless highlighted the extent to which soldiers could generalize the "enemy" into a monolithic Other, blurring the lines between combatant and noncombatant, innocent and guilty, and ensuring that retaliation, far from curbing depredations, would only result in their escalation.¹¹

¹⁰ Henry Keiser Diary, 17 August 1864, Harrisburg Civil War Round Table Collection, USMHI; William Bentley to "Dear Bro," 16 November 1864, in Smith, *Burning Rails as We Pleas'd*, 124. An excellent study of Winchester during the war and the relationship between its citizens and Union soldiers is Richard R. Duncan's, *Beleaguered Winchester: A Virginia Community at War, 1861-1865*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2007).

¹¹ James McChesney Memoir, Lewis Leigh Collection, USMHI; Jubal A. Early to Jacob Hoke, 4 September 1864, in Jacob Hoke, *The Great Invasion of 1863, or, General Lee in Pennsylvania*, (Dayton, OH: W.J. Shuey, 1887), 589-590.

2.4.2 “A Barren Waste”: The Valley and Atlanta Campaigns

As a direct result of Early’s invasion through the Shenandoah Valley, the US army enacted one of the greatest scorched earth campaigns of the war. On July 14, two weeks before Confederates burned Chambersburg, Grant, furious over the distraction caused by Early’s raid, sought to close off the Valley to further incursions. “If the enemy has left Maryland, as I suppose he has,” he wrote to General Henry Halleck, “he should have upon his heels veterans, militiamen, men on horseback, and everything that can be got to follow to eat out Virginia clear and clean as far as they go, so that crows flying over it for the balance of this season will have to carry their provender with them.” A month later, he ordered General Phil Sheridan to make it so. “Do all the damage to railroads and crops you can,” he instructed. “Carry off stock of all descriptions, and negroes, so as to prevent further planting. If the war is to last another year, we want the Shenandoah Valley to remain a barren waste.”¹²

Between August and October 1864, Sheridan’s troops dutifully carried out their mission. “The Yankees have utterly desolated this [region], burning every barn & wheat stack & in some instances burning the stocks of corn in the field,” wrote a Virginia infantryman in early October. “Cattle & hogs were shot down and left lying in the fields. A more infamous set of barbarians never yet cursed this earth with their existence.” Their actions were too much for him. “I rejoiced to hear that our cavalry caught some dozen or more of the barn burners & deliberately shot them after disarming them. I want to see no more Yankee prisoners from Sheridan’s command. Death and death alone will end their villainous conduct.”¹³

Indeed, Confederate guerillas and partisans stepped up their attacks during the campaign and sabotage and reprisal executions proliferated. When bushwhackers reputedly of partisan leader Colonel John S. Mosby’s command killed one of Sheridan’s engineering officers near the town of Dayton, Sheridan in turn ordered every dwelling within a five mile radius burned. In response to Mosby’s persistent torpedoing of the railroads, Union authorities forced Valley citizens to ride the trains, hoping their presence

¹² U.S. Grant to Major-General Henry Halleck, 14 July 1864, *OR*, Ser. 1, Vol. 40, Pt. 3, 223; U.S. Grant to Major-General Sheridan, 26 August 1864, *OR*, Ser. 1, Vol. 43, Pt. 2, 202.

¹³ Henry Ruffner Morrison to “My Dear Brother,” 11 October 1864, Civil War Miscellaneous Collection, USMHI.

would prove a suitable deterrent against future attacks. It was not. “They are worse than Chinese,” raged one of Mosby’s men, “but no matter what they do I will not swerve one inch from my path of duty. They might as well place women & children in front of their lines of battle. My mode of warfare is just as legitimate as that of the army fighting in their front. I am placed here to annoy them & interrupt their communication as much as possible. This I intend doing & should I again have an opportunity of throwing off a train I would do it if my wife & children were on [it].”¹⁴

In considering the reprisals for guerilla attacks, a Massachusetts colonel questioned the efficacy of burning individual villages. Better for the Union cause, and fairer to the people of the Valley, he thought, to just burn it all. “I would *cheerfully* assist in making this whole Valley a desert,” he insisted, “for that would have, I am sure, an important effect on the campaign of the Spring, - but in *partial* burnings I see less justice and less propriety.” Ultimately, civilians would be victimized by both philosophies, for not only did the vendettas continue, they served to fuel Sheridan’s men in their work, and the destruction they wrought was every bit as bad as the Confederate defenders claimed. One Union officer attested that “the devastation . . . would disgrace a band of Indians. All that the rebels have said about our vandalism &tc, is true, and more. But they have made their own bed, and can blame themselves. . . .Whatever will aid and assist the enemy must be destroyed regardless of what suffering it may cause.” An awestruck Pennsylvania trooper plainly admitted the extensiveness of the destruction, including the burning of houses – an activity that had ostensibly been placed off limits. “the rebs have ever got a worse whipping since the war began than they got in this valley,” he wrote in late October.

we burnt some sixty houses and all most all the barns hay and grain and corn in the shock for fifty miles above strausburg. the third div made a raid to stanton and destroyed large stores of supplys tore up the railroad and destroyed the mills. it was a hard looking sight to see the woman and children turned out of doors at this season of the year but no worse than for those at chambersburg.

¹⁴ Sheridan to Grant, 7 October 1864, *OR*, Ser. 1, Vol. 43, Pt. 1, 30; James Williamson Diary, 17 October, 6 November 1864, Lewis Leigh Collection, USMHI.

“starvation is a staring the citisins in the face in the valley,” he concluded. “i have no idea how this war is a going to terminate”¹⁵

Nor did anyone else, but Sheridan had made certain that the Valley would no longer be part of it. On October 7 he tallied for Grant the extent of the destruction, offering mere numbers which could only hint at the vastness of human misery which underlay them. “I have destroyed over 2,000 barns filled with wheat, hay, and farming implements; over seventy mills filled with flour and wheat; have driven in front of the army over 4[,000] head of stock, and have killed and issued to the troops not less than 3,000 sheep,” he reported. He failed to calculate the number of private dwellings destroyed, but did proffer that “the people here are getting sick of the war; heretofore, they have had no reason to complain, because they have been living in great abundance.” Amazingly, he had not yet concluded his operations. “When this is completed the Valley, from Winchester up to Staunton, ninety-two miles, will have but little in it for man or beast.”¹⁶

The destruction of property and foodstuffs in the Valley was unprecedented, but would soon be superseded in Georgia and South Carolina. In the spring of 1864, while Grant and Sheridan contended with Lee and Early in Virginia, Sherman advanced into Georgia from Tennessee. In early May, his army clashed with General Joe Johnston’s Army of Tennessee at Rocky Face Ridge, commencing an extended campaign that would result in the capture of Atlanta four months later. Though Sherman’s fame (or infamy) in popular memory derives primarily from his actions after he occupied the city, the march to Atlanta itself was something of a trial run for what would occur later. Between May and September, the soldiers under his command devastated northwestern Georgia. A Connecticut volunteer, whose regiment occupied Cassville in the wake of a Confederate retreat, offered a glimpse of what awaited the rest of the state. “As soon as our men got in . . . they felt privileged to ransack every thing they could and such an overhauling of property I never saw,” he reported. “It looked sad and now the citizens are coming in and

¹⁵ Charles Russell Lowell to wife, 5 October 1864, in *Life and Letters of Charles Russell Lowell*, ed. Edward W. Emerson, (New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1907), 353; Hazard Stevens to “Dear Mother,” 20 August 1864, 2 October 1864, Stevens Family Papers, LC; William H. Martin to wife, 17 October 1864, Harrisburg Civil War Round Table Collection, USMHI.

¹⁶ Sheridan to Grant, 7 October 1864, *OR*, Ser. 1, Vol. 43, Pt. 1, 30-31.

mourning dolefully over it. I can't pity them much." A Michigan artilleryman painted a similar picture of desolation and ruin. "There was only 2 families remaining in the whole town to be seen," he noted. "Beautiful buildings with a share of the furniture was left such as pianos and heavy goods and I say it with a blush of shame that a great many of the men in this army destroyed hundreds of dollars of property, but they would not have done so if the families had remained at home."¹⁷

The notion that citizens could best ensure the sanctity of their homes simply by remaining in them was a widely held belief among volunteers. "Many of the Southern people acted verry foolishly in thus fleeing from their homes on the approach of the Union Army," wrote an Ohio veteran of the campaign. "Union soldiers seldom entered the house of the citizens that was occupied, for it was against orders so to do. They would sometime go to the door of such, and ask for something or talk to the inmates, and if invited in would some times accept the invitation. But soldiers would often enter and pillage around in houses that wer deserted." For the most part, this assertion rang true, as brazenly accosting private citizens in their homes in broad daylight was an act that most soldiers not only found distasteful, but difficult to get away with without causing a scene or otherwise drawing attention to themselves. On the other hand, common wisdom dictated that only the guilty fled. If the person was loyal, why run? Unfortunately, this view failed to take into account how Southerners perceived the approaching army. "The women and children we seldom see," reported an Ohioan in early August, "as they are led to believe that the Yankees will kill them." When skirmishers from his regiment surprised two women with a houseful of children who had failed to escape with retreating Confederates, a particularly unsettling scene ensued. "I never heard such screaming and praying," he reported. "They begged us not to shoot them and it was with the greatest of difficulty that the officer in command of the line quieted them long enough to convince them that we were not going to murder them."¹⁸

¹⁷ Rufus Mead to "Dear Folks at Home," 22 May 1864, Rufus Mead Papers, LC; Marshall M. Miller to wife, 20 May 1864, Marshall Mortimer Miller Collection, LC. See also, Frances Josephine Black, ed., "We Begged to Hearts of Stone: The Wartime Journal of Cassville's Lizzie Gaines," *Northwest Georgia Historical & Genealogical Quarterly* 20 (1988), 1-6.

¹⁸ John Patton Memoir, Atlanta Campaign, LC; William Garrigues Bentley, 4 August 1864, in Smith, *Burning Rails as We Pleased*, 106.

Not all citizens fled before Sherman's army, of course. In mid-June, as the two armies settled in for a protracted fight outside of Marietta, Northerners and Southerners alike noted the presence of women atop nearby Kennesaw Mountain. They mingled with Confederate soldiers and gawked at the Union army below, seemingly enjoying the spectacle. "Day before yesterday you could see a great many women on the top of the mountain waving handkerchiefs to encourage their men to fight," reported a Union volunteer. "Just before they made a charge you could see some of them shaking hands with the soldiers. It was the last farewell for some of them for they were repulsed with considerable loss." What the Confederates thought of these erstwhile cheerleaders is uncertain, and though Union witnesses assumed their presence heartened the Confederate defenders, at least one Mississippian thought their presence odd, their behavior inappropriate. "We are now at the highest peak of Keneysaw Mountain," he recorded. "The Yankeys have just set fire to a large dwelling house just below where we are and the flames are rising higher and higher" As the fire spread, he contemplated the nearby women and appeared more annoyed than encouraged by their presence. "Once in a while I can hear their voices ringing out in merry laughter. It seems strange they can laugh when there is so much misery and distruction all around." Whatever their intentions, Sherman's army made certain they would not return. "We now throw shell on the mountain so that the women will not be apt to go up there to day," a blue-coated soldier concluded.¹⁹

The women, most likely residents of Marietta, were surely not laughing in the coming weeks, for as the Mississippian who looked askance at them attested, "the Yankeys are burning everything as they go." Indeed, Union volunteers eventually burned most of Marietta, as they did to a half-dozen other towns along the route between Chattanooga and Atlanta. Before then, however, the residents would be subjected to the vagaries of Union occupation. After the Confederates abandoned Marietta in early July, General Joseph Hooker and what appeared to be his entire corps visited the matron of a plantation whose property had been the site of a recent skirmish. "[He] came in and shook hands cordially as an old friend," she wrote of the encounter, "saying he was glad

¹⁹ Josiah Dexter Cotton to wife, 20 June 1864, Josiah Dexter Cotton Papers, LC; Albert Quincy Porter Diary, 17 June 1864, Albert Quincy Porter Collection, LC.

to see a citizen at home, that all the houses he had yet passed were deserted and why was it that the inhabitants would run away from their friends.” After inquiring about the local roads (he had in fact stopped to ask directions), he left with a promise that her property should be protected, and was true to his word. He posted guards to ward off vandals – but when the corps departed, so did they. So exposed, there was little for her to do but await the inevitable. “They did not come in the house,” she reported with some relief of the foragers and plunderers who appeared in the yard, “but took everything we had in the storeroom and kitchen. Killed all my fowls but one or two that escaped somehow, took the mothers from little chicks a few days old – and left them chirping. They took all our corn, flour, meal, honey, molasses and meat they found, and left us with a very small supply that we happened to have in the house. Took cooking vessels – flatirons, crocks, pans – pitchers – everything that was outside the house. Took all the children’s books – and valuable files of newspapers – pictures, slates, everything out of the office, went to the carriage house and cut the carriage all to pieces – tore the green grapes from the vines, and the green apples were beaten from the trees. The garden was tramped all over and everything destroyed. A field of fine corn near the house, that was cut down in 15 minutes, and fed to their horses.”²⁰

For those Georgia residents unfortunate enough to be in the path of the army, the destruction of property could be disheartening. The alarmingly wide-spread devastation and consumption of food supplies, on the other hand, was potentially life-threatening. Though Sherman’s army still received supplies via the railroad from Chattanooga, it often proved easier for soldiers to simply take what was available. “I don’t see how the people that stay here are going to live without government help,” wrote an Illinois volunteer in early August, “for their crops are all destroyed and fences torn down and burned for camp fires.”

It’s hard to see a lot of horses and mules turned into a nice cornfield or grainfield and see it all eaten up. And if there is wheat or oats cut and stacked it is only so much more handy. After our army has passed through a country you can’t find anything of the fowl unless it is too small to eat, then they have to be less than a partridge. They even take old setting hens

²⁰ Albert Quincy Porter Diary, 20 May 1864, Albert Quincy Porter Collection, LC. Marietta, Cassville, Kingston, Acworth, and Big Shanty were all destroyed by fire after the capture of Atlanta. Narrative of Minerva Leah Rowles McClatchey, 3 July 1864, in *Cornerstones of Georgia History: Documents That Formed the State*, ed. Thomas A. Scott, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2005), 100-102

off their nests and an old cluck with a lot of chicks doesn't stand a chance at all. In short, everything that is eatable is taken, even down to green melons which are eaten for pickles."

A Michigan volunteer came to a similar conclusion. "Hundreds of families will suffer for food in this state," he maintained, "and the rich will now feel the evils of secession to their own sorrow." Here again was expressed the rampant antipathy for the "rich," those people who allegedly brought on the war and the one group volunteers thought genuinely worthy of starvation. It would not be the wealthy who truly suffered, however, as a sympathetic Ohio officer seemed to understand. "I don't see what the people in this country are going to do next winter," he wrote to his wife in early June. "There will not be anything left for them to live upon. . . .I sometimes feel sorry for the poorer class as they were not to blame in bring[ing] on this war."²¹

As the Confederate Army of Tennessee, now under the command of Texan John Bell Hood, made its final stand outside of Atlanta in August the surrounding countryside was utterly devastated, say nothing of the city itself, which was sporadically battered by Union shot and shell. The army may have been "stationary" as it settled into a siege, but that also meant that the damage it caused was heavily concentrated, and as Sherman tightened his noose around the city, there was damage aplenty. "Our raid south of Atlanta . . . will be felt very severely by the rebs," wrote a volunteer in the 92nd Ohio of an excursion to destroy a railroad, "for our army stripped the country of almost *everything* through which they passed, and for several miles on each side of them." As the month of August wore on, however, and as Union pickets stared across a no man's land separated by an ever-growing complex of trenches, volunteers impatiently began to consider the fate of the city itself which must soon fall into their hands. Militarily speaking, some posited that Atlanta, for all intents and purposes, was worthless. "I don't doubt but what we could take the town any time we wished to," surmised an Ohio colonel, "but except for effect upon the people it would be of no use to us. The army is what we want to destroy, to take the city by assault would cause us heavy loss, without a compensating result." Enlisted men, unsurprisingly, often held different priorities. A volunteer in the 104th Ohio confidently wrote that the army had received enough

²¹ George Conrad to brother, 4 August 1864, Harrisburg Civil War Round Table Collection, USMHI; Josiah Dexter Cotton to wife, 5 June 1864, Josiah Dexter Cotton Papers, LC.

reinforcements “to knock Atlanta into a *cocked hat*” should it become necessary. “For my part,” he added, “I should like to see it burned to the ground.” He would soon be given the opportunity to act on that whim.²²

On September 1, the Confederate army set fire to its warehouses and abandoned Atlanta, and Union soldiers occupied the city the next day. Shortly thereafter, Sherman issued one his more controversial orders of the war, directing the evacuation of all citizens. Feeling it unwise to leave behind a hostile population and unwilling to assume the duties of caring for them, he nevertheless indicated to General Hood that he would gladly provide the necessary assistance and transportation to complete the exodus. With little choice in the matter, Hood accepted the proposal, but not without criticism. “Permit me to say,” he wrote to Sherman, “that the unprecedented measure you propose transcends, in studied and ingenious cruelty, all acts ever before brought to my attention in the dark history of war. In the name of God and humanity I protest, believing that you will find that you are expelling from their homes and firesides the wives and children of a brave people.” The evacuation order likewise drew protests from the city mayor and council members, who pointed out the impracticality of the measure and the hardships that would ensue. “You know the woe, the horrors and the suffering cannot be described by words;” they pleaded, “imagination can only conceive of it, and we ask you to take these things into consideration.”²³

Sherman, with a flare for the dramatic, was unmoved. To General Hood, he pointed out the numerous occasions on which “brave” Confederate soldiers had burned Southern Unionists out of home and destroyed civilian property when it aided their own defense. “Talk thus to the marines, but not to me, who have seen these things,” he retorted. “If we must be enemies, let us be men and fight it out, as we propose to do, and not deal in such hypocritical appeals to God and humanity. God will judge us in due

²² Josiah Dexter Cotton to wife, 9 September 1864, Josiah Dexter Cotton Papers, LC; Caleb H. Carleton to wife, 22 August 1864, Caleb H. Carleton Papers, LC; William G. Bentley to “My dear Bro,” 9 August 1864, in Smith, *Burning Rails as We Pleased*, 109.

²³ Sherman officially ordered the evacuation on 10 September 1864, but made his intentions known to General Hood three days earlier, and later reiterated the reasoning for his decision to General Halleck. See Special Field Orders No. 70, *OR*, Ser. 1, Vol. 39, Pt. 2, 356-357; W.T. Sherman to General John B. Hood, 7 September 1864, *OR*, Ser. 1, Vol. 38, Pt. 5, 822; and W.T. Sherman to General Henry Halleck, 20 September 1864, *OR*, Ser. 1, Vol. 39, Pt. 2, 414. General Hood to Sherman, 9 September 1864, *OR*, Ser. 1, Vol. 39, Pt. 2, 415; James M. Calhoun (mayor), E.E. Rawson (councilman), and S.C. Wells (councilman) to Sherman, 11 September 1864, Ser. 1, Vol. 39, Pt. 2, 417-418.

time, and He will pronounce whether it be more humane to fight with a town full of women, and the families of ‘a brave people’ at our back, or to remove them in time to places of safety among their own friends and people.” His reply to the petition of the city leaders was even more straightforward and seemingly callous. “You cannot qualify war in harsher terms than I will,” he insisted. “War is cruelty, and you cannot refine it; and those who brought war into our country deserve all the curses and maledictions a people can pour out. . . . You might as well appeal against the thunder-storm as against these terrible hardships of war. They are inevitable, and the only way the people of Atlanta can hope once more to live in peace and quiet at home is to stop the war, which can alone be done by admitting that it began in error and is perpetuated in pride.”²⁴

Sherman, who two years earlier had personally threatened to shoot his own foragers for destroying the property of Southern civilians, exemplified the dramatic reversal in opinion of how the war ought to be conducted. Not only did he now hold *all* Southern civilians responsible for the war, but also implied that they deserved whatever fate might befall them. Collective guilt required collective punishment. Even more radical, he appeared to differentiate between war, itself, and its actual prosecution. War, he made clear, was an unmitigated evil. So evil, in fact, that any action – even one that would be considered criminal in peace time – might be excused if it hastened its end. His was a non-moral approach to waging war, one which, if carried to its logical conclusion, all but precluded noncombatant immunity.²⁵

Though his treatise undoubtedly chagrined his Southern audience, for his soldiers it revealed nothing new, as it merely codified and gave official voice to what the vast majority had thought for some time. War was indeed a calamitous debacle, but as

²⁴ Sherman to Hood, 10 September 1864, *OR*, Ser. 1, Vol. 39, Pt. 2, 416; Sherman to Calhoun, Rawson, and Wells, 12 September 1864, *OR*, Ser. 1, Vol. 39, Pt. 2, 418-419.

²⁵ It has been pointed out on occasion that though Sherman’s talk could be ferocious, his bark was often worse than his bite. In the case of the evacuation of Atlanta, Sherman’s exchanges with Hood and city officials were followed in the press, the fact of which he was well aware, which might suggest that he intended his words as propaganda more than anything else. Whatever may be the case, it is certain that his soldiers subscribed to his stated philosophy of war, and they fully intended to act upon it. See Charles Royster, *The Destructive War: William Tecumseh Sherman, Stonewall Jackson, and the Americans*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991), John F. Marszalek, *Sherman: A Soldier’s Passion for Order*, (New York: Free Press, 1992), and Michael Fellman, *Citizen Sherman: A Life of William Tecumseh Sherman*, (New York: Random House, 1995). Michael Walzer has specifically discussed Sherman’s stated philosophy in relation to Just War theory. See Michael Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument with Historical Illustrations*, (New York: Basic Books, 1977), 29-33, 230.

Southerner civilians had helped to bring it about, they could not be considered innocent. “[The citizens] think it dreadful,” wrote one soldier of the evacuation order, “but why did they not consider and count the cost before rushing into war?” The opinion was seemingly unanimous. As the volunteers occupied the city, the few citizens who remained in the wake of the forced exile could only watch in despair. “Many a house has been torn down for our accomodation and nothing left to mark the place, except the chimney or the foundation stones,” wrote a Pennsylvania artillerist. “This is a sad calamity upon the citizens, but such treatment they must expect – they brought this war on & therefore must abide by the consequences.” When Sherman ordered the burning of public buildings and military storage facilities in preparation for the army’s movement toward the coast, many volunteers took advantage of the decree to enact their own brand of justice. Against official orders, countless private dwellings were put to the torch. “Most of the people left their houses without Saying a word for they heard the cry of *Chambersburg* and they knew it would be useless to contend with the soldiers,” recounted one Michigan soldier. Significantly, as he approached a house with torch in hand, the tears of a young girl stopped cold his incendiary impulses. “She looked into my face with such a pleading look that I could not have the heart to fire the place So I dropped the torch and walked away,” he admitted. “but *Chambersburg* is dearly paid for.”²⁶

2.4.3 “Reap the Whirlwind”: Georgia and the Carolinas

Atlanta taken, Sherman had no intention of resting on his laurels. Remaining in the city would upset the army’s momentum, forcing it to act on the defensive against Hood’s expelled Confederates who now threatened his lines of supply. Pursuing an army he had already defeated once and defending supply routes seemed a fruitless endeavor. “Until we can repopulate Georgia,” he wrote to Grant in early October, “it is useless to occupy it, but the utter destruction of its [rail]roads, houses, and people will cripple their military resources.” For some time, he had contemplated a grand and decisive maneuver,

²⁶ James A. Congleton Diary, 26 September 1864, LC; David Nichols to mother, 26 October 1864, Harrisburg Civil War Round Table Collection, USMHI; Quoted in Joseph T. Glatthaar, *The March to the Sea and Beyond: Sherman’s Troops in the Savannah and Carolinas Campaigns*, (New York: New York University Press, 1985), 139.

one that would significantly shorten or even end the war should it succeed. Leaving part of his army to deal with the Confederate force which had been evicted from its Atlanta base, he proposed to take the remainder, some 62,000 men, on a sweeping march through the central part of the state to the seaport city of Savannah. "I can make the march," he insisted, "and make Georgia howl." Though Sherman ostensibly sought to undermine the South's war-making capabilities, his primary target was the psyche of Southern civilians. The presence of a large army moving unimpeded through the heart of Confederacy, consuming and destroying, would crush civilian morale and showcase to the world the inevitability of a Union victory. "This may not be war, but rather statesmanship," he admitted to Grant.²⁷

The first of Sherman's men left Atlanta in mid-November, and the last regiments arrived in Savannah a month later, ragged, weary, and victorious. The volunteers had cut a path through the state sixty miles wide and three hundred miles long, swatting away what little military resistance they encountered. As per orders, they foraged liberally, seizing animals and supplies as it suited them, and destroyed railroads, outbuildings, cotton gins, mills, and other resources that might have aided the Confederate war effort. The diary of an Illinois volunteer highlights the typical activities of the army on the march, and especially the range of responses which the men exhibited toward civilians (mostly women and children) in their midst:

November 28, 1864

Come to fine and large plantation. Women crying. Little girl comes to me and asks will you burn all our property. I tell her only the cotton and cotton gins. Soldiers take nearly [all] they have that is movable. . . . Stop at house, talk with a woman. She says she did not think there was so many people in the United States as there are in this Army.

November 29, 1864

Passed through Louisville at sundown. Small town but rather nice. Four or five buildings burnt. Set on fire on account of "Southern Lady" spitting in a soldier's face. Served her right.

December 2, 1864

Reach a fine plantation about 8 o'clock. Guards placed around house. Would not be so, was the building owned by a poor man.

²⁷ Sherman to Grant, 9 October 1864, *OR*, Ser. 1, Vol. 39, Pt. 3, 162; Sherman to Grant, 6 November 1864, *OR*, Ser. 1, Vol. 39, Pt. 3, 660.

December 3, 1864

Stop at a plantation owned by a widow named Jones. She is protected on account of taking a sick union soldier from the prison at Millen and keeping him four months. The soldier not yet able to travel and has to be left. Our advance enters Millen in the morning, and find our prisoners all taken off. Three dead and unburied. Destroy the prison and also the town. First brigade tears up the railroad.

December 5, 1864

Stop at house. Everything movable taken. The women crying. Tell them they should have immigrated from this country before the war. They say that the women had nothing to do with the trouble. We can't see it. Consider them our worst enemies.²⁸

Despite the infamy that still surrounds Sherman's march – especially in the South – it was for the most part an orderly affair. Cutting loose from his base of supplies in Atlanta was a risky endeavor, and preserving military discipline was paramount to survival. To prevent the army from turning into a mob, Sherman prohibited men from entering private dwellings and from foraging individually, instead assigning the task to authorized details. The presence of bushwhackers discouraged free-booting, as well. Few battle deaths occurred during the march, but at least sixty volunteers met their end at the hands of enraged citizens and guerrillas. Many were found by comrades with their throats cut or hanging from trees, often adorned with signs proclaiming “death to all foragers.”²⁹

As suggested by the words of the Illinois diarist above, however, events sometimes got out of hand. Sherman accepted the excesses as inevitable, and was not inclined to punish volunteers for their actions. It was not they, after all, who were responsible for the situation, a view he articulated to a subordinate before the army departed for Savannah. In preparation for the march, he had ordered the destruction of

²⁸ James E. Morrow Diary, 28 November – 5 December 1864, Civil War Times Illustrated Collection, USMHI. For secondary studies of Sherman's March, see Burke Davis, *Sherman's March*, (New York: Random House, 1980), Glatthaar, *The March to the Sea and Beyond*, Anne J. Bailey, *War and Ruin: William T. Sherman and the Savannah Campaign*, (Lanham MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), Noah Andre Trudeau, *Southern Storm: Sherman's March to the Sea*, (New York: HarperCollins, 2008). For a scholarly treatment of how Sherman and his march have come to be viewed in popular memory, see Edward Caudill and Paul Ashdown, *Sherman's March in Myth and Memory*, (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2008).

²⁹ Joseph Glatthaar has calculated that at least 64 soldiers were killed in this manner in Georgia, and another 109 in South Carolina. See, *The March to the Sea*, 128.

much of the rail line running from Chattanooga to Atlanta. In all, volunteers destroyed some fifty miles of track, but used the opportunity to destroy several towns along the route, as well. Riding into Marietta to observe the operations there, Sherman and an aide discovered that the soldiers who had preceded them had been hard at work. The court house was in flames, the fire spreading to the adjacent buildings. Though a few volunteers furiously manned a water pump, their efforts were in vain, and as more fires popped up it became evident that the town must burn. The aide, new to Sherman's command, asked the General if it had been his intention to destroy it. "Can't save it," came the reply. "I've seen more of this sort of thing than you." As a squad of soldiers passed, Sherman waved a hand in their direction. "There are the men who do this," he explained. "Set as many guards as you please, they will slip in and set fire. . . .I never ordered burning of any dwelling – didn't order this, but can't be helped. I say *Jeff. Davis burnt them.*" Volunteers were of the same mind as their commander, refusing to be held accountable for the consequences of what they considered a foolish Southern decision. Upon reaching Savannah, a sergeant in the 5th Connecticut reflected on the journey which brought him there. "I rather felt sorry for some women who cried & begged so piteously for the soldiers to leave them a little," he admitted. "Yet after all I don't know but extermination is our only means now. They feel now the effects of their wickedness & who can sympathize very much with them. I only hope experience will prove a good schoolmaster to them."³⁰

Sherman offhandedly estimated that his army caused \$100,000,000 in damage during the course of the march, "\$20,000,000 of which has inured to our advantage, and the remainder is simple waste and destruction." And he was not yet finished. After a short respite in Savannah, which he offered as a "Christmas gift" to the President, the

³⁰ M.A. DeWolfe Howe, ed., *Marching with Sherman: Passages from the Letters and Campaign Diaries of Henry Hitchcock, Major and Assistant Adjutant General of Volunteers, November 1864-May 1865*, (University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 52-53; Rufus Mead to "Dear Folks at Home, 28 December 1864, Rufus Mead Papers, LC.

army turned north. To its west lay a swath of destruction unprecedented in American warfare; before it loomed South Carolina.³¹

Though much has been written about the devastation in Georgia, it truly pales in comparison to what transpired in the Palmetto State. For the volunteers, the movement into South Carolina was a highly anticipated event. As the birthplace of secession, they held the entire state responsible for the war, and there existed a general understanding that the march to Savannah had been but prelude. Crossing the state line in early February, the 89th Ohio carried out a ritual which was oft repeated by other regiments. “One of the boys,” wrote a volunteer, “stepped out from the ranks and turning around yelled in a lusty voice, ‘Boys, this is old South Carolina, lets give her h—ll,’ to which there was many favorable responses.” Encamped on the grounds of a splendid plantation, an Illinois soldier ruminated on South Carolinians’ guilt and the punishment that awaited them. “I think some of the prominent rebels will have an opportunity to feel the cruel curse of war,” he wrote.

We are now in South Carolina where treason was conceived. Where this dreadful war was launched by firing on Fort Sumter. You have been in the forefront – you have brought us here – you are responsible – you must pay the penalty. The foot of the hated Yankee will press your sacred soil. We will visit your city’s and eat of the fruits of your land. Some of your fat poultry and nicely cured hams may help to satisfy the hunger of the yank. South Carolina why did you do it? You have sown the wind – you will reap the whirlwind.”³²

The residents of South Carolina, who had mostly escaped the vagaries of war, were about to receive a very rude awakening. A Pennsylvania trooper marked his regiment’s arrival with a brief diary entry: “Rockville, S.C. February, 4th. We are now in South Carolina. We commenced operations by burning down the town above mentioned.” Indeed, Rockville was but one of many towns to disappear, engulfed by flames. In many instances nothing was left to mark their existence except for scorched chimneys, dubbed “Sherman’s sentinels.” Inconsequential villages such as Lexington, Winnsboro, and Blackville were left in ashes. The town of Barnwell, unfortunate enough

³¹ W.T. Sherman to General Henry Halleck, 1 January 1865, *OR*, Ser. 1, Vol. 44, 13; Sherman to Lincoln, 22 December 1864, in *Memoirs of General W.T. Sherman*, ed. Michael Fellman, (New York: Penguin Books, 2000), 592.

³² W.C. Johnson Diary, 5 February 1865, LC; James A. Congleton Diary, 4 January 1865, LC.

to carry the name of a prominent secessionist family, was renamed “Burnwell” by the volunteers who marched away from its smoldering ruins. “The destruction of property as we pass along is truly very great,” confided an Ohio volunteer in his diary on February 8. “Surely the ‘Mother State of Secession’ . . . is being visited by the ‘Bosom of Destruction’ or what may be worse, ‘Sherman’s Yankee Army of Mudsills and Lincoln’s hirelings, etc, etc,’ as they call us.”³³

The sense of justice and righteous retribution which pervaded their actions was unmistakable. “The people are very ignorant and all rank rebels; but the day of their humiliation has come,” insisted one Union trooper. “Wherever we go they are left homeless and houseless. . . .The rebels burn all the corn and forage; we burn the cotton and outhouses. The infantry coming in the rear burn the houses, and there is nothing left. You cannot imagine the destruction on all sides.”

When we march, when there is no enemy near at hand, each division takes a different parallel road, and when they all stretch out from right to left, it covers an extent of country ranging from 75 to 100 miles in width *and everything* – I say *everything* – I mean it is destroyed. Fences are set on fire . . . and a fire will burn fences for miles without going out. I have traveled all day, and my feet would keep warm all day from the fences on fire at each side of the road. The roads catch fire; the grass in the fields catches fire, and everything burns up. I have sometimes thought that the very Devil was in the elements. Even large trees catch fire and burn down, making it unsafe to travel near the woods. You cannot imagine it; the “Niggers” look on with speechless awe and wonder. Poor devils; they think that the “Yankees” are certainly preliminaries to the last-day of which they have heard of from the more intelligent. I believe, if there are judgements inflicted upon men in their “latter days” that Sherman’s Army are the avenging angels, and that the “judgements” are for the fool cause of slavery.

“The sun,” he observed in closing, “looks red through the smoke of the cotton incense.”³⁴

³³ William W. Prichard Diary, 4 February 1865, Civil War Miscellaneous Collection, USMHI; W.C. Johnson Diary, 8 February 1865, LC. Robert Woodward Barnwell, a former US Senator, served as a Confederate Senator from South Carolina throughout the war. Robert Barnwell Rhett and his son of the same name were both “fire-eaters.” Robert Sr. served in the Confederate Congress; Robert Jr. edited the notoriously pro-secession Charleston *Mercury*. Both the town and county were named for a Barnwell ancestor.

³⁴ William W. Prichard Diary, 9, February, 20 February 1865, Civil War Miscellaneous Collection, USMHI.

Though the soldiers retained their particular hatred of the wealthy, making a special point to destroy plantation mansions, their wrath inevitably precluded the discrimination that was practiced in Georgia. Houses, empty and occupied, were burned. The poor were plundered along with the rich. Foraging and pillaging became virtually indistinguishable. Animals – cows, hogs, dogs, and even their own worn out horses – were shot down and left to rot. Infantry mounted on confiscated mules scoured the countryside bringing in all manner of supplies and loot. When wandering soldiers were waylaid by guerrillas or enraged citizens, retaliation was swift. One of the “avenging angels,” a drummer in the 43rd Ohio, certainly felt the label to be appropriate. “You can have no idea of the destruction that we are bringing down on the heads of the Devils that started this war,” he reported. Others, however, seemed more inclined to think of the army as an all-powerful and vengeful god. “Pity for these inhabitants, I have none,” conceded a Massachusetts volunteer. “They are rebels, and I am almost prepared to agree with Sherman that a rebel has no rights, not even the right to live except by our permission.”³⁵

On February 17, Sherman’s army occupied the state capital of Columbia. That night, the city mysteriously caught fire, though it is unlikely that the blaze was intentionally set. In their retreat, Confederates had attempted to burn bales of cotton in the streets rather than let them fall into the hands of the enemy, and they continued to smolder after they left. An untimely windstorm reignited the cotton, spreading the fire throughout the city and impeding all attempts to control it. Worse, some of Sherman’s men chanced upon stores of alcohol, and a repeat of Chambersburg ensued. Though numbers of soldiers attempted to aid civilians in putting out the fires, many more entered homes to pillage and burn. Morning showed that approximately one-third of the city – 265 residences and 193 businesses and public buildings – had been consumed by the fire. Though few rejoiced in its destruction, neither did they lament it. “This army has crossed the proud state of South Carolina, wrote one of Sherman’s men upon reflection. “She has tasted the blight of war which she richly deserves to.” The feeling was near unanimous. South Carolina, the home of the most rabid secessionists, had been “justly” mauled and

³⁵ David Auld letter/diary [n.d. – p. 11 of letter], David Auld Papers, WRHS; Charles Fessenden Morse, 31 January 1865, in *Letters Written during the Civil War*, (privately printed by the author, 1898), 211. For further details of the destruction in South Carolina, see Glatthaar, *The March to the Sea*, 119-155.

humiliated. “They have all got what they boasted they would give us (war to the bitter end),” maintained another. “They have found the last *ditch* and all are satisfied they have fallen so low that the most aristocratic will beg their food and clothing from our soldiers. . . . I am so glad S.C. got a good dose before the war was over.”³⁶

Upon reaching North Carolina, Sherman’s juggernaut slowed, and the destruction which had heretofore marked its course abated – to a degree. Their vengeance spent on South Carolina, the volunteers reverted to more “ordinary” levels of devastation. “North Carolina was treated with a little more compassion, for at least not as much was burned, but still enough to keep the memory alive, for where we passed through nothing edible remained behind,” attested an 82nd Illinois volunteer from Goldsboro. “Only by such campaigns one can starve out the Confederacy!” he insisted. “That is how it is everywhere we get to – everything edible is taken and no mercy; that is how it had to come, they would not have it otherwise.”³⁷

³⁶ James A. Congleton Diary, 4 March 1865, LC; David Auld letter/diary, 4 May 1865, David Auld Papers, WRHS. See also, Marion B. Lucas, *Sherman and the Burning of Columbia*, (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2000, c1976), and Charles Royster, *The Destructive War*, chapter one, “The Burning of Columbia.”

³⁷ Friedrich P. Kappelman to parents, 26 March 1865, Civil War Times Illustrated Collection, USMHI.

2.5 Conclusion

“If God Wills That It Continue”

On April 9, 1865, as Sherman’s army tore its way through North Carolina, Lee’s Army of Northern Virginia at last surrendered, unofficially ending the war. Two months later, the 6th Ohio Cavalry had not yet been mustered out of service. Stationed near Appomattox, Virginia the regiment continued to patrol the country – not to hunt down and punish recalcitrant rebels, nor to raze villages in a post-victory frenzy, but, tellingly, to offer aid and distribute rations to citizens. In the course of one of their stops, a particularly cantankerous and unrepentant “secesh” began to lecture them as to how the North had illegally seized Southern property and freed the slaves. The North, they countered, had not started the war. Ridiculing their logic, he refused to drop the matter. “At last I got mad,” reported one trooper, “and said to him, the North did not commence the war and if I was in his place I should think I got off well if I only lost property. For when the men of the South took up arms against the U.S. they committed an act of treason and their just dues was death and that any d—m one of them ought to be hung.” Undoubtedly, there were many in the Union army who thought likewise, just as many Southerners believed Northerners deserved a similar fate for invading their country, burning their homes, and using their slaves against them. The obvious question to ask, then, given that the desire existed, is why nothing of the sort occurred.¹

Even though volunteers firmly believed in the righteousness of their respective causes, the war itself often struck them as surreal. There was, thought many, something plainly awry with the idea of Americans killing Americans. “Oh, what a horrid and unnatural state of affairs this war has produced both north and south how many homes have and will be made desolate by it,” lamented one Virginian in June 1862. “Would to God that it could be ended. I am heartily sick of it.” A Pennsylvanian thought likewise. “There is a radical wrong at the root of all this,” he remarked of the war. “We claim to be the most civilized nation on the earth – and to illustrate the fact, we are butchering each other by hundreds of thousands.” After witnessing the aftermath of the battle at Sharpsburg, Maryland in September 1862, a West Virginia cavalryman came to a similar

¹ Thomas M. Covert to “My Dear Wife,” 17 June 1865, Thomas M. Covert Papers, WRHS.

conclusion. “The last ten days have gone far towards convincing me that this is an unnatural war,” he wrote. “As I rode over the bloody fields of South Mountain, of Sharpsburg, or Antietam, and saw men of the same blood, of the same dialect, of the same country lying side by side their bodies mangled and chilled in death – to what other conclusion could I come . . .” A volunteer in the 55th Ohio, surveying the graves of some thirty Texans near Fredericksburg, was more explicit as to what made the war so tragic, so “unnatural.” “Poor deluded victims of foul traitors,” he reflected. “Strange that such delusion can possess this noble race of ours.”²

The sight of mangled corpses certainly gave men pause, but so too did fraternization. A little more than a week after the battle at Fredericksburg – a fight in which Confederates handily slaughtered thousands of Union soldiers – pickets from the opposing armies were again engaged in fraternization. As one group traded tobacco and newspapers, the topic of conversation inevitably turned to the war. “They say they are tired of fighting us,” related a Union participant, “that men from the North and South are equally brave; and that they (many of them) would like to have the politicians on both sides – the *leaders* – shut up in a tight room to fight till one side or the other were all killed and so decide the matter instead of us shooting each other.” It was, he thought, a swell idea. “I thought their remarks very sensible. I have nothing against rebels *as individuals*; but as enemies, I wish they were exterminated. Those I have seen face to face appear to be fine fellows . . .” These meetings were far from isolated. A North Carolina officer reported his experience with loquacious Union pickets along the Rappahannock River a few months later. “They seemed inclined to talk from the other side & some of our officers indulged them a while,” he wrote. “It really did seem singular to me that we should be confronting each other so friendly, & at the same time each army or the leaders of the same were plotting each other’s destruction.” This sort of existential thinking could devastate morale, prompting commanders to forbid such interaction. Following a crackdown on fraternization in the trenches outside of Atlanta, Union soldiers overheard a Confederate officer complain that “if the tobacco trade was

² Robert Gaines Haile Diary, 12 June 1862, Soldier Diary Collection, MOC; Edgar A. Walters Memoir, July – November 1864 (Box 5), Harrisburg Civil War Round Table Collection, USMHI; James Abraham to “Dear Friends,” 23 September 1862, Civil War Times Illustrated Collection, USMHI; Henry Henney Diary, 13 December 1862, Civil War Times Illustrated Collection, USMHI.

allowed to go on between the pickets the enlisted men would make peace in a week in spite of the Devil.”³

The reactions of volunteers to civilians – particularly women and children – followed a similar pattern. Fantasizing of destruction and extermination could certainly be cathartic, but adding a human dimension to the much-maligned “secesh” or “Yankee” necessarily complicated the situation. Like many of his comrades, a young volunteer in the 65th Ohio grew to despise rebels, and wished they could be wiped from the face of the earth. Yet he could not bring himself to confiscate a favorite horse of a sobbing, teenaged girl. “I can perform the (sometimes unpleasant) duties of foraging in spite of men, women, or darkies but a beautiful young lady with her pretty eyes suffused with tears staggers a fellow,” he wrote. “I am a boy and human.” For every Union soldier who willingly pillaged and burned, there were others who questioned the legitimacy of it – even in the midst of the widespread devastation in South Carolina in 1865. “I am more and more impressed with the burning business and the cruelty of it,” wrote one of the Union destructors. “I do not believe in it, and the more I see of it, the more I hate the principle. . . . I did not enlist to fight women and children and I shall never raise my hand to assist in any such nefarious business. Of course they have wronged us! the rebels have burned *our* towns and exacted contributions from our Northern citizens to save their homes [a reference to Chambersburg]; but the principles of humanity are adverse to such inhuman retaliation. If we were to retaliate in kind for every wrong that the rebels commit, this war would soon assume the no quarter system – and I am not so sure but it will yet.” A similar pattern was visible among Confederates, as well. “I thought before I crossed the [Potomac] river how heartless I would be toward the yankee women & all,” wrote a Virginian with General Early’s command in July 1864, “but fiddlestix when I saw these two girls with tears trembling in their eyes my wrath & spirit of revenge all passed away & I felt like saying or doing anything in the world just to remove their tears.

³ Edwin O. Wentworth to “My Dear Wife,” 22 December 1862, Edwin O. Wentworth Papers, LC; Benjamin Franklin Little to wife, 9 June 1863, SHC, UNC; Caleb H. Carleton to wife, 24 August 1864, Caleb H. Carleton Papers, LC.

. . . Say what you will a lady is a lady be she union or secesh & a *gentleman* will not be long in recognizing the fact.⁴

Though the self-proclaimed “gentleman” above would later participate in the burning of Chambersburg (a city notable to Confederates for its “unladylike” women), his apparent sincerity hints at one of the fundamental restraints under which soldiers operated during the war, and the moral repugnance they attached to its violation. As a salve for troubled consciences, it was common for volunteers to blame vandalism, arson, and thievery on a “criminal” element rather than acknowledging that such acts were so widely practiced as to have become an accepted method of waging war. In regards to sexual assault and rape, however, their accusations ring true. In a Victorian culture marked by an almost maudlin reverence for women and in which self-control was considered a hallmark of manhood, volunteers looked upon it as the most heinous of deeds. Consequently, in proportion to the millions of men who eventually entered Federal or Confederate service, the numbers of reported rapes were relatively small, and those convicted of the crime were subjected to severe punishment – including execution.⁵

To suggest that the Civil War was a “low-rape war,” however, does not, of course, imply the absence of wide-spread gender-specific violence. In fact, what has come to be defined as “symbolic rape” occurred quite frequently, and followed a distinct pattern where soldiers would forcibly enter a home and rifle and pillage through a woman’s personal belongings, often in her presence. Whether or not men physically mistreated women during such incidents (and they often did), there always remained the unspoken threat of sexual violence. Even in these instances, however, there was a sense that some line had been crossed, as an Ohio cavalryman who expressed a sense of guilt after raiding a house in Missouri in early 1862 demonstrates. “There was one thing when we took this

⁴ Wilbur F. Hinman to “My Dear Mother,” 1 August 1863, Wilbur F. Hinman Papers, WRHS; William M. Prichard Diary, 9 February 1865, Civil War Miscellaneous Collection, USMHI; J. Kelley Bennette Diary, 5 July 1864, SHC, UNC.

⁵ Bell I. Wiley has asserted that of the 267 Union soldiers put to death for crimes committed during the war, twenty-two were executed for rape, and eleven of them were black. See Wiley, *The Life of Billy Yank*, 205. Confederate statistics are unknown, but probably comparable. The number of actual rapes, let alone those attempted, were certainly higher than the execution rate as many incidents likely went unreported, the culprit(s) were never caught, or if convicted received a lighter sentence. Thomas P. Lowry, who sampled five percent of Union court martial records, reported at least thirty cases involving an assault or an attempted assault. Extrapolating from that finding, one could safely place the total number of recorded assaults at no less than 600 for the entire war. See *The Stories the Soldier Wouldn’t Tell*, 123.

old secesh house that made me feel bad,” he wrote from Platte City, Missouri. “I ran up stairs into a young lady’s bed room. there was the bed just as she had got out of it, fine bed clothes, a spring bottom bed, her drawers all open and every thing as a young lady would leave them to go down to breakfast, her guitar all in tune, her love letters directed to ----- the captain would not let us read them.” In early July 1863 a contingent of soldiers from the 25th Wisconsin received orders to search a plantation house near Snyder’s Bluff, Mississippi, thought to be a hideout for guerrillas. An investigation of the grounds turned up the remnants of several camp fires, raising their suspicions. Next, they moved to the house, itself. “Just as we stepped in,” related one,

three women, an old grey haired lady and two young ladies came up to us and asked us not to come into the house. The oldest [daughter] pleaded pitifully, wringing and rubbing her hands first one and then the other, and then reaching out her hands toward us as far as she could urging us to stay out, all the while crying and at times screaming as if her heart was breaking. She said her mother was sick and likely to die and begged us to go away.

Her tears and pleading were for naught. A soldier rudely pushed her aside and began to tear through the contents of a closet. Soldiers swarmed the place, and cloaks, dresses, bonnets, and undergarments were strewn about the residence in short order. “I never felt meaner in my life,” reported the soldier-chronicler afterwards. “I got ashamed and wished that I was out of it.” Even during the Atlanta Campaign, as Union soldiers freely ransacked civilian dwellings, a volunteer in the 2nd Iowa could still report disgustedly that some women had been visited and insulted by a few “low-lived soldiers.” “It is a Shame and Disgrace to our army,” he wrote of their behavior. “Such men ought to be shot without trial. They are worse than brutes of the field. Oh for a day of retribution to Such Scoundrels.”⁶

One would think that the guerrilla wars, which were marked by a flagrant disregard for noncombatant immunity, might offer a stark exception to the rule, but even

⁶ For a comparative discussion of rape in the Civil War, see Susan Brownmiller, *Against Our Will: Men, Women, and Rape*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1975), 88. On the idea of symbolic rape, see Fellman, *Inside War*, 199-214, Stephen V. Ash, *When the Yankees Came: Conflict and Chaos in the Occupied South*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 200-201, and George C. Rable, *Civil Wars: Women and the Crisis of Southern Nationalism*, (Champaign: The University of Illinois Press, 1991), 160-162. Samuel Trescott to “Dear cousin,” (?) February 1862, Samuel Trescott Papers, OHS; Chauncey Herbert Cooke to “Dear Father,” 2 July 1863, in *Soldier Boy’s Letters to His Father and Mother, 1861-1865*, (News-Office, 1915), 47; John N. Ferguson Diary, 7 July 1864, LC.

here women – *white* women, and no one else – were normally accorded a degree of protection. Bushwhackers and the counterinsurgents who tracked them may have lacked the discipline of regular units but, as has been pointed out, they were not at heart completely nihilistic. In other words, despite their brutality they still adhered to a certain code of chivalric honor which called for the defense of home, family, and dependents. Quantrill’s men burned Lawrence and massacred the male population, but they spared women and there were no reports of rape. Likewise, though the North Carolinians responsible for the incident at Shelton Laurel seemingly possessed few qualms about abusing women, they killed none and there is no reliable evidence to suggest that they engaged in sexual misconduct. The line was a supremely thin one, but it generally held, and most soldiers would continue to respect white women regardless of their actions simply by virtue of their gender *and* race. As an Illinois sergeant rather vulgarly explained to a Tennessee woman brazen enough to cheer for Jefferson Davis in his presence, “By God, Maddam, your cunt is all that saves your life.”⁷

The actual destruction of human life was cause for even greater alarm, and for *most* volunteers the intentional killing of noncombatants, especially women and children, would not be countenanced. Even guerrillas, as noted above, loosely adhered to the rule. Particularly instructive in this matter is the case of Mary Virginia “Jennie” Wade, who gained notoriety as the only civilian casualty during the battle of Gettysburg when she was inadvertently killed by a stray minie ball. That her death would be so prominently remembered (her house has since been converted into a museum) suggests it was anomalous. The same might be said of another woman’s death near Brandon, Mississippi in early February 1864. “In firing at some rebels near a house our cavalry accidently kill a woman,” recorded an Illinois volunteer. “I feel very sorry for the little children.” General Sherman, according to another, “caused a notice to be immediately posted on the house, specifying the manner of her death and ordering the premises to be held as sacred.” Even during Sherman’s infamous march to the sea, civilian deaths remained

⁷ Historian Michael Fellman has succinctly defined the limits of guerrilla violence, the attitudes of guerrillas toward women and non-whites, and how they rationalized their actions. See, “At the Nihilist Edge: Reflections on Guerrilla War during the American Civil War, in *“On the Road to Total War: The American Civil War and the German Wars for Unification, 1861-1871*, eds., Stig Förster and Jörg Nagler, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 519-540. William Moore Parkinson to “My Dear Family,” 2 July 1862, William Moore Parkinson Letters, <<http://www.geocities.com/cindyparkinson/page44t.html>>.

atypical. When an eighty year old man on a mule was shot after failing to heed an officer's warning to halt, a Union veteran could with sincerity refer to the incident as "one of the accidents of the war."⁸

There has as yet been no serious inquiry into the numbers of civilians who died as a result of the conflict, but a conservative estimate would likely figure in the tens of thousands. Few of these deaths resulted intentionally, instead being attributable to the common vagaries of war: hunger and malnutrition, disease spread by the armies, and accidental deaths. It was never really a war against civilians per se, but a war against civilian morale waged through the destruction of property. Soldiers did not wish to destroy fellow Americans, but the political views which they espoused. Most Southerners insisted that the Confederacy was waging a defensive war. If Northerners wished to avoid further bloodshed, all they need do, as volunteers so often insisted, was simply to "let us alone." Southerners, likewise, could secure their safety by renouncing rebellion. "I want peace," Sherman explained to the leaders of Atlanta immediately before he expelled the city's residents, "and believe it can now only be reached through union and war, and I will ever conduct war with a view to perfect an early success. But, my dear sirs, when that peace does come, you may call on me for anything. Then will I share with you the last cracker, and watch with you to shield your homes and families against danger from every quarter." Though the war was one of competing ideologies, neither side defined the other solely by the ideas for which it stood. This meant that only the cause, rather than its supporters, need be destroyed. A New Hampshire volunteer, encamped near Berryville, Virginia in 1865, seemed to vindicate Sherman's promise of fraternal reconciliation when he befriended a parolee from the Army of Northern Virginia, though managing the relationship required a bit of finesse. "He is a violent secesh," admitted the New Englander, "but we get along well together because we avoid such topics of conversation as would make trouble."⁹

⁸ The story of Jennie Wade and how she has been "remembered" since her death is ably discussed in Margaret S. Creighton's, *The Colors of Courage: Gettysburg's Forgotten History: Immigrants, Women and African Americans in the Civil War's Defining Battle*, (New York: Basic Books, 2005), 121, 194-198; James Eastburn Diary, 8 February 1864, WRHS; Lucius W. Barber, *Army Memoirs*, 133-134; Quoted in Drew Gilpin Faust, *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008), 138.

⁹ James McPherson has estimated that civilian deaths in the South "might" have approached fifty thousand. See, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 691, fn. 53.

The willingness to distinguish between a “wicked” cause and the misguided Americans who supported it undoubtedly limited the extent of the destruction during the war and averted wholesale retaliation in its aftermath. Indeed, in the years and decades that followed, significant attention was given to the idea of sectional reconciliation, underscored by regular battlefield reunions between elderly veterans who shook hands across the same rock walls from whence they had once tried to kill one another. “We were fighting the confederate army, not southern men,” explained a Union veteran in 1910. “When a battle was on we were to shoot to kill . . . but when we were on picket duty, acting only as sentries, we were friendly, guarding our posts but displaying no individual enmity. All through the war we sang: ‘We’ll hang Jeff Davis to a sour apple tree,’ but when we captured him, did we? When he was no longer dangerous animosity against him evaporated. There is nothing of the vendetta in American character.” The war, he implied, was not personal, but simply business. Such sentiments were more readily expressed by the victors, naturally, but even aging Confederates seemed inclined to bury the past – even if the peace they made with it was colored with an air of reproach and nostalgia. “The United States has no North, no South, no East, no West. *We are one and undivided,*” wrote a Tennessee veteran in 1882. “We are willing to forget and forgive those who have wronged and falsified us.”¹⁰

As the last statement makes clear, conciliatory rhetoric and displays of forgiveness barely disguised the fact that postwar relations between North and South were rife with recrimination, and that the old Confederacy, defeated and occupied, remained defiant in the face of Union victory and wracked with violence. Four years of death and destruction were neither easily forgotten nor forgiven. “If I should speak my real feelings, I should say that I am sorry the war is ended,” admitted a Massachusetts volunteer shortly after Lee’s surrender and the assassination of Lincoln. “Pray do not

Frank M. Myers to “Dear Home Folks,” 16 May 1864, Civil War Miscellaneous Collection, USMHI; John W. Joyce to wife, 18 June 1864, Harrisburg Civil War Round Table Collection, USMHI; Memoir of Johnny Green, 25 December 1864, in Albert Dennis Kerwin and Kent Masterson Brown, eds., *Johnny Green of the Orphan Brigade: The Journal of a Confederate Soldier*, (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2002), 184; W.T. Sherman to James M. Calhoun, E.E. Rawson, and S.C. Wells, 12 September 1864, *OR*, Ser. 1, Vol. 39, Pt. 2, 418-419; John Henry Burrill to parents, 23 April 1865, Civil War Time Illustrated Collection, USMHI.

¹⁰ C.W. Bardeen, *A Little Fifer’s War Diary*, (Syracuse: C.W. Bardeen, 1910), 57; Sam R. Watkins, *Co. Aytch: A Side Show of the Big Show*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997, c.1882), 245-246.

think me murderous . . . but all the punishment we could inflict on the rebels would not atone for one drop of the blood so cruelly spilled. I would exterminate them, root and branch. They have often said they preferred it before subjugation, and, with the good help of God, I would give it to them.” Fraternal affection was notably absent from the memoir of a Confederate Missourian, as well. Writing in 1868 during the height of Reconstruction, he not only lambasted the “cruelties” enacted against the South during the war, but roundly condemned the current attempt of “radical” Northerners to strip white Southerners of all dignity by imposing racial equality. “Upon our own American soil has been established a despotism more fearful and revolting than that which rules in the empire of the Muscovite,” he lamented, “and scenes are in preparation here, which, in depth of wretchedness and misery and in the height of gloating vengeance and tyranny, will even surpass the most forlorn and dreary spectacle ever exhibited on the ice-bound wastes of Siberia.” The victims of these “radical cannibals,” he insisted, “will be countless, their fate sadder, more tragic and gloomy.”¹¹

Albert T. Morgan, a former Union officer from Wisconsin who traveled to Yazoo City, Mississippi after the war to try his hand at running a plantation and saw mill, discovered just how this smoldering resentment might translate into action. Having sold a quantity of lumber to a local businessman on credit and not receiving payment for several months, he went to collect on the bill. The purchaser, a former Confederate captain, explained that he was short of cash, but assured him the payment would be forthcoming. Departing on what he believed to be amicable terms, Morgan shortly thereafter was chased down on the sidewalk by the flustered debtor. “What in the hell do you mean, you Yankee son of a bitch?” he spewed. “By God, sir, I’ll have you to bear in mind that I pay my debts; I’m a gentleman, by God, sir, and if you don’t know it, I’ll teach you how to conduct yourself toward one, damn you.” He knocked Morgan to the ground and continued to pummel him as a sympathetic crowd gathered and shouted: “Fair play here! Fair play! Kill the damn Yankee! Damn him!” He was rescued by

¹¹ T.R. Keenan, 20 April 1865, in Lydia Minturn Post, ed., *Soldiers’ Letters, from Camp, Battlefield, and Prison*, (New York: Bunce & Huntington, 1865), 467-468; Ephraim McDowell Anderson, *Memoirs: Historical and Personal, Including the Campaigns of the First Missouri Confederate Brigade*, (St. Louis: Times Printing, 1868), 433, 435.

several Union veterans who, after cleaning the blood from his face, lectured him as to the stupidity of traveling unarmed in such a hostile climate.¹²

The ugliness of the postwar years was, of course, firmly rooted in the war itself, suggesting that not far beneath the veneer of civility there lurked countervailing forces which chipped away at the restraint soldiers generally exercised toward themselves and civilians, and there is no reason to believe that it would have continued indefinitely. For both sides, the desire to retaliate against real or perceived injustices continually threatened to escalate the violence to unprecedented levels. More alarming, however, was the psychological transformation necessary to carry out such acts. Burning cities and stripping bare the countryside inevitably required a degree of depersonalization and “otherization” of those people who might otherwise be called innocent victims. Southerners, in defining the enemy, typically drew upon the pre-war stereotypical image of the “Yankee.” Northerners, they insisted, were a cowardly bunch, more inclined to worship the dollar than the Almighty and decidedly lacking in martial prowess. They were devoid of honor as Southerners understood the term, and fought only if a profit might be gotten. At the same time, they were treacherous, cruel, and fanatic (a result of their Puritan heritage), and would stop at nothing to impose their irrational abolitionist platform on the South, regardless of the consequences. John Brown’s fateful raid in 1859 had proven that these were a people who were not subject to reason. In September 1861, the war still in its infancy, a captain in the 15th Alabama warned his sweetheart of what awaited her should the Confederacy suffer defeat. “If we are conquered in this war, no tongue can portray the horrors the South must witness,” he declared. “Every woman will have to fight for her virtue, every child for its life. It behooves all to prepare for the worst. Our enemies are as hungry as devils for our blood.”¹³

Though the captain’s foreboding may appear melodramatic, such pronouncements were all too common and accurately reflected a widely held belief as to the nature of the

¹² Albert Talmon Morgan, *Yazoo; Or, On the Picket Line of Freedom in the South*, (Washington DC: Published by the author, 1884), 99-101. White violence against Northern “Carpetbaggers,” Southern “Scalawags,” and freed people was endemic to the postwar South. See Richard N. Current, *Those Terrible Carpetbaggers*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), George C. Rable, *But There Was No Peace: The Role of Violence in the Politics of Reconstruction*, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1984), and Brooks D. Simpson, *Let Us Have Peace: Ulysses S. Grant and the Politics of War and Reconstruction, 186-1868*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991).

¹³ John Taylor Smith to “My Dear Sallie, 3 September 1861, Soldier Letter Collection, MOC.

enemy Southerners faced. The denunciations, moreover, were often tinged with racial overtones – a development not at all surprising when one considers how completely race defined Southern society. Elite Southerners had for decades before the war constructed an image of themselves of the direct descendants of English Cavaliers, an image that was solidified during the sectional strife of the 1850s. On the eve of war, Southern newspapers readily trumpeted the supposed differences between the inferior Puritanical Yankee and the pure-blooded and noble Confederate volunteer. “The people of the two sections have ever hated each other,” insisted the Richmond *Examiner* in the spring of 1861, “not merely because their laws, customs, manners, and institutions are different; but more still, because their races, their blood, their ancestry, were different.”

The people of the South belong to the brave, impulsive, hospitable, and generous Celtic race; the people of the North to the cold, phlegmatic Teutonic race. We include the old Greek and Roman among the Celtic races; - also the Anglo-Normans, whose cleanly habits, language, laws, and personal appearance, prove beyond a doubt that they were of Latin origin. The South was settled by Anglo-Normans, Welshmen, Scotchmen, Irishmen, Frenchmen, and Spaniards. These were all Celts, all belonging to what may be classed as Mediterranean people. Few Teutons and few Anglo-Saxons (who are of Teutonic extract) settled in the South. What Teutonic blood did settle in the South, has been diluted and neutralized by frequent intermarriage with our Anglo-Norman families. Every schoolboy knows that the Mediterranean races have almost monopolized the chivalry of the world, and, until within the last three hundred years, quite monopolized its civilization.

Lest this meandering, pseudo-scientific treatise lead to confusion, the editor was courteous enough to reiterate his main point before concluding: “The [Anglo-Norman] people of the South,” he assured his readers, “belong to a different and superior race from those of the [Anglo-Saxon] North.” Other papers echoed this dogma, suggesting that the superior Southerner could never be conquered by the likes of Northern scum. “The Ruler of the Universe,” cried the Memphis *Avalanche*, “certainly never designed that a mongrel race, composed of the *debris* of all the nations of Europe, swept upon its shores by the waves of the Atlantic – infidel and God-defying; presumptuous and Bible-ignoring; rife with every error and pernicious ism; cowardly, cruel, and treacherous – should exercise despotic authority over a Christian people.” The Richmond *Daily Dispatch* was happy to report that the people who Southerners most aspired to emulate acknowledged their

superiority over Northerners. “The *London Times*,” the editor proudly conveyed, “calls the Yankees a ‘mongrel race,’ and speaks of us as the genuine descendants of Englishmen. We certainly have much more English blood in our veins than the Yankees or rather English, Scotch, and Welsh — that is British blood.”¹⁴

Ranting editors, however, reflected common assumptions as much as they propagated them. Southern soldiers and civilians regularly referred to Northern soldiers as vandals, barbarians, and savages (a clear reference to the uncivilized Native American), and identified them collectively as a “horde” (a clear reference to the Mongols). One can even find scattered references to Yankees as being worse than “Chinese” or the “Sepoy of Indian.” That Germans, Irish, and other immigrant groups (and eventually African-Americans) comprised a significant percentage of the Federal army offered further proof as to the impurity of Northerners and their cause. The Lincoln government, Southerners regularly charged, recruited foreign “mercenaries” and “hirelings” who fought only for monetary gain. Such people could not possibly fathom the concepts of honor, courage, or freedom, nor could they be expected to understand or adhere to the accepted rules of “civilized” warfare.¹⁵

There is little doubt that many Confederate volunteers whole-heartedly subscribed to the idea of the Yankee as racial other. “I don’t see why it should be called a *civil* war,” wrote a Louisiana volunteer in 1861. “We are not fighting our own people – but a race which is & has always been antagonistic in every particular to us – of a different country & of different pursuits.” A Virginia officer, in corresponding with his captured brother in 1862, prayed for his expedited release, “that you may again be enabled to take up arms in defence of our beloved country, against this ungodly, fanatical, depraved Yankee race.” Sir Arthur Fremantle, a British military observer who toured the Confederacy in 1863,

¹⁴ Richmond *Examiner*, reprinted in the Charleston *Mercury*, 30 April 1861, in Frank Moore, ed., *The Rebellion Record: A Diary of American Events*, Vol. 1, (New York: G.P. Putnam, 1862), 274; Memphis *Avalanche*, [n.d.], in Moore, *The Rebellion Record*, Vol. 4, 400; Richmond *Daily Dispatch*, 19 August 1862. One of the earliest studies to explore the invention of the “Cavalier” myth is William R. Taylor’s, *Cavalier and Yankee: The Old South and American National Character*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957). For a more recent examination, see Ritchie Devon Watson, Jr., *Normans and Saxons: Southern Race Mythology and the Intellectual History of the American Civil War*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2008).

¹⁵ See James Williamson Diary, 17 October 1864, Lewis Leigh Collection, USMHI; San Antonio *Herald*, 7 June 1862; Robert E. Park Diary, 10 June 1864, in *Southern Historical Society Papers*, 52 Vols., (Richmond, VA: Southern Historical Society, 1876-1959), Volume 1, 372.

noted the contemptuous attitude that Texans held of their opponents. “They said from time immemorial the Yankees had been despised by the Southerners, as a race inferior to themselves in courage and in honourable sentiments,” he wrote of his conversations with a company of rangers. The few occasions when Southerners invaded the North only encouraged the belief that the Union consisted of a lesser people. The cowardly “Dutch” of Pennsylvania, with their strange accents and “common-level” society, were, as one officer insisted, a race “fit for contempt.”¹⁶

Union soldiers who spent any time around the Southern “aristocracy” noted such talk and, unsurprisingly, dismissed it as pure rubbish. A conversation with several Williamsburg women in 1864 left one Massachusetts soldier amused. “These ladies pride themselves on being the regular F.F.V’s [First Families of Virginia] and have a great pride of birth and ancestry,” he skeptically reported. “They claim to be the real thoroughbreds and can trace their lineage in a direct line right straight back to William and Mary.” Undaunted by this “nonsense” and their criticism of the “mixed Yankee race,” he coolly pointed out that, though their assertions of noble lineage may be true, it appeared that many of the black folk in the community – judging by the fairness of their skin – might readily claim that distinction, as well. The insinuation, he noted with understatement, “seemed to bring a sort of coldness over the meeting.”¹⁷

Union soldiers may have considered Southern claims to racial superiority laughable, but their own thinking closely paralleled that which they scorned. What had begun as a war to punish secessionist leaders had clearly evolved into a war to punish all “secesh” and “rebels,” terms which they increasingly used to define not only Southern military and political leaders but ordinary people. The characteristics of a secesh depended upon the observer, but they might alternately be described as ignorant, lazy,

¹⁶ Robert H. Miller to Mary Anna, 25 November 1861, in Joseph T. Glatthaar, *General Lee’s Army: From Victory to Collapse*, (New York: Free Press, 2008), 154-155; William Pegram to brother, 11 February 1862, in Peter S. Carmichael, *Lee’s Young Artillerist: William R.J. Pegram*, (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1998), 35; Journal of Sir Arthur James Lyon Fremantle, 9 April 1863, in *Three Months in the Southern States*, (Edinburgh, Scotland: William Blackwood & Son, 1863), 19. See also, Sam R. Watkins, *Co. Aytch: A Side Show of the Big Show*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997, c.1882), 17-18, 101-103; John H. Aughey, *The Iron Furnace, or, Slavery and Secession*, (Philadelphia: William S. & Alfred Martien, 1863), 14-19; and Ward W. Briggs, Jr., ed., *Soldier and Scholar: Basil Lanneau Gildersleeve and the Civil War*, (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1998), 16, 121, 291-293.

¹⁷ Diary of David L. Day, 29 February 1864, in *My Diary of Rambles with the 25th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry*, (Milford, MA: King & Billings Printers, 1884), 130-131.

dirty, sneaky, cowardly, haughty, fanatic, brutal, and savage. Though they did not explicitly racialize their enemies, that they attempted to minimize their humanity cannot be denied. Moreover, they were perfectly willing to accept the enemy's charge that they were indeed a people apart – a people superior to the backwards and brutal slave-holding Southerner.¹⁸

The perniciousness of such talk is especially evident among civilians, who tended to internalize the worst possible stereotypes of the enemy. Soldiers on both sides reacted with incredulity when citizens expressed genuine surprise at discovering that they did not have horns and cloven feet. Admittedly, these are extreme examples, but the tendency to view the opposing side as barbaric savages was all too common. For Union soldiers, who had much more contact with civilians, such preconceptions were an ever-present source of irritation. A volunteer in the 21st Kentucky (US) described the mass panic which seemed to grip the countryside as his regiment made its way through northern Georgia in September 1863. “The lying rebels had told the poor ignorant citizens, especially women, that we would kill the men and abuse the women,” he noted with disgust. “You cannot imagine the change in feeling towards us when they find we have been belied.” In May 1865, two Union officers traveling by train through southwestern Georgia reported a similarly disconcerting experience. “We were the first Yankees that had visited that part [and] I can assure you that we were the objects of considerable curiosity with the citizens,” reported one. “At the little stations along the road the people would congregate to see the Yankees and the exclamations would often be made that we looked like themselves and wondering if we were really Yankees or not.” Though Union volunteers condescendingly attributed such views to Southern ignorance, Northerners were just as likely to harbor similar preconceptions. During the Gettysburg campaign, a captain in the 12th Virginia reflected upon one his many conversations with Pennsylvanians. “I was informed yesterday (while in Fayetteville) by some ladies that they were very much surprised at the good conduct of our troops, that they had been told the Rebels killed little children by placing them on their bayonets & tossing them from bayonet to bayonet,” he reported. “I could not but laugh at such a tale & asked them if they had seen any such conduct exhibited by us – oh. no. by no means quite the contrary. These people look

¹⁸ See Watson, *Normans and Saxons*, 178-180, 188-192.

upon us as Savages, incarnate devils until they are brought in contact & then a most pleasing change comes over them.” In these instances, reality undercut civilian fears, but they demonstrated a readiness on both sides to assume the worst about the enemy.¹⁹

To be sure, much of the language utilized by the combatants to denounce the enemy was unremarkable. One is hard-pressed to differentiate between descriptions of a Northerner or Southerner, as each side tended to use the same terms in denouncing each other, terms which spoke more to their own fears and sense of identity than to anything else. Still, it was not without consequence, for it facilitated the dehumanization and rationalization which too often foreshadows an escalation of hostilities. Confederates fantasized of burning and slaying, of inflicting the terror of Chambersburg a hundred-fold. Denied that opportunity, they could at least take morbid pleasure in the sight of dead Yankee soldiers. “Nothing has done me so much good for a long time as seeing the thousands of dead yankees strewed over the country,” insisted a Virginia cavalryman in the aftermath of the Union repulse at Spotsylvania. “It does me good to the toes of my boots any time to see a dead yank and you may imagine how much good it does to look at miles of them.” At the very least, volunteers could embrace a fight to the death rather than submitting to a contemptible foe. “For Dixie I have fought, bled and suffered imprisonment, and for Dixie I am ever ready to die,” wrote one die-hard Alabamian a month before the Confederacy collapsed. “It will never do to think of giving it up now. I for one am for liberty or extermination.”²⁰

Union volunteers tended to scoff at the latter sentiments (as did the majority of Southern soldiers at war’s end), but they were increasingly happy to oblige those who expressed them. When speaking of the apparent steadfastness of the Confederate resistance, “extermination” was a term that frequently found its way into their letters and diaries – though it was not at all clear if they were referring solely to military personnel. “Sometimes,” wrote one, “I almost wish I had the power to go through their camps and slay them by thousands or that they might be swept from the earth by the destroying

¹⁹ Sue K. Black Recollection, Robert L. Brake Collection, USMHI; Account of Anna L. Kitzmiller, in *Gettysburg Compiler*, 23 August 1905; Aaron E. Bachman Memoirs, Harrisburg Civil War Round Table Collection, USMHI; Thomas Morris Gunn to mother, 13 September 1863, Gunn Family Papers, UK; Edward Dale to wife, 10 May 1865, Dale-Holt-Hensley Family Papers, MHS; Charles E. Waddell Diary, 30 June 1863, Soldier Diary Collection, MOC.

²⁰ Frank M. Myers to “Dear Home Folks,” 16 May 1864, Civil War Miscellaneous Collection, USMHI; Henry Vaughn to “dear Father,” 1 March 1865, Paul Turner Vaughn Diary and Letters, SHC, UNC.

angel as was the army of Sennacherib of old.” The tenacity with which Confederate forces opposed Sherman’s campaign against Atlanta caused one Ohioan to ruminate on their apparently indomitable *esprit de corps*. “The majority hold to the policy of ‘*Independence or Extermination*’ with a determination worthy of a better cause,” he insisted. “It is sorrowful to think of, but we must *force* them to submit to our terms, even if it requires us to wipe the whole *secesh* tribe out of existence” From occupied Atlanta, an Illinois volunteer chronicled the incessant regimental debates over the upcoming 1864 presidential election. “those that are tired of fighting are for McClellan and those that are for fighting untill evry armed rebble begs for mercy these are for Old Abe,” he wrote. “Some says that the south will never submit to lincoln then I say kill evry last one of them.” By far, one of the most frightful tirades came from a USCT officer who abandoned all pretense of discriminating between combatants and civilians. “It may seem hard,” he wrote to his sister in August 1864, “but I am in for the doctrine of extermination for all Rebels. This is Gods own doctrine. All rebels against him will be punished eternally, and accordingly all Rebs against our Govt. should be exterminated so far as it is in the power of man to exterminate. They are nothing more nor less than *Devils incarnate. Big and Little, male and female.*” Perhaps conscious that the recipient of this rant might think him unhinged, he assured her of his seriousness. “Now I am not excited but am talking good sound sense.”²¹

Indeed, these were not the ramblings of lunatics, nor even those of men exasperated by guerrilla warfare, but the views of common Union soldiers who, determined to attain victory, were psychologically steeling themselves to the sacrifices it might necessitate. None other than Abraham Lincoln, who consistently fended off Congressional calls for sterner measures and can hardly be accused of advocating the extermination of Southerners, alluded to that very possibility in his second inaugural speech on March 4, 1865. “Fondly do we hope, fervently do we pray, that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away,” he began.

Yet, if God wills that it continue until all the wealth piled by the bondsman’s two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk,

²¹ Wilbur F. Hinman to “Dear Ones at Home,” 20 February 1863, Wilbur F. Hinman Papers, WRHS; William G. Bentley to “My dear Bro,” 9 August 1864, in Smith, *Burning Rails as We Pleased*, 108; George A. Hudson to mother, 11 September 1864, George A. Hudson Letters, LC; Carlos Parsons Lyman to “Dear Sister Celia,” 29 August 1864, Carlos Parsons Lyman Papers, WRHS.

and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said “the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.”²²

Fortunately, the terrifying scenario never came to pass. Despite the prevalence of absurd racial theories and equally outlandish talk as to the necessity of extermination, in most instances both sides clearly continued to view each other, if not precisely as equals, then at least as human beings. This was demonstrated not in words, of course, but actions. Truces, official and unofficial, were common place: for burying the dead, treating the wounded, or even to trade newspapers and tobacco. Surrendering soldiers, with rare exceptions, were always granted quarter. Lee’s conquered army was given a remarkable show of respect by Grant’s men at Appomattox. Yankees did not indulge in whole-sale slaughter of the defeated, and most Southerners chose not to fight to the death despite the fact that their worst nightmare had apparently become reality. Most importantly, combatants ultimately accepted that although civilian property might be destroyed, civilians themselves were not to be harmed.

Because the implications of this ferocious and often dehumanizing rhetoric were never completely realized, it is tempting to dismiss it as hyperbole – meaningless prattle induced by wartime frustration and rage – rather than a genuine and growing belief in the necessity of literally eradicating the enemy. Simply because the apocalyptic visions of the combatants did not come to pass, however, does not imply that they could not have come to pass. Indeed, all signs pointed to the fact that they *would* have come to pass had the war continued much longer. Americans have been far too self-congratulatory in remembering the conflict as a “civil” war, one in which political and military leaders “chose” not to implement harsher policies against civilians and combatants generally adhered to a moral code. Despite more than 600,000 dead (and an unknown number of civilian casualties), that conclusion is not incorrect, but it ignores a hard reality. Those who would “control” the conflict, be they officers or statesmen, invariably relented to volunteers who, in their democratic way, went about the business of subduing the enemy as they deemed proper. Soldiers, however, no more controlled the conflict than did their

²² Lincoln’s Second Inaugural speech of 4 March 1865, reprinted in Ronald C. White, *Lincoln’s Greatest Speech: The Second Inaugural*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2002), 17-19. White notes that Lincoln was referring to divine retribution against the entire nation for the sin of slavery but, unsurprisingly, Northerners tended to hear in his speech a call for retribution against the South. See pp. 150-163.

leaders, for both ultimately answered to the dictates of war – a master which knew no bounds or restraints.

Though the volunteers recognized limits of acceptable destruction, the war continually tested those limits, inviting, seducing, and compelling the participants to take part in greater destruction while anesthetizing them to the consequences. In modern parlance, the process is known as “brutalization” or “coarsening,” and Civil War soldiers, though they appear to have escaped its worst effects, were clearly not immune. The typical nineteenth century American was no stranger to death, as it pervaded antebellum society to a degree which most contemporary observers cannot readily appreciate. Even so, such familiarity did not prepare the volunteers for the horrors they would witness. Disease wracked the camps early, sending many a recruit to his grave before he even witnessed a battle. In late 1861, a Virginia recruit remarked that “Death has become so familiar to a great many individuals in the service that they would not hesitate to play cards [on] the coffin of a messmate.” Battle, of course, fueled the process. Veterans could look upon only so many mangled and mutilated bodies before they were numbed by the sight. “I can not describe the change nor do I know when it took place,” related one Southerner, “yet I know that there is a change for I look on the carcass of a man now with pretty much such feeling as I would so were it a horse or dog.” While some embraced the transformation as a badge of honor, others were troubled by it. An Ohio volunteer, ruminating on the nature of a soldier’s life, determined that “it is terribly hard on men in *every* respect, mental moral and physical. It hardens and brutalizes us and makes us almost worse than savages.” Becoming inured to the hardships and death which surrounded them was a coping mechanism, perhaps a necessary and inevitable one. It posed a greater problem, however, when soldiers viewed civilians with the same indifference, which they increasingly tended to do. As one Union volunteer attested, “Soldiers haven’t much sentiment or sympathy about them for anybody much less for the enemy. When I come home, you’ll find me probably less sentimental than [before], and I shall be lucky indeed if that should be the worst effect of three years in the army.”²³

²³ John Taylor Smith to “Dear Mother,” 28 November 1861, Soldier Letter Collection, MOC; Henry Graves to father, 16 June 1862, quoted in Wiley, *The Life of Johnny Reb*, 35; Wilbur F. Hinman to “Dear Friends,” 2 March 1863, Wilbur F. Hinman Papers, WRHS Samuel Henry Eells to “Dear Aunty,” 27 August 1863, Samuel Henry Eells Papers, LC.

Though brutalization is often a precursor of atrocity, it is not sufficient in itself. It is impossible to know, therefore, what might have occurred had the war ground on for longer than it did, but many volunteers – Northerners especially – expressed certainty in a coming sea change. “If fighting had continued,” speculated a Massachusetts volunteer from North Carolina in April 1865, “no one knows how it would end. Apart from the closing of the war, it is a mercy few of us yet appreciate. The South would have been deluged with blood; fire and sword would have laid a heavy mark on this once fair land. Nothing would have been left.” In May, an Iowa volunteer addressed rumors that his regiment might be sent to Texas to quell what remained of the rebellion. “The boys do not want to go to Texas now since we certainly will come home soon,” he complained. “They say that: ‘We will kill every house and burn every man’ and I believe that we will be good for our word.” The trend, as so many volunteers recognized, was always one of escalating violence. Early on, there existed the desire to punish or retaliate against civilians, which only intensified in the years that followed. Further, though a common identity bound the belligerents and ultimately served to check the level of violence, it is apparent that each side was inclined to amplify rather than diminish their differences. The rhetoric promulgated by polemicists and newspapermen during the sectional crisis of the 1850s provided a ready framework in which to objectify the enemy. The outbreak of war, with the killing and destruction it required, made adoption of that language all the more attractive and, indeed, psychologically necessary. Escalation and dehumanization enjoyed a symbiotic relationship, each perpetuated by the other. By 1865, the result was that Northerners and Southerners were, at a fundamental level, truly beginning to believe that they faced not errant brothers, but an alien race or species whose existence could not be tolerated. In reviewing the conflict in its entirety, it seems clear that what saved civilians from total destruction was not decisions from on high, nor the morality of those who fought, which could be twisted and warped to suit, but, simply enough, the war’s conclusion.²⁴

The consequences of such a “racialized” war are not difficult to imagine. They could be discerned in the flames of Chambersburg and Columbia, in the Confederate

²⁴ T.R. Keenan, 20 April 1865, in Lydia Minturn Post, ed., *Soldiers’ Letters, from Camp, Battlefield, and Prison*, (New York: Bunce & Huntington, 1865), 467-468; Gilbert Gulbrandson to parents, 18 May 1865, Harrisburg Civil War Round Table Collection, USMHI.

persecution of Southern Unionists, and, especially, in the festering guerrilla conflict that plagued much of the South. These instances marked the extremes of the war, how effortlessly even people of the same supposed race, religion, and culture might demonize one another, and the horrendous toll which objectification of the enemy exacted. Still, none of them offers a complete picture of what total dehumanization meant. One need not rely on speculation, however, to understand its devastating potential and to appreciate the tenuous restraint which held it at bay. Anglo-Americans, who displayed such a remarkable capacity for dehumanizing each other, had ample opportunity between 1861 and 1865 to demonstrate how utterly it might be accomplished when the opposition they encountered actually was of another “race,” when language barriers precluded familiarity and intimacy, when they faced a culture deemed totally incompatible with the prevailing “American” civilization, and when an ideology or cause was judged inseparable from the person who fought in its name. In such a conflict, it was possible to look upon extermination with much less ambivalence – not simply as a *potential* means to end a war, but as a *necessary* measure and even as an end in itself.

Section 3: The War in New Mexico

3.1 Introduction

“Excuse my bad writing for I am in a very great hurry,” a young Texas artillerist apologetically addressed his father in early October 1861. “It is rumored that we march next monday – where to I do not know but I suspect towards New *Mexico*” Penned with palpable anticipation from Camp Sibley outside San Antonio, this brief missive presaged a significant expansion of a conflict which six months earlier most had assumed would last no more than a few weeks. Those heady, paradoxical predictions of decisive victory and bloodless war were shattered over the summer of 1861. On July 21, an untested Union army suffered a staggering defeat at the hands of an equally inexperienced rebel army at Manassas, Virginia. Less than a month later, Confederate forces again emerged victorious, this time at Wilson’s Creek, Missouri. Yet the rebel victories proved indecisive. The United States did not crumble. The Federal government did not sue for peace on any terms. Indeed, the war effort would be vigorously renewed in the spring, producing appalling casualties on both sides.¹

Stalemated in the East, some Southerners looked to the Southwest for the decisive encounter that would secure independence. New Mexico Territory – which included all of what is now Arizona – seemed ripe for the taking. But the subsequent campaign to expand the Confederate empire would not go unchallenged. Union volunteers from New Mexico, Colorado and California eventually blunted the rebel advance, effectively securing the territory for the United States by the spring of 1862. The battles in the Southwest, though never given the attention accorded to the bloodletting in the East, were no less spectacular or dramatic to those involved. For a brief period the war had become continental in scope. Unsurprisingly, the conduct if not overall strategy of the New Mexico campaign seemed to mirror in large degree what was occurring in East: Americans fought Americans; casualties numbered in the thousands; and the single climactic encounter at Glorieta Pass was even retroactively dubbed the “Gettysburg of the West.” And, as in the East, the ferocity of the fighting was tempered by the ethos of

¹ David B. Gracy, ed., “New Mexico Campaign Letters of Frank Starr,” *Texas Military History*, Vol. 4 (Fall 1964), 171.

“civilized” warfare among the combatants: prisoners were taken, the wounded received proper care, and soldiers often ruminated on the inherent humanity of their enemy.

But in at least one glaring regard, the New Mexico campaign differed drastically from what was transpiring on the other side of the Mississippi. As we have seen, a policy of military restraint toward civilians, however tenuous, continued to hold sway in the East at least through 1863. Anglo-American soldiers encountering Anglo enemy civilians tended to adopt, with important exceptions, relatively mild retributive policies. Despite inflammatory rhetoric demanding that the enemy’s country be laid waste, soldiers stopped far short of total devastation. In New Mexico and Arizona, however, soldiers encountered not Anglo-Americans but Hispanic-Americans. The territory may have been an American possession, but in the eyes of Confederate conquerors and Union “liberators” it harbored a decidedly un-American citizenry. Uniformly denounced as treacherous “greasers” or “indolent” peons, native New Mexicans fell prey to both Northern and Southern forces. Both armies, in effect, became occupiers of a “foreign” land, and the multi-racial Southwest ultimately exposed the shallowness of Anglo notions of “civilized” warfare.²

² There are a number of excellent works on the New Mexico Campaign, though none look specifically at the role of race in the interaction between soldiers and civilians. Conversely, there are several superb studies of Anglo-Mexican race relations, but few address the issue in the context of the American Civil War. On the campaign, see Martin Hardwick Hall, *Sibley’s New Mexico Campaign*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1960); Alvin M. Josephy, Jr., *The Civil War in the American West*, (New York: Knopf, 1991); Donald S. Frazier, *Blood & Treasure: Confederate Empire in the Southwest*, (College Station: Texas A&M Press, 1995); and Flint Whitlock, *Distant Bugles, Distant Drums: The Union Response to the Confederate Invasion of New Mexico*, (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2006). For discussion of race relations, see Martin H. Hall, “Native Mexican Relations in Confederate Arizona, 1861-1862,” *The Journal of Arizona History*, Vol. 8 (Autumn, 1967), 171-178; Mario Barrera, *Race and Class in the Southwest: A Theory of Racial Inequality*, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Press, 1979); Darlis A. Miller, “Hispanos and the Civil War in New Mexico: A Reconsideration,” *New Mexico Historical Review*, Vol. 54, No.2 (April 1979), 105-123; Arnoldo De León, *They Called Them Greasers: Anglo-Attitudes Toward Mexicans in Texas, 1821-1900*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1983); Jerry D. Thompson, *Mexican Texans in the Union Army*, (University of Texas at El Paso: Texas Western Press, 1986); David Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas, 1836-1986*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987); Tomas Almaguer, *Racial Fault Lines: The Historical Origins of White Supremacy in California*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994). Finally, Michael Foss’s *A Short, Offhand, Killing Affair: Soldiers and Social Conflict during the Mexican-American War*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002), a detailed study of the actions of American volunteers in an earlier conflict involving Mexicans, has significant implications for this investigation.

3.2 “Our Poor and Distant Territory Has Not Been Spared”: The Civil War in the Southwest

3.2.1 The Southwest in 1860

In 1860, the preponderance of US regulars were scattered in company-size detachments throughout the West. Chasing down Indians only occasionally interrupted an otherwise monotonous life of road-building, fort construction, and drill. The secession crisis demanded the soldiers play a much greater role. The Federal government transferred a significant number East, completely abandoning some forts while manning others with hastily raised volunteer units. The inevitable confusion left the remaining Union defenders vulnerable. Further, with all eyes fixed on the Virginia battlefields, help would not be forthcoming. New Mexico Territory, with its largely Hispanic population of uncertain loyalty, marauding Navajo and Apache, and hostile Texans to the east seemed particularly susceptible to unrest.

Some Southerners, Texans especially, deemed the territory too great a prize not to exploit. The capture of gold and silver mines would assure a steady flow of precious metals at the expense of the Union war effort. Annexing the territory would also bring the South one step closer to becoming a continental nation. With New Mexico secured, so went the conventional wisdom, it was only a matter of time before California threw in its lot with the Confederacy (significant discontent with the Federal government among Californians lent plausibility to the scenario) or was conquered in turn. Already stretched thin on the Atlantic coast, the Union navy would be hard-pressed to effectively blockade Pacific ports, leaving the South with virtually unfettered access to international trade. Most importantly, significant gains in the Southwest might win for the Confederacy the foreign recognition Southern leaders so desperately sought. If the plans seemed grandiose, at least they corresponded to an overall national strategy of winning independence. But abundant evidence suggests that some Texans considered the conquest of New Mexico merely the first stage in an even greater design: the creation of a Confederate Latin-American empire.¹

¹ Joesphy, *The Civil War in the American West*, 18-19; Trevanion T. Teel, “Sibley’s New Mexico Campaign: Its Objects and the Causes of Its Failures,” in Robert U. Johnson, and Clarence C. Buel, eds.,

To the inalienable rights of life, liberty, and property, Texans had added that of Western expansion. Declaring independence from Mexico in 1836, the new nation claimed borders as far west as the Rio Grande and as far north as present-day Wyoming. On numerous occasions before the American war with Mexico in 1846, Texans attempted to expand at the expense of northern Mexican states. An ill-fated 1841 military expedition to Santa Fe carried out under the presidency of Mirabeau B. Lamar, though resulting in the destruction and capture of the entire Texan force, did little to diminish the desire for Mexican land. Indeed, the poor treatment accorded the Texan prisoners by Mexican authorities, and Mexican resentment over the Texans' attempt to seize Santa Fe, only increased antagonism. In retaliation for the raid, Mexican troops briefly seized San Antonio twice in 1842, carrying off a number of prisoners before finally retiring. Incensed, Texan legislators demanded war, passing a bill over the veto of president Sam Houston calling for the annexation of northern Mexico. Though the 750 volunteers charged with accomplishing the task were no more successful than the would-be conquerors of Santa Fe, they caused considerably more damage. The Mexican towns of Laredo and Guerrero were thoroughly pillaged. Soldiers vandalized residences, used logs to break down doors, looted private property, and forced women to disrobe in public. The anarchy finally ended when a Mexican force defeated the Texans in the town of Mier in December. General Santa Anna, in a move that further enraged Texans, ordered the 170 prisoners to draw beans from a pot and summarily executed the seventeen who pulled black. Not until 1848, with the conclusion of US operations in Mexico, would the coveted northern states be brought under American control. Even then, the status of much of the territory remained in dispute. Texas continued to claim New Mexico as its own, and only after a series of threats and compromises by the Federal government did the state finally relinquish its claim.²

Battles and Leaders of the Civil War, Vol. 2, (New York: Thomas Yoseloff, 1956), 700. Teel, a Confederate officer in the New Mexico Campaign, later insisted that Sibley planned not only to conquer California, but also the northern states of Mexico. See also: Frazier, *Blood and Treasure: Confederate Empire in the Southwest*, 21. For a general study of Southern expansionism, see Robert E. May, *The Southern Dream of a Caribbean Empire, 1854-1861*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1973).

² For the specifics of the Santa Fe and Mier Expeditions, see W.C. Binkley, "New Mexico and the Santa Fe Expedition," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, 27 (October 1923), 85-107; Sam W. Haynes, *Soldiers of Misfortune: The Somervell and Mier Expeditions*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990); and Gary

Though subordination to a national government undercut the unilateral adventurism that marked early Texas history, the philosophy of expansionism remained a potent force through the 1850s. As the rancor of sectional politics increased, Texans' historical yearning for territorial aggrandizement neatly coalesced with a more general Southern desire to expand the institution of slavery. For many proponents it seemed the only way to ensure its survival, especially after the election of a Republican administration in 1860 which advocated immediate containment as a road to eventual abolishment. If safeguarding slavery required expansion, Federal opposition to expansion required secession. "The Southern States once constituted as an independent Republic, the acquisition of Mexico, Central America, San Domingo, and other West India Islands would follow as a direct and necessary result," insisted the *Vicksburg Weekly Sun* in October 1860. The Gulf of Mexico, concluded the editor, could be made into a "Southern lake." For Texas nationalists, the prospect of unhindered expansion was equally attractive, though advocates invariably couched the benefits in more provincial terms. "We must have [the northern Mexican states of] Sonora and Chihuahua," declared a future officer in a Texas regiment. "With Sonora and Chihuahua we gain Southern California, and by a railroad to Guaymas render our State of Texas the great highway of nations." The improbability of the success of such schemes did not prevent them from gaining widespread acceptance, and the possible extent of Southern power appeared limited only by the imagination. It was not by accident that the Knights of the Golden Circle, a secretive organization dedicated to the creation of a pro-slavery empire in Latin America, found its greatest support in Texas.³

The desire to expand slavery to the west and south was, however, simply one component of the much larger phenomenon of Manifest Destiny. Hardly limited to Southerners, the belief that American values and institutions were destined to spread across the continent, and perhaps the hemisphere, had been a driving force since the nation's inception. Americans touted their country as a paragon of democracy and exemplar of freedom. Other peoples, it was assumed, would only benefit from American

Clayton Anderson, *The Conquest of Texas: Ethnic Cleansing in the Promised Land, 1820-1875*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2005), 196-199.

³ *Vicksburg Weekly Sun*, 29 October 1860; James Reiley to John H. Reagan, 26 January 1862, *OR*, Ser. 1, Vol. 50, Pt. 1, 825-826; Roy Sylvan Dunn, "The KGC in Texas, 1860-1861," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, 70 (April 1967), 543-573.

tutelage. But, as might be expected of a country that simultaneously espoused the equality of man and racial slavery, such a philosophy was rife with tensions and contradictions. Civilizing the savage and enlightening the ignorant too often equated with extermination and subjugation. Nor would those subjected to American “enlightenment” have much choice in the matter. What Manifest Destiny meant in regard to Mexicans had been ruthlessly demonstrated by the United States in 1846. Upon seizing all of northern Mexico, Americans determined that uplifting such an “indolent” people might not be possible – or even desirable. “The people are addicted to gaming, & robbing is common to the mass – men take office here for plunder, so that all have become corrupt, and it is very evident that they are incapable of good government,” surmised an American officer in 1848. “It is perfectly evident to me that this people are doomed to pass off, and at no distant day.” Short on virtue, morally deficient, and incapable of effective governance, Mexicans simply lacked the requisite skills for survival. “The sentence has gone forth,” he concluded. “The hardy and nobler northerners are destined . . . to over run this section of North America, even should peace now be made.” This officer spoke not of enlightenment, but of extinction. An inferior, feeble race would inevitably “pass off,” leaving the country in the hands of “hardy” Anglo Saxons. Immutable racial flaws made them incapable of improvement, and therefore unworthy of the land they possessed. The rationale justified an aggressive war for territory in 1846, underpinned racially-motivated atrocities against Mexican civilians, and later served as the basis for relegating Mexican-Americans to second-class citizenship. Above all, then, Manifest Destiny stood for exploitation and Anglo supremacy.⁴

The Mexican War experience left Americans with a decidedly negative image of their southern neighbors that endured through and was reinforced by the Civil War. Union volunteers, dismissive of native New Mexicans, often treated them more as a hostile population than as true Americans. The people had not, as predicted, “passed off” but neither had they been fully assimilated. Indeed, to many soldiers, New Mexico

⁴ On the subject of race and American expansionism, see Ronald Takaki, *Iron Cages: Race and Culture in Nineteenth-Century America*, (New York: Knopf, 1979); Richard Drinnon, *Facing West: The Metaphysics of Indian Hating and Empire-Building*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1980); and Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981; Lorenzo Thomas to “Friends,” 12 January 1848, LC.

appeared much too similar to Old Mexico. Meanwhile, Confederate volunteers, with Texans in the vanguard, clearly meant to assume the mantle of expansionism that had seemingly been cast aside by the United States. “The conquest of New Mexico opens the way to that portion of the Pacific coast that affiliates with us in sentiment,” exclaimed the Clarksville, Texas *Standard*. “It also is the opening scene of our manifest destiny.” A Texan volunteer in a hastily raised militia unit, in thanking the local women who presented his regiment with a flag and bible, assumed even greater plans: “May they, and those interested, live to see the flag of the S. Confederacy overshadow the North American Continent, and extend Southward beyond the Isthmus, and a great and free people, living in peace and security beneath its folds, guided and directed by the Book of Books, the Bible.” But if the belligerent words of a Dallas paper were any indication, Mexicans and Mexican-Americans alike had good reason to be wary of such an endeavor. “Let these Texans range on the Mexican Frontier and infuse some of the Anglo-Saxon ideas of progressiveness into the stupid, leaden souls of the people – and then the world will notice a change.”⁵

Events in the Southwest moved at a rapid pace following the election of Lincoln in November 1860. Texas seceded from the Union in February 1861, joining the states of the Lower South. The next month, Anglo residents from southern New Mexico declared for the Confederacy, as well. A convention led by a white political elite with historic ties to Texas and other Southern states pronounced the formation of the Confederate Territory of Arizona, encompassing all of New Mexico south of the 34th parallel. The future of California, too, remained in doubt. Membership in the Knights of the Golden Circle purportedly numbered in the thousands, and the appearance of the “Bear Flag” as a symbol of Californian nationalism became all too common in the lower part of the state. Rumors flew that Southern partisans aimed to create a separate “Pacific Republic.” Though their scheming came to naught, Confederate sympathizers within the state remained a very real problem throughout the war. Adding to the chaotic situation in the Southwest was the departure of a substantial portion of the regular army to the East.

⁵ Clarksville (Texas) *Standard*, 12 May 1862; A.G. Nicholson to Maj. De Morse, Clarksville (Texas) *Standard*, 29 June 1861; Dallas *Herald*, 29 February 1860.

Worse, over three hundred officers – a third of all officers in the United States Army – left Western commands to fight for the Confederacy. Into this vacuum would flow inexperienced and untested volunteers. The largest unknown, of course, was the disposition of the native population of the Southwest. Though many Anglos had made clear their loyalties, where Mexican-Americans would stand in the crisis remained in doubt. Most supporters of the Union placed little faith in them, and Southerners hoped to take advantage of their presumed indifference to the conflict. New Mexicans, insisted the editor of the pro-Confederate *Mesilla Times*, “do not differ, in any essential degree, from the people of Old Mexico, who neither know nor care anything about the principle involved, and are, with a facility proverbial with the Mexican race, ready to espouse the side of the successful.”⁶

For Confederates anxious to incorporate the territories of the Southwest it seemed a perfect opportunity to strike, and it is not at all surprising that the advance came out of Texas. During the early summer of 1861, as authorities scrambled to raise troops, a small detachment of mounted volunteers under Colonel John Robert Baylor was ordered to occupy the abandoned Federal forts in the western-most part of the state. Fort Bliss, just north of El Paso, remained his primary target but he was also authorized to cross into New Mexico and attack Union-held Fort Fillmore if he deemed it feasible. Baylor’s mission was essentially a defensive one, meant to counter any Federal threat to western Texas. Defensive operations, however, hardly suited the hot-tempered, Indian-fighting Baylor (who was also a member of the KGC). With his superiors hundreds of miles to the southeast in Brownsville, the colonel possessed a de facto independent command which he put to good use. By mid-summer his small force of some 300 men had not only occupied Fort Fillmore, but had routed the Union defenders from southern New Mexico. The Anglo elite who had brazenly proclaimed their independence just months before at last had a means to defend it. Enconced in Mesilla, Baylor issued a proclamation on August 1 declaring martial law and appointing himself military governor of the Territory of Arizona. Confederate authorities, meanwhile, had authorized a full-scale invasion. Responsibility for the undertaking fell to Brigadier General Henry

⁶ Hall, *Sibley’s New Mexico Campaign*, 12-13; Frazier, *Blood & Treasure*, 14-15; Josephy, *The Civil War in the American West*, 34; *Mesilla Times*, 15 January 1862.

Hopkins Sibley, a former US officer, who organized three regiments of Texas mounted infantry for the campaign. Departing from San Antonio in mid-October, the lead elements of the so-called “Sibley Brigade” began to trickle into New Mexico by December. Soon after, Sibley assumed command of all Confederate operations in the region, consolidated his own army with Baylor’s, and renamed the entire force as the Army of New Mexico. The Confederate conquest had begun.⁷

3.2.2 A Degraded and Indolent Race

As volunteers quickly discovered, campaigning in the Southwest posed special challenges. Most had never set foot in the territory before the war, and the rugged terrain and harsh climate caught them by surprise. Outside of the few isolated settlements such as Tuscon, Mesilla, Albuquerque, and Santa Fe citizens barely managed a subsistence living. Food, water, wood, forage – everything necessary to support an army – proved extraordinarily scarce. If most soldiers managed to steel themselves to the realities of combat, the reality of campaigning posed much greater obstacles. One Texan, forced to assume the role of a lowly foot soldier after losing his horse in battle (a common fate among mounted volunteers), could only lament his predicament. “I now feel the pleasure of soldiering in New Mexico more plainly than I have ever done before,” he wrote in February 1862. “This country . . . [is] impenetrable, only by the native savages, except along the river which is thinly settled by Mexicans who are stuck along the banks of the Rio Grande” A trooper in the 5th Texas Mounted Volunteers was similarly perturbed by the country. Though acknowledging the possibilities of settlement around the Rio Grande, he questioned one of the fundamental motives behind the campaign. “This territory is noted for its rich gold mines & silver mines,” he wrote from the vicinity of Fort Craig, “[but] the scarcity of wood & water make it unprofitable to man.” Time did not improve his opinion. As the Confederate Army of New Mexico advanced toward Santa Fe through mountainous terrain and wintry weather, he came to a pessimistic conclusion: “This country will be a tax to any government to which it may belong. It is one of the roughest countries that I ever saw or ever expect to see.” The occasional sandstorm only reinforced the view that New Mexico resembled less a viable American

⁷ Hall, *Sibley’s New Mexico Campaign*, 26-28.

territory and more an inhospitable, foreign land. On March 8, 1862 a particularly fierce storm engulfed several regiments of the Sibley Brigade as they marched toward Albuquerque. Soldiers watched with a sense of awe and dismay as the wind kicked up and darkened the sky with enormous clouds of dust and debris. “The pebbles dashed stingingly against our backs, and our eyes were almost put out by the sand,” wrote one. “I thought of the Simoons which cross the great deserts of Africa, which could scarcely exceed in violence the wind we experienced.” Caught in the same tempest, another Texan could not resist using a similar metaphor: “The wind [is] blowing . . . and the sand and gravel flying in a manner that I never saw before. I would compare it to a description that I have seen of the sand storms of the great desert of Sahara.”⁸

If Confederates felt compelled to compare New Mexico with the wilds of Africa, Union assessments of “this country” were no more generous. Encamped near the village of Socorro on the Rio Grande in April 1862, A Coloradoan marveled at the “finest savannah” he had seen along the river. The lush grass that covered the area led him to speculate that “a white man *might* live here, could he shut his eyes to the bare, brown, sandy hills surrounding.” But again, Socorro appeared as a solitary river oasis in an area otherwise marked by desolation. “New Mexico,” he continued, “is an alternation of mountains, sand-hills, and arid wastes; the whole poorly supplied with running water, and owing to the almost total absence of rain, but scantily clothed with vegetation.” From farther west came comparable indictments. A volunteer in the famed “California Column,” marching from that state toward Tucson to help repel the rebel advance, described what he saw in similar fashion. “A more uninviting country, the sun never shone on,” he insisted. “We should say that some years must elapse before it ‘Blossoms as the rose.’ With a few exceptions, we may in fact, set it down as an interminable waste.” Even areas once thought of as unquestionably “American” came under scrutiny. Encamped outside of Brownsville, Texas at the end of the war, a lieutenant in the 8th United States Colored Infantry attempted to describe the region to a relative. A native of New York, he first noticed the wildlife. “I have heard before of snake countries, but till I

⁸ Martin H. Hall, ed., “The Journal of Ebenezer Hanna,” *Password*, Vol. 3 (January 1958), 22; Walter A. Faulkner, ed., “With Sibley in New Mexico: The Journal of William Henry Smith,” *West Texas Historical Association Yearbook*, Vol. 27 (October 1951), 127, 133; Don E. Alberts, ed., *Rebels on the Rio Grande: The Civil War Journal of A. B. Peticolas*, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1984), 66; Faulkner, “With Sibley in New Mexico,” 25.

came here I never saw so many snakes,” he related. “Not the little striped worms that run in New York meadows, but black snakes and rattle snakes from six to eight feet long” Then, too, there was the barren-looking landscape, dotted with wild grass and mesquite trees but devoid of anything edible. “I tell you it is tough living, and take it all in all, I would not live in this country if I could own a whole county,” he concluded. “To all intents and purposes, this country is Mexico still.”⁹

If many volunteers considered the Southwest a region unsuitable for Anglo civilization. The people they encountered merely reinforced their assumptions. Whatever their political, social, or ideological differences, Northern and Southern soldiers held a common view of Mexicans. Initial impressions could be quite negative, and condemnations quite sweeping. A California soldier summed up his impression of El Paso in a single brief sentence: “The wine is good, the women ugly and the men all have a villainous look.” Another Californian went a step further, dismissing the entire territory of Arizona as a place where “every bush had a thorn, every toad a horn, and every woman was a whore and every man was a lying Gambling horse thief.” In an era when women were idealized for their virtue and horse theft constituted a capital crime, a stronger denunciation is difficult to imagine. Still, a Colorado volunteer made the attempt. “All Mexican towns in Ter[ritory] are alike,” he wrote from New Mexico. “[B]uilt on the bank of a stream[,] all very irregularly laid out[.]” Worst of all, he noted, most were populated by *Mexicanos*. That New Mexico should have a heavy Hispanic population would seem commonsensical, yet soldier-diarists felt compelled to note this demographic reality with regularity – and disgust. Santa Fe, in particular, struck this soldier as an especially unsavory place. “[F]ound it a poor *town* of 10,000 Greasers,” he wrote in January 1862. “The town supports one Presbyterian and two Catholic churches but I do not think they exercise *any good influence* over the people. Santa Fe is one grande (excuse the expression) brothel”¹⁰

⁹ Ovando J. Hollister, *Colorado Volunteers in New Mexico, 1862*, Richard Harwell, ed. (Chicago: R.R. Donnelley & Sons Company, 1962, 1863), 168, 243; Diary of William Addison Bushnell, 10 November 1865, <http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.com/~steelquist/WmBushnell.html>. Hereafter referred to as “Bushnell Diary.”; Oliver Wilcox Norton, *Army Letters, 1861-1865: Being Extracts from Private Letters to Relatives and Friends from a Soldier in the Field during the Late Civil War*, (Chicago: O.L. Deming, 1903), 274-276.

¹⁰ Neil B. Carmony, ed. *The Civil War in Apacheland: Sergeant George Hand's Diary*, (Silver City, NM: High-Lonesome Books, 1996), 113; Konrad F. Schreier, Jr., “The California Column in the Civil War:

The above statements attribute a wide range of disparaging characteristics to the people of the Southwest, though some are fairly generic. That some volunteers insisted upon the physical ugliness of Mexican women, for example, does not actually say much. After all, Union soldiers freely criticized Georgian women, as did Southerners the “ladies” of Pennsylvania. Indeed, labeling women of an unfamiliar culture as “ugly” would appear to be a time-honored habit among soldiers, and reflected a difference in cultures more than anything else. Other assigned attributes, however, cannot be so readily dismissed. When volunteers criticized the population of New Mexico as heathens and villainous horse thieves, when they censured the territory as one “grande brothel,” their words were not aimed at the questionable morality of a few Anglos, but toward a decadent race of Mexican “greasers.” In fact, not only were unsavory white folk on the frontier considered unrepresentative, their condition might be explained by a prolonged contact with an inferior people. “Everything seemed grotesque, incongruous, and behind the age,” a Union veteran remarked of New Mexico. “Those evidences of thrift and enterprise, naturally to have been expected in an ostensibly American Community, were noticeable only by their absence. The few Americans living . . . in the territory were gradually degenerating to the Mexican type of humanity.” Though soldiers looked upon Anglo outlaws with contempt, it is clear they did not hold them primarily responsible for the assortment of supposed social ills which afflicted the territory, but rather the racially flawed New Mexican. How volunteers defined this “Mexican type of humanity” would prove to be of the utmost importance, for the security of civilians, or lack thereof, would ultimately rest upon the judgment of the armed men in their midst.¹¹

Though preoccupied with the rigors of an active campaign, the volunteers who descended upon the Southwest still found ample time to ruminate on the people they encountered. Their conclusions were not flattering. While General Sibley outfitted his

Hazen’s Civil War Diary,” *The Journal of San Diego History*, Vol. 26, No. 2 (Spring 1976), <http://www.sandiegohistory.org/journal/76spring/civilwar.htm>, 26 June 1862. Hereafter referred to as “Hazen Diary.”; Nolie Mumey, ed., *Bloody Trails along the Rio Grande: A Day-by-Day Diary of Alonzo Ferdinand Ickis, 1836-1917*, (Denver: Old West Pub. Company, 1958), 30, 59. The etymology of the epithet “greaser” is unclear, though the word obviously makes a nod toward Anglo perceptions of Mexican “dirtiness.” Purportedly, the word originally was used to describe the lower class of Mexicans who often found employment greasing the axles of ox carts. By the mid-nineteenth century it was being used by Anglos as a racial, rather than a socio-economic, descriptor. See De León, *They Called Them Greasers*, 16.

¹¹ Alwyn Barr, ed., *Charles Porter’s Account of the Confederate Attempt to Seize Arizona and New Mexico*, (Austin: The Pemberton Press, 1964), 1.

Army of New Mexico near San Antonio in September 1861 many of his volunteers, natives of East Texas, used the opportunity to explore the historic town. Some found time to sightsee at the famed Alamo, visit the local stores, or admire the architecture of the churches. Regardless of the cosmopolitan attractions, however, at least one soldier thought the city suffered a major drawback: “It has the worst mixed population I have ever seen – Americans, Germans, Mexicans, and any sort of people you want to see,” he wrote to his family. “They look like a greatly degraded people, the most of them – The Mexicans especially.” Months later, during the Confederate retreat from New Mexico, another Texan offered a virtually identical assessment: “The Inhabitants are almost universally a low, ignorant, degraded race,” he reported. The notion of Mexican degradation, that they were somehow tainted, corrupted, or impure, was a common pronouncement. The source of that degradation, of course, was racial miscegenation.¹²

Whatever their origins – and soldiers speculated exceedingly on this point – Mexicans clearly stood apart from the Anglo race. Custom, culture, religion and most of all skin color and physical appearance branded them as different. “I cannot tell what nation is best represented in the formation of this people,” mused an Iowa volunteer stationed at Brownsville. “Africa might lay some claim for color but their hair is fine, soft and straight which the indian might claim, but his nobleness of character is wanting . . .” He surmised “that there is a mixture of three or four distinct nations and possessing the Superstition, shrewdness, avarice, cowardice and [a] love for display – peculiarities of the distinct races they represent.” A Colorado volunteer hypothesized that they were “a cross between the Spaniard and Indian, though the latter greatly predominates . . .” And a Union lieutenant, strolling the streets of Brownsville, thought them something different entirely. They seemed a throwback to a much older civilization. “These people are the genuine Aztec Mexicans – a race by themselves, neither negro nor Indian, but something like both,” he concluded.¹³

¹² Jerry D. Thompson, ed., *Westward the Texans: The Civil War Journal of Private William Randolph Howell*, (The University of Texas at El Paso: Texas Western Press, 1990), 114; Gracy, “New Mexico Campaign Letters of Frank Starr,” 184.

¹³ Nannie M. Tilley, ed., *Federals on the Frontier: The Diary of Benjamin F. McIntyre, 1862-1864*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1963), 254; Hollister, *Colorado Volunteers in New Mexico*, 245; Norton, *Army Letters*, 273.

Spanish. Indian. African. Aztec. Whether “a race by themselves,” or a combination of all with the redeeming traits of none, soldiers looked upon their manner of living with a degree of condescension or outright contempt. Volunteers scrutinized every aspect of their culture, and often determined that it was not much of a culture, at all. Their dress, or lack of it, served only as the most visible proof of Mexican inadequacy. One Union volunteer acknowledged the existence of a small upper class whose appearance was extravagant, even ostentatious: pants and skirts bedazzled with jewels or silver, fancily embroidered hatbands studded with gold, and, lastly, a shawl, or *serape*, which “must finish off this seemingly grotesque costume” The outrageous display of the few, however, only highlighted the poverty of the majority. The poorer class, from what he gathered, attempted to “ape” the wealthy as much as possible, though they often lacked shoes and coats. Most women, he also noted, abandoned the pretense of a shawl while at home, “leaving arms and breasts exposed while their children are perfectly nude – wearing no clothes until arriving at an age of 5 or 6 years.” His observations were echoed by another. “The little pot-bellied children go entirely naked till they are ten years old, when they attain to shirts, which seems to be the only garment worn till they are grown up,” he wrote. “Passing through the streets [of Brownsville], one sees through all the open doors, the families . . . in all stages of dress below semi-nakedness.”¹⁴

To the dearth of clothing among Mexicans, which marked them less as Anglos and more as Indians, was added yet another charge, that of physical dirtiness. “From the day we left Mesilla all eyes were strained to get a peep at Santa Fe,” wrote one Texan. “Imagine our astonishment! Instead of a fine city, a group of mud cabins – instead of neatness and beauty, loathsomeness and filth, – instead of intelligence, the grossest ignorance. What a capital for a great nation.” This perception of dirtiness carried over to native New Mexicans, as well. Hispanic regiments, recruited by the Union to fight against the Confederacy, did not particularly impress Anglos with their soldierly bearing. A white captain in one of the units, in recommending the promotion of two enlisted men, managed to simultaneously compliment and condescend. “[T]hey are without any exception the two best and cleanest Mexican soldiers I ever seen,” he reported. The

¹⁴ Tilley, *Federals on the Frontier*, 261-262; Norton, *Army Letters*, 272-273.

opinions of white enlisted men seldom differed. When a California volunteer arrived at Fort McRae in May 1863, he discovered it to be “a miserable and dirty looking place garrisoned by a company of greasers” He could do little but hold his nose and hope for them to leave. “I admire them for their willingness to fight our enemies,” he grudgingly admitted, “but I do not like to mix with them. They are dirty and lousy This has none of the look of a military camp – tents every which way and brush shanties all around. They kill sheep, throw the offal where the smell blows through camp and makes it horrible.” A private in the 1st Colorado was similarly exasperated by apparent hygienic shortcomings. Returning to Fort Craig, which had been left under the command of the famed trapper and former Indian agent Kit Carson and his regiment of New Mexico volunteers, he made an unpleasant discovery. “The Ft. has undergone some change since we left,” he wrote. “Kit Carson has been in command [and] has kept his Mexicans at work . . . but the Plaza is full of rags and dirt.” He expressed confidence that General Edward R.S. Canby, an old regular and commander of the Union forces, would whip the camp into order. Interestingly, he seemed to place most of the blame on the New Mexicans’ unpolished colonel. “There is too much Injin in Kit to keep anything clean,” he concluded.¹⁵

What appeared to be a deliberate distinction between the Indian-like Carson and his men, however, actually exposed a much more ambiguous relationship. As the charge against Carson suggests (and as will be demonstrated in subsequent chapters), Anglos clung fast to a stereotypical image of the “dirty” Native American, too ignorant or lazy to care about the virtues of cleanliness. Because the racial identity of the vast majority of Mexicans included some Indian ancestry, soldiers found it easy enough to project the supposed negative traits of one racial group onto another. This was not simply guilt by association, but guilt by miscegenation. As the remarks of a literary-minded volunteer in the 2nd California suggest, the proclivity to condemn Mexican and Indian as one in the same was all too common. “The inhabitants [of Arizona] are greasers and Indians with the exception of Uncle Sam’s boys,” he insisted. “Viewing the inhabitants collectively, one may say of them in the language of Byron, that ‘No one doth seem to care for

¹⁵ Clarksville (Texas) *Standard*, 14 June 1862; Quoted in Darlis A. Miller, “Hispanos and the Civil War,” 109; Carmony, *The Civil War in Apacheland*, 126-127; Mumey, *Bloody Trails*, 100.

cleanliness of surtout or of shirt, though shent with Egypt's plague, unkempt, unwashed, unhurt.”¹⁶

Native New Mexicans also struck volunteers as an exceptionally simple people. “Simple,” of course, did not refer to the American values (or myths) of frugality and rugged individualism. Rather, it denoted backwardness and abject poverty. In many instances, soldiers remarked upon what they observed with evident derision, but not without a degree of accuracy. The former provinces of Mexico were indeed ruled by a tiny cadre of wealthy Hispanics and Anglos, who were in turn supported by an enormous underclass and a system of peonage that left individuals in a state of servitude only marginally better than outright slavery. “I used to think that Ross Brown’s delineation of Mexican life, in *Harper’s Monthly*, was somewhat exaggerated,” wrote a Union volunteer, “but I am satisfied now that his portraits are true to life.” J. Ross Browne, a correspondent for *Harper’s*, traveled throughout the Southwest in 1864 and 1865. Often accompanying Union troops on patrols, he submitted lengthy reports on the people he encountered:

The inhabitants of Imuriz, Terrenati, San Ignatio, and the smaller villages or rancherias are miserably poor and lazy. Their cattle have nearly all disappeared, in consequence of the frequent raids of the Apaches; and their milpas, or fields, formerly cultivated with considerable success, have gone to ruin. Scarcely sufficient food to sustain life is now produced. The ground is rich and the climate unsurpassed, and with the rudest cultivation abundant crops . . . might be produced; but all hope for the future seems to have been crushed out of these miserable people. All day long they sit by the doors of their filthy little adobe huts, smoking cigarritos and playing cards. I fancy they like it better than working. At least they live by idleness. Industry would kill them. When these mixed races are compelled to work they sicken and die.

Most volunteers hardly required the erudition of a *Harper’s* journalist to “understand” New Mexican society; they were perfectly capable of formulating similar conclusions on their own. “The living of this class seems of the most simple,” wrote a Union volunteer of the residents of Brownsville. They were, he thought, “mere ‘hewers of wood and hawlers of water’ with nothing grand or enobling in their natures.” Yet the “merchant class,” their supposed superiors, fared little better. “Their whole stock would not amount

¹⁶ Bushnell Diary, 10 November 1865.

to a dollar . . . and the little rotten cane shanty that screens them from the sun resembles more a little dirty chicken coop than a place for a human being to spend his time.” Their methods of farming, too, were summarily dismissed. “The art and science of agriculture are in no very advanced state among them,” noted a Coloradoan. “Their stock, of all descriptions, is of the most inferior kind. A States farmer would not have it on his premises.” A private in the 5th Texas concurred. “There is some sheep raised in this territory,” he remarked. “They are poor trifling things, almost unfit to eat. . . . I do not see how the inhabitants have done to live here so long.” Attempting to answer that riddle, a compatriot in the 4th Texas struck at the heart of the issue: “Mexicans . . . have a certain degree of civilization in their manners and appearance which does not exceed the common class of the half civilized Indians of the Indian Territory,” he declared. “These natives . . . [are] peculiarly adapted to the country and climate.” The logic was ironclad. Who else but a half-civilized people could survive in a half-civilized land? The “mongrel” language, the gaudy dress, the wretched filthiness, and the miserable poverty of these “half-civilized creatures” clearly placed them below Anglos, and but little above the “savage” Indian.¹⁷

Labeling New Mexicans as half-civilized, however, was not meant to explain their condition. It was merely another way of describing it, of accentuating the difference between Anglo-American and Mexican-American. The true cause of their plight, as might be gleaned from Ross Browne’s commentary, was a deficiency in the Mexican character attributable to their mixed racial heritage. Though Mexicans had achieved a certain degree of civilization they, like their Indian cousins, seemed incapable of further advancement. They were a decadent people who had reached the limits of their natural development, their stagnant culture bound to be surpassed by a progressive and “pure” Anglo civilization. In what would prove to be a recurring pattern, Anglos rarely defined the racial “other” on the basis of any trait actually exhibited by the group in question, but on the qualities the group supposedly lacked in comparison to Anglos. This process of negative definition ultimately said much more about Anglo values than about the group

¹⁷ Norton, *Army Letters*, 272; J. Ross Browne, “A Tour through Arizona,” *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine*, Vol. 30, No. 176 (January 1865), 140; Tilley, *Federals on the Frontier*, 262; Hollister, *Colorado Volunteers in New Mexico*, 162; Faulkner, “With Sibley in New Mexico,” 138, 141; Hall, “The Journal of Ebenezer Hanna,” 22-23.

being defined, but it did serve as an important measure of racial interaction. The greater the negative definition, the wider the perceived gap between the two cultures, the more likely were the people being defined to suffer violence at the hands of those who defined them.¹⁸

As soldiers made abundantly clear, they considered the gap between Mexicans and white Americans to be extreme. Though the nineteenth century democrat, in his capacity as soldier, voluntarily and temporarily relinquished much of the egalitarianism by which he defined himself, he did so with neither relish nor enthusiasm. Nor did the cognizance that he surrendered his freedoms to advance a greater cause (however defined) make the process any less painful. The authoritarianism of the military was simply incompatible with the liberalism of the civilian. For the volunteers, the two worlds seemed polar opposites, as different as night and day. Once considered free men, they now found themselves “enslaved” to military law. In a nation that condoned actual slavery, soldiers understood the significance of this metaphor and did not make the comparison lightly. Associating their plight with that of African-Americans, however, was only one means to express chagrin at being treated as anything less than free white men. In reality, who they chose as their point of reference varied, and chiefly depended upon the identity of those they perceived as occupying the lowest rung of the racial ladder in the immediate vicinity. In the West, for instance, soldiers with bruised egos often insisted they were treated no better than reservation Indians. In the Southwest, the lowly Mexican received this dubious honor. “A man or soldier is not as much thought of by the officers as the meanest greaser,” wrote a disgusted California volunteer from Tucson. “This service is more degrading to one who has the least particle of manly pride

¹⁸ The propensity of oppressors to project their own vices onto the oppressed has been well documented and is certainly not unique to Anglo-Americans. One need only look to Chinese descriptions of frontier “barbarians” or Japanese thoughts on Koreans in the early twentieth century to understand its universality. At its most fundamental, the process was rooted in specious and subjective claims of the superiority of “civilization” over alleged “savagism.” Only later would oppression be justified on specifically “racial” grounds. See Roy Harvey Pearce, *Savagism and Civilization: A Study of the Indian in the American Mind*. (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988, 1953); Winthrop D. Jordan, *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812*, (Chapel Hill, 1968); Robert F. Berkhofer, *The White Man’s Indian: Images of the American Indian from Columbus to the Present*, (New York: Knopf, 1978); Arnaldo De León, *They Called Them Greasers: Anglo-Attitudes Toward Mexicans in Texas, 1821-1900*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1983); and Paul A. Kramer, “Race-Making and Colonial Violence in the U.S. Empire: The Philippine-American War as Race War,” *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 30, No. 2 (April 2006), 169-210.

than any menial work ever performed.” A conversation that allegedly took place at a fandango verified his suspicions: “It is currently reported that at a dance the other night an officer was overheard telling a greaser woman that the soldiers (Privates) were the same as peons,” he remarked. “That is a new idea but I have not the least doubt but that some of them really think so.” Others, too, felt they did not receive the full respect demanded of their Anglo status. A Union volunteer in Brownsville thought it outrageous that Mexican and black civilians should be allowed to purchase fresh bread from a government-operated bakery while the army compelled soldiers to subsist on plain hardtack. “I was today forcibly reminded that a Mexican greaser or nigger was in better circumstances than the soldier,” he penned with acidity. “It is wrong and an insult upon every enlisted man” When a white lieutenant of a New Mexican regiment ordered several members of the 1st Colorado tied to a wagon for killing an ox, at least one soldier who witnessed the incident felt the punishment unjustified. “If I had been one that . . . was tied, the Liut would not tied a nother after he had tied me,” he boldly informed his wife. “He is Leut of a Mexican Co[mpany] and he thinks that we ar all gresers, I think he will soon find out that we ar not gresers but whit men.”¹⁹

To say that such statements implied not only that soldiers had a very clear idea of their own identity, but also of the Mexican “greasers” whom they held in obvious contempt would not be entirely accurate. As previously suggested, the volunteers made sense of who they were in relation to what Mexicans – or Indians or African-Americans – supposedly were not. Among the many images of the Mexican in the Anglo mind, for example, one of the more enduring and prominent was that of the “indolent” Mexican, an obvious counterpoint to the “industrious” American. Accusations of laziness and indolence often accompanied a litany of other condemnations, but it seemed a principle cause of Mexican backwardness. “The female portion of [Tuscon] is entirely Mexican,” observed a Californian, “and they are slouchy and inelegant in their attire and indolent in their habits.” A Coloradoan, commenting on the poverty he saw before him, could only attribute it to intentional Mexican sloth. “One would almost think they scrimped themselves to save work,” he insisted. “They seem destitute of ambition or enterprise.

¹⁹ Carmony, *The Civil War in Apacheland*, 70-71; Tilley, *Federals on the Frontier*, 266; George Aux to “Dear Wife,” 10 May 1862, Civil War Miscellaneous Collection, USMHI.

Laziness is their most marked characteristic.” Yet even the laziest of people require some means of survival, and the alacrity with which Mexicans supposedly indulged in gambling, cheating, thievery and outright banditry seemed to belie the notion that they lacked ambition. “This is a very dangerous country to travel in as these Greasers will kill a man for a dollar any time,” insisted a Coloradoan. “They wont work but will steal all they can lay their dirty hands upon.” Confederate volunteers in the Army of New Mexico harbored similar sentiments. As the army advanced northward toward Santa Fe in March 1862, a Texan in the harried column was hard-pressed to identify the greater nuisance: “At the present stage of affairs it is more distressing than ever to large armies on hostile terms, and surrounded on all sides by savage Indians, and the Mexicans . . . being but a little better,” he wrote. “The Indians and Mexicans [are] preying on the native armies and every thing that they get hold of”²⁰

Ignorance, too, seemed a pervasive problem. Coupled with indolence and its associated vices, soldiers found it a convenient explanation for some of the wretched conditions and outlandish behavior they observed. “Their ignorance of even the most prominent current events and their apparently utter indifference to them were appalling in human beings popularly supposed to possess intelligence,” remarked a Union soldier. “They seemingly never bothered their brains with abstract notions of liberty and the privilege of self-government.” A soldier in the 1st Colorado thought the town of Las Vegas nothing more than a “collection of sheep-pens inhabited by a race of people whose poverty of purse is equaled only by their poverty of mind.” He was particularly struck by Mexican women, moving through the streets with clay pots balanced on their heads, and offered what he felt a just comparison: “As they pass a jackass . . . you are forced to acknowledge that one looks about as sagacious as the other.” For some, it appeared that Mexicans lacked the mental capacity to fully appreciate their own plight. At the village of Alamoso, for instance, a California trooper remarked with some detachment on the pervasiveness of gambling among the women of the town. “Some of them gamble off all their clothing, and one even went so far as to get rid of her house in that way, thereby forcing herself and very small child to sleep out of doors.” It was not the irresponsibility

²⁰ Bushnell Diary, 10 November 1865; Hollister, *Colorado Volunteers in New Mexico*, 245; Mumey, *Bloody Trails*, 51, 72; Hall, “The Journal of Ebenezer Hanna,” 23.

of the woman's action that bothered him, however, but her apparent indifference to the consequences. "She had her bed spread on the plaza and seemed to be perfectly satisfied," he noted with incredulity. "In a short time she was gambling again and seemed more lucky. At last she beat the game and was the happy owner of a house again." An Iowan also noted this apparent indifference, and conjectured as to its cause. Forced to witness the execution of a Mexican deserter, he watched as a priest administered the last rites to the doomed man. Moments later, a firing squad ended his life. "In his death there was little or no display of feeling – no fear manifested," he recorded. "In fact there was a lack of everything which denoted a realization of his situation in which he was placed." The man's serenity left him skeptical, however. He did not question its genuineness, but did doubt its basis. "He was one of that class who lacked enlightenment, who was a superstitious and firm believer in the roman church and centered every hope and thought upon the bright promis the priest had represented as awaiting him." In short, the poor man had simply been deluded by the false religion of Catholicism.²¹

To Anglo volunteers, the prevalence of Catholicism among native New Mexicans was but another peculiarity that marked them as a lesser people. They derided the religion as mere "superstition," its practitioners as "heathens." Consequently, when a Colorado soldier matter-of-factly declared that "Mexicans are all Catholics," his statement was not intended as an objective observation. The ubiquity of chiming bells, in particular, caught their attention, and though some aesthetes appreciated the beauty of the more elaborate churches and cathedrals, most were simply annoyed by them. "Like all Catholic towns, [Santa Fe] abounds in bells," noted a Texan in April 1862, "and it is not very harmonious to hear them all chiming for matins and vespers mornings and evenings, for they do not chord by any means, but the noise is rather disagreeable than otherwise" Others were not nearly as patient. After a few days in the city, a Texan in the 4th Regiment had had enough. "I am completely disgusted with church bells and Mexicans generally," he exclaimed. A cacophony of bells likewise disturbed members of the 1st California encamped at Tucson, forcing one frustrated soldier to take action. Unable to

²¹ Barr, *Charles Porter's Account*, 2; Hollister, *Colorado Volunteers in New Mexico*, 91, 246; Carmony, *The Civil War in Apacheland*, 168-169; Tilley, *Federals on the Frontier*, 354-355.

sleep because of the incessant chiming, in a fit of rage he ran to the nearest church – the source of his torment – and pelted it with rocks. But as irritating as some found church bells to be, their antipathy toward Catholicism obviously had much deeper roots. Anglo-Americans enjoyed a rich history of anti-Catholic sentiment, culminating in the nativist Know-Nothing movement of the 1850s. Widespread fear of Irish-Catholic immigrants, allegedly more loyal to Rome than to the United States, frequently resulted in discrimination and ethnic violence. Many soldiers carried these preconceptions with them to the Southwest, where they discovered a “priest-ridden” people steeped in rosaries and rituals.²²

Criticisms of Mexican Catholicism, however, centered more on the issue of oppression than loyalty. The role of the Catholic Church in subjugating the great empires of Central and South America was well known. To many volunteers, it also appeared guilty of tyrannizing its own parishioners, of keeping them in poverty and ignorance for the sake of its own aggrandizement. “[The Church] is said to work miracles yearly,” reported a skeptical California volunteer from Tucson, “which mainly consists in the easy and sudden transportation of money from the pockets of devout believers, into those of other people, wearing long black gowns and long black hats.” A Coloradoan likewise thought that the Church abused its authority for ulterior motives. “I stood spell-bound by their influence,” he related of the chiming bells of Santa Fe. “[T]he awful power of the Catholic Church in the dark ages, [and] the overwhelming influence of the clergy obtained by keeping the masses in ignorance . . . mingled with visions of my native hills, where man is man and thought is free as the wind.” It was not as if Anglos were in danger of being dominated by a religious cabal, however, and had escaped the grasp of a repressive religious institution by pure chance. His observations of the Mexican parishioners made it clear that they were a people especially prone to such influence: “Their physiognomy is a good index of their character, which is vacant and insipid – destitute of the heroic virtues.”²³

Despite the pervasiveness of Church influence and the “sheep-like” nature of its followers, soldiers still discerned a great deal of immorality among the people – a

²² Mumeay, *Bloody Trails*, 58; Alberts, *Rebels on the Rio Grande*, 91; Thompson, *Westward the Texans*, 97; Carmony, *The Civil War in Apacheland*, 85.

²³ San Francisco *Alta California*, 23 July 1862; Hollister, *Colorado Volunteers in New Mexico*, 214-215.

contradiction not at all surprising when one considers the basic irrationality of racist thought. Sexual licentiousness, in particular, seemed endemic to the culture, paradoxically a product of the same ignorance that defined the Mexican relationship with the Church. “This is a decidedly *fast town* by moonlight,” reported a Coloradoan of Santa Fe. “Licentiousness is deemed a virtue and but few Mexicans are without sexual disease in some form. I believe there are but few but what inherit *disease*.” In part, this perception originated from the predictable boon in prostitution that accompanied the influx of thousands of unattached young men into the territory. Just as women of ill-repute tagged along with the armies in the East, so too did they find a home with the armies of the Southwest, and a portion of the men were all too willing to take advantage of their services. “Since the occupation of Tucson by our troops, crowds of Mexican women have flocked thither, and the ‘cry is, still they come,’” wrote a Californian in June 1862. “As you may suppose, gambling, vice, and the grossest immoralities attend the march of so considerable a column” Significant racial and regional differences existed, however, in how soldiers perceived these women. In the East, where Anglo prostitutes predominated, soldiers might look upon them with disdain as an aberrant, downtrodden class but few construed them as somehow representative of all women, North or South. A decidedly different attitude prevailed in the Southwest: even if soldiers granted that not all Mexican women were prostitutes, as a race they seemed to lack those requisite virtues and proprieties that traditionally separated the two. “They are generally ignorant and sensual,” a Coloradoan explained of Mexican women. “Virtue is comparatively unknown among them. The relations of the sexes are invested with none of that nobleness and tenderness that gives value and beauty to the sentiment.”²⁴

Like other discernable traits, however, the charge of moral inadequacy hardly originated with objective observation. The source of soldiers’ condemnations rested neither upon an actual prevalence of prostitution nor moral deficiencies, but rather with a Mexican culture that clashed with their own Victorian sensibilities. As a way to further distance themselves from a half-civilized people, Americans passed moral judgments on what were in fact non-moral situations, imputing to Mexicans an immorality that served

²⁴ Mumey, *Bloody Trails*, 63; “Vidette” to editor, San Francisco *Alta California*, 29 June 1862; Hollister, *Colorado Volunteers in New Mexico*, 211.

to bolster their own sense of virtuousness. The stereotypical image of the lascivious Mexican became the stuff of legend. It was at once alluring and repulsive, romantic and degrading. That children ran naked and grown women had not the “decency” to adequately cover themselves, for example, suggested not only a cultural difference, but a degree of lewdness supposedly absent in Anglo-America. The Mexican custom of public bathing, in particular, left soldiers aghast. “I went down to the river to swim,” recounted one Union volunteer, “and was a little surprised to observe that it is the custom for whole families to enjoy that luxury together without the incumbrance of bathing dressed.” Still, he remained open-minded and, realizing that it was an innocent affair, managed to take the encounter in stride: “All ages and sexes were indiscriminately mixed in the river, and as when you are with the Romans, you must do as the Romans do, I mixed in too.”²⁵

The infamous fandangos, as well, allowed soldiers the opportunity to interact with women in a manner that most Anglos considered unseemly, even scandalous. Still, the provocative dances were extraordinarily popular with volunteers, if not for the women then at least for the opportunity to escape the monotonous drudgery of military life. Though most soldiers seemed to have genuinely enjoyed the female companionship provided by these community affairs, they were also quick to note when a woman’s “conviviality” crossed the line. An incident that occurred at a fandango in Tucson speaks volumes as to Anglo ideas of propriety, race, gender, and class. “It was going off well,” reported a Californian in attendance, “until Genl. [James] Carleton’s nigger led a good looking señorita out. The boys commenced throwing bricks and the dance broke up.” The incident left him thoroughly disgusted, and the “airs” that had been assumed by his officers for the benefit of the women seemed laughable. “To know that while they are dancing a buck nigger could come in, take her from them and sleep with her, is too much for me. Yet they . . . associate with and treat them as ladies in every sense of the word when in a decent community they would be obliged to live in the suburbs or leave town altogether.”²⁶

Given that volunteers regularly discerned African ancestry in the Mexican, which also conveniently explained their sexual impropriety, their reaction to a black man

²⁵ Norton, *Army Letters*, 272.

²⁶ Carmony, *The Civil War in Apacheland*, 84, 85-86.

leaving with a native woman is at first difficult to comprehend. The key to the above scene, however, is that Carleton's bondservant left the dance not with a licentious Mexican prostitute, but with a "good looking senorita." She was, in other words, fair-skinned – and therefore off limits to an African-American. As with everything else, volunteers provided contradictory opinions as to the physical beauty of Mexican women, but even those who found them repulsive left no doubt as to what features the ideal woman should possess. "I do not know how I will do when I get back to a civilized country where there is women," pondered a soldier in the 1st California. "The discription given by a great many of the beautiful women of Mexico is absurd. . . . There all as black as the ace of spades & as ugly as sin." Though most were a bit more forgiving, skin color played a major role in assessing beauty and soldiers invariably considered Mexican women with Anglo-like features (who also tended to come from the upper class) as more desirable. "There is *one* decidedly handsome Senorita in [Teculote]," confessed a Coloradoan. "She was only a shade dark – what novelists call a rich olive complexion" As for the rest of the female population, he was less sanguine. "A pretty woman is rarely met with in New Mexico, notwithstanding the silly rhapsodies usually indulged in by everybody when they refer to the subject."²⁷

Interestingly, if there were indeed only a handful of women attractive enough to merit a soldier's attention, they apparently leaped-frog from village to village with lightning speed. Nearly every soldier who discussed the subject admitted to encountering a "pretty senorita" at some point in his travels, illuminating the conflicting images volunteers held of Mexican women. While some abhorred their supposed sensuality and found them to be physically repulsive, others found them charming and exotic and allowed themselves to succumb to romantic fantasy. During the retreat from New Mexico in March 1862, a lonely Texan lamented to his sweetheart in the privacy of his diary: "Sweet girl I often think of you in these wild woods of New Mexico, where . . . no kind female friend is near our camps to watch over us so tenderly as our girls did at Home." The next day saw a marked change of attitude, as a "kind female friend" was apparently at hand. "Old Armiche [a Southern sympathizer] has two beautiful

²⁷ Ernest Marchand, ed., *News from Fort Craig, New Mexico, 1863: Civil War Letters of Andrew Ryan, with the First California Volunteers*, (Santa Fe: Stage Coach Press, 1966), 64; Hollister, *Colorado Volunteers in New Mexico*, 247.

daughters,” he swooned. “I have got to loving one of them, she is so pretty. I believe I will marry her, & take her home with me and show her to the homefolks.” Fraternization occurred regularly, and could often be quite flirtatious, at least according to the soldiers who described the encounters. How Mexican women perceived them is unknown. Whether attending a raucous village fandango or simply walking the streets, soldiers could not escape the allure of the pretty Mexican *senorita*. A Union lieutenant who ventured to learn a smattering of Spanish from a woman in Brownsville apparently enjoyed the experience – though he was clearly more interested in the instructor than the subject. “My first lesson in the language I learned from a pretty *senorita* – bright, intelligent, vivacious and pretty,” he wrote. “She took a bunch of “cigarros” (cigarettes) from her pocket, passed them around and lit one herself. The women all smoke [another oddity noted by volunteers, especially those from the North]. Of course I could not refuse to light my cigar at her lips, when so temptingly offered.” By the end of the “tutorial,” he was smitten. “My *senorita*, when I left, kissed her hand to me with ‘Adios, *Senor,*’ in the prettiest way.”²⁸

These were not isolated instances, and suggest that soldiers were quite capable of the rationalization required to justify relations with a “degraded” race. Indeed, when soldiers found themselves quartered within a town for any amount of time, investigating the female population ranked as a priority. Housed near a convent in Santa Fe, a few adventurous Confederates let their curiosity get the better of them. While some contented themselves with ogling the nuns over the convent wall, others swarmed the rooftop of an attached school. One Texan even climbed through a window and attempted to enter the courtyard, but beat a hasty retreat when confronted by a group of irritated sisters. Unsurprisingly, they experienced better luck with women who had not taken vows of celibacy. To be sure, one Confederate insisted that Texans never “appropriated” a woman without her consent. Union sources, too, left little doubt as to the intimate relationships that developed between soldier and *senorita*. “Left Santa Fe and the many *Bueno Senoritas,*” wrote a Coloradoan. “[Companies] A & F of the 10th [Infantry] are all drunk today and O! what a parting scene they had with their *women*. Such hugging and kissing would astonish a Hoosier Lass.” In June 1863, after a lengthy sojourn in El Paso,

²⁸ Faulkner, “With Sibley in New Mexico,” 140-141; Norton, *Army Letters*, 273.

the 1st California received orders to march north up the Rio Grande to Fort McRae. “We were sorry to leave,” confessed a volunteer. “We had such fine and cool quarters, good water, eggs, butter, cheese, vegetables, fruit, and many other things very plenty” What those “other things” may have been became apparent as the 1st California departed. “As we marched from town it was amusing to see the women out wishing us ‘Adios, adios amigos,’ and then bellow and cry to see some of their lovers leave so unexpectedly.”²⁹

Nevertheless, no matter how cordial or consensual the relationship, it is apparent that soldiers exhibited a dangerous tendency to sexually objectify the women they encountered. While Coloradoans denounced the entire territory as a “grande brothel,” Texans “appropriated” women as they would a mule. Whether volunteers decried Mexican immorality or lusted after the beautiful *senorita*, the issue of sex remained the common denominator. That soldiers should view them through the lens of sexuality, however, was not unusual. Appraisals of Anglo women, too, were based on the same criterion, the mythical “southern lady” being a primary example. But whereas the American lady was idealized for her timidity, modesty, purity, and above all sexual restraint, the Mexican woman, unsurprisingly, was idealized (and demonized) for exactly the opposite characteristics: vivaciousness, immodesty, and sexual aggressiveness. Furthermore, sexual mores alone did not define Anglo women. Though constrained by a highly patriarchal society, they were not simply objects of male desire, and were expected to fulfill very specific duties which included reining in masculine boorishness, managing household affairs, and caring for children. In short, they also played the role of wife and mother. When it came to Mexican women, however, soldiers seemed incapable of recognizing them as anything other than sexual creatures, coveting or condemning them almost solely as either sexual deviants or, worse, potential concubines to be enjoyed as spoils of war.³⁰

²⁹ Mary J. Straw, *Loretto: The Sisters and Their Santa Fe Chapel*, (Santa Fe: Museum of New Mexico Press, 2002), 23; Hall, *Sibley’s New Mexico Campaign*, 56; Mumey, *Bloody Trails*, 64; Carmony, *The Civil War in Apacheland*, 124.

³⁰ Important studies of gender include Anne Firor Scott, *The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics, 1830-1930*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970); Suzanne Lebsock, *The Free Women of Petersburg: Status and Culture in a Southern Town, 1784-1860*, (New York: Norton, 1985); and Drew Gilpin Faust, *Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War*, (Chapel Hill, 1996).

Because of this narrow view, there consequently occurred predictable results. In early October 1862, a drunken California volunteer entered the house of a Tucson woman and refused to leave. Sensing that he had not called upon her for conversation, she fled and informed a regimental officer of the situation. Ordered to depart, the soldier instead drew a knife and, in the scuffle that followed, managed his escape. A similar incident involved a volunteer from the 7th Texas. In late December 1861, soon after Sibley's army had crossed into New Mexico, several soldiers took leave in the town of El Paso. During their stay, one of them was killed by Mexican authorities after entering a woman's residence. "They said that [he] had assaulted or insulted a Mexican woman in her house, that she ran out of the house screaming," reported a comrade. A mob caught up with the Texan shortly after, riddling him with at least eighteen bullets when he ignored orders to halt. Needless to say, the episode did nothing to improve Texan-Mexican relations, and with great effort officers convinced their men not to burn the town in retribution. A Unionist observer in El Paso corroborated the reports of such behavior, noting with despair the rowdy conduct of Sibley's men after they entered the town. "The officers have no control over them," he complained, "and they do just as they please, and you know what men off a long trip please to do; females neither in nor out of their houses are safe." Owing to the paucity of information concerning violence against Mexican women it is difficult to draw any firm conclusions from these events, and the available information must be used with caution. Statistically, it is impossible to determine with any degree of accuracy the representativeness of such incidents, how the rate of assaults against women in the Southwest (including rape) compared with that of assaults against women in other theatres of the war, or even if the acts were more likely to be committed by Texans or Coloradoans. Still, the reports suggest a wider pattern of abuse.³¹

Assuming one believes Unionist complaints, the accusation of Confederate bawdiness in El Paso is particularly noteworthy. Comparable reports involving Confederate and Union forces (excluding guerrilla units) and Anglo women are practically nonexistent. To be sure, rape and other "outrages" did occur, but with

³¹ Carmony, *The Civil War in Apacheland*, 82; William Davidson, "The March to New Mexico," *Civil War in the Southwest: Recollections of the Sibley Brigade*, Jerry Thompson, ed. (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2001), 15-16; US Consul R. L. Robertson to General George Wright, 18 April 1862, *OR*, Ser. 1, Vol. 50, Pt. 1, 1012-1013. Robertson forwarded to Wright the report of the unnamed correspondent.

surprising infrequency. Though there existed a widespread fear of marauding soldiers indiscriminately violating women, reality proved those apprehensions to be unfounded. Everyone breathed easier when it became apparent that both Lee's men in Pennsylvania and Sherman's men in Georgia, themselves "off a long trip," generally treated women with respect and granted them a degree of immunity – so long as they comported to the accepted ideal of womanhood. When women violated those norms, often by their failure to behave with proper submissiveness (by spitting on or striking a soldier, for instance), they did so at their own peril. "Unladylike" behavior stripped them of the feminine aura that served as their primary defense. In contemporary parlance, they became "unsexed" and thus legitimate targets of retribution. The timid lady deserved protection; the Southern "she devil" or haughty Pennsylvanian, by contrast, invited punishment. In most cases, however, the punishment meted out by volunteers did not include sexual assault or harassment. In fact, the response was often nonviolent (though there exist numerous examples to the contrary), and consisted of little more than a sarcastic quip or thorough tongue-lashing – a recourse meant to put a "spirited" female in her place without actually causing physical harm. No matter how irksome their behavior, as part of the Anglo-American community they still commanded a certain irreducible respect.³²

While it is doubtful that soldiers in the Southwest varied greatly in their suppositions about proper womanly conduct, the matter was complicated by the issue of race. Not only did Mexican women flout acceptable behavior with their supposed licentiousness, they also lacked the protection provided by racial affinities. Their status as the non-Anglo, racial "other" undermined any defense that might have been afforded by gender. These were degraded, morally deficient, dark-skinned foreigners, after all, and as such did not warrant the same protection accorded to "true" women. Their womanly shortcomings, consequently, were bound to provoke a range of otherwise unacceptable male behavior. It is also worthwhile to remember that volunteers – Texans especially – entered New Mexico under the banner of Manifest Destiny, carrying with them a sense of entitlement to the land and its resources. It is not too far of a leap, then, to suggest that they viewed the "appropriation" of Mexican women as their prerogative.

³² On the image of the "lady" and consequences of its violation, see Scott, *The Southern Lady*, 4-21; Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 196-219; and Reid Mitchell, *The Vacant Chair: The Northern Soldier Leaves Home*, (New York: Oxford, 1993), particularly chapter six, "She Devils," 89-113.

Understanding the *mélange* of motives behind these acts, and whether soldiers committed them out of a sense of entitlement, vengeance or simple sexual gratification is, in the end, not nearly as important as understanding why they were allowed to occur to in the first place.

Just as Mexican women appeared to lack some crucial element of femininity, so too did men seem to be missing an integral component of masculinity. Charges of cowardice and obscene self-interest ran hand in hand. General Canby expressed these sentiments as early as August 1861, doubting if native New Mexicans would assist Americans in defending the territory: “The people of the Territory . . . are apathetic in disposition, and will adopt any measures that may be necessary for the defense of their Territory with great tardiness, looking with greater concern to their private, and often petty interests,” he insisted. “I place no reliance upon any volunteer force that can be raised, unless strongly supported by regular troops.” Union volunteers who might have expected New Mexican support in repelling the Confederate invasion quickly came to the same conclusions. The people simply lacked the necessary fortitude to protect themselves. As a detachment of the 1st Colorado approached one village, a volunteer observed the actions of the panicked residents who could not distinguish if the force represented friend or foe. “We struck the river just below an outlandish Mexican town; whose inhabitants fled, like any other cattle, and hid in the corn,” he recorded with contempt. Those New Mexicans who did volunteer received scant credit for their service. “Too little cannot be said of their valor nor too much of their inefficiency,” insisted a Union veteran in a typical assessment. “The demoralization of a single six-pound shot precipitated a stampede equaled only by a break of terrified buffalo. . . . There [should] be no mistake as to the romantic notion that very much of the valiant blood of the *Hidalgos* flows in the veins of the average New Mexican.” If there was any hint of “noble” Spanish ancestry among them – which might have placed them on par with Anglo-Saxons – it had long since been drowned out by extensive racial intermixing. Only the *sub par* Mexican remained. An Iowa volunteer thought it neatly explained the massive number of desertions among Unionist Hispanic regiments raised in Texas. “[They] are almost entirely of Mexican Origin (or of the mixture Spanish & Indian),” he

wrote with some exasperation. “I consider them dishonest, cowardly and treacherous and only bide their time to make good their escape.”³³

Considering the opinion of their supposed allies, that New Mexicans should be disparaged by Confederate soldiers is not surprising. One volunteer, in a letter to a local paper, felt compelled to warn his countryman against complacency in the coming conflict. “Texans may have easily conquered the Mexican and Savage foe by their dauntless valor, but the case is far different now,” he cautioned. Though Mexican resistance might be brushed aside, conquering New Mexico would require the besting of a much more formidable American foe. “Our enemy has the same Norman blood – greatly exceeds us in numbers, and will be thoroughly disciplined before giving us battle.” Their contempt showed through on the battlefield, as well – at least according to a spiteful Union veteran. Confederates, he insisted, did not take New Mexicans as prisoners, though this did not imply that they were slaughtered in cold blood. “They merely disarmed the Mexicans and did not ever take the trouble to parole them – told them to go back to the post, get other arms and return to the front to be again disarmed,” he wrote without sarcasm. Whatever the veracity of this claim, it is apparent that some New Mexicans did end up as prisoners of war in the hands of the Confederate army. Though there is little evidence to suggest they were mistreated, a proposed prisoner exchange during the Confederate retreat from Santa Fe revealed their estimated worth. When Colonel Thomas Green of the 5th Texas entered Union lines in early April 1862 under a flag of truce and suggested an even, man for man exchange of his New Mexican prisoners for captured Texans, Federal authorities balked. According to one Union volunteer, Confederate insistence on this point eventually sunk the negotiations: “As they would consent to nothing but an even exchange between Mexicans and Whites no arrangement was concluded.” Though their reluctance to deal with Green may simply have been a ploy to deprive the beaten Confederates of additional manpower, they appeared genuinely hesitant to relinquish Anglo rebels for Mexican Unionists on such a basis. Given the assumptions as to New Mexican fighting ability, they doubtless felt the arrangement would have worked to their disadvantage. As the prisoners pondered their

³³ *OR*, Ser. 1, Vol. 4, 65; Hollister, *Colorado Volunteers in New Mexico*, 221; Joseph McC. Bell, “Memoirs of Joseph McC. Bell,” *War Papers Read Before the State of Wisconsin*, *MOLLUS*, (Milwaukee, WI: Burdick, Armitage & Allen, 1891), 54; Tilley, *Federals on the Frontier*, 346-347.

fate, the exchange insultingly degenerated into a haggling match over the relative value of what each side obviously considered defective materiel of war. (In an ironic twist, the national exchange cartel would be sabotaged the following year when Confederate authorities rejected Union demands of an even exchange of captured black soldiers.)³⁴

The flip side of Mexican cowardice, of course, was not bravery but treachery. As suggested above, when applied by Union volunteers “treachery” usually signified nothing more than betrayal or criminal actions. For Confederate Texans, however, who used the term with far more frequency, it was a pejorative rife with historical baggage. The “treacherous Mexican” conjured images not of simple banditry, but of past cruelties inflicted upon Texans: the Alamo, the Goliad massacre, the 1841 Santa Fe debacle, and the Cortina Wars. The image was synonymous with barbarity, inhumanity, and no-quarter warfare, a threat to the very foundations of American (Texan) civilization. With the departure of United States regulars from the region the floodgates had been cast wide open, and a sense of paranoia pervaded Texas. The speeches offered at flag dedication ceremonies, in which local women bestowed hand-sewn banners upon newly raised regiments, paint a vivid portrait of the triumvirate of threats – brown, red, and black – which Texans believed they faced. “This little Confederacy is surrounded on all sides by enemies,” began one woman’s address to the Cook County Volunteers:

Our ports blockaded on the South, the treacherous Mexicans on the West, and savage Indians in our very neighborhood, while the bloodthirsty Abolitionists rushing in from the North would see the enemy among us, barbarously massacre the helpless women and innocent children, and burn their houses over their heads, and in these brutalities try to convince us that they are doing God’s service. . . . Gentlemen, remember you are Texans! Remember the stark and soul-trying hour, when a few war worn patriots drove back the Mexican invaders, and raised the Lone Star State from the clouds of Catholic tyranny that hung over its glimmering folds. And as the handful of Spartan like heroes bore the blood stained banner from the crimson fields of Goliad and the Alamo, so do you, if you should meet in deadly fray, return with your flag still waving, and its stars floating in silver lustre above your heads.³⁵

³⁴ “Cavalry” to editor, Clarksville (Texas) *Standard*, 27 July 1861; Barr, *Charles Porter’s Account*, 13; Hollister, *Colorado Volunteers in New Mexico*, 133.

³⁵ Mrs. E.F. Gibson to Captain William G. Twitty’s Company of Cook Country Volunteers, Dallas *Herald*, 14 August 1861.

Assuming that the panic and alarm which underscored this message were genuine, it is with no little irony that one reads the statements of another woman who felt it necessary to remind prospective volunteers of their birthright: “The name of a ‘Texas Ranger’ strikes terror into the heart of a Mexican or an Indian to this day.” Regardless, the responses that these exhortations elicited from volunteers were no less histrionic; they fully appreciated the direness of the situation. “Our enemies are as numerous as the waves of the forest, and as various as the hues of autumn!” exclaimed a freshly-minted Texas officer. “On the one hand, we have the treacherous and unprincipled Mexican; on the other, the cunning barbarous and blood-thirsty Indian; and still another, up in the land of dark deeds and foul designs, the not less treacherous, faith-breaking and blood-thirsty abolitionists It is against these, our foes, so devoid of honor, so destitute of every feeling of humanity, so insensible to every generous impulse and noble instinct, that stirs the heart of civilized man, that these ladies invoke our aid, and in the presentation of this flag, conjure us to protect them and our country.” This was more than empty rhetoric meant to goad men into action, but the expression of a very real fear. “The U S troops . . . are all abandoning their post’s,” recorded one volunteer in his diary, “and are now on the march to the coast; thereby leaving the inhabitants of the frontier country exposed to the murderous excursions of the Indians and treacherous Mexicans.”³⁶

Without reading too much into these statements, several conclusions might be drawn about their meaning. First, the comparison of abolitionists (“blood-thirsty” though they may be) with “savage” Indians and “treacherous” Mexicans seems oddly incongruous. It was, in fact, little more than a rhetorical device, meant to demonize an enemy that by virtue of racial and cultural affinities had more in common with Texans than they cared to admit. As familiar symbols of barbarity, Mexicans and Indians provided convenient images with which to arouse popular passion against an unknown Anglo menace. Further, because abolitionism in the above accounts is mentioned only tangentially, if at all, one also suspects that the political agenda of white Northerners was the least of their fears. Abolitionist hordes, after all, would not be descending upon the

³⁶ Miss Mary B. Breeding to the “Academy Guards,” Bellville (Texas) *Countryman*, 5 June 1861; M.L. Sims to Miss Belle Gordon, Clarksville (Texas) *Standard*, 25 May 1861; Bell Irvin Wiley, ed. *Fourteen Hundred and 91 Days in the Confederate Army: A Journal Kept by W.W. Heartsill*. (Jackson, TN: McCowat-Mercer Press 1954, 1876), 1-2.

state in the immediate future, and the real meaning of Republican rule had yet to be ascertained. This is not to say that Texans discounted the threat posed by emancipation and “negro equality,” but only that as the sole frontier state in the Confederacy they confronted unique problems that demanded more immediate attention. In the list of grievances against the United States that Texans presented in their declaration of secession, the supposed threats to slavery were given their usual airing. There was, however, one grievance which no other seceding state could claim: “The Federal Government . . . has for years almost entirely failed to protect the lives and property of the people of Texas against the Indian savages on our border, and more recently against the murderous forays of banditti from the neighboring territory of Mexico . . . thus rendering our condition more insecure and harassing than it was during the existence of the Republic of Texas.”³⁷

Unlike abolitionists, Mexicans and Indians posed a tangible threat, their “murderous” ways well-documented in the annals of Texas history. Hence, their evocation was made with much more literalness and urgency. Nor was their recurring juxtaposition an accident. The treacherous Mexican, as far as Texans were concerned, owed much to his savage cousin. Anglos had historically ascribed to the Spanish an inherent barbarism and cruelty, evidenced in the ruthlessness of Cortez and his successors in subjugating the Indians of Latin America. Propagated to divert attention from Anglos’ own atrocities against Native Americans, the stereotype of the vicious Spaniard gained primacy. The violence that often accompanied Mexican treachery, however, was rarely attributed to the remnants of Hidalgo ancestry. To do so would be to acknowledge an uncomfortable kinship. A more reassuring endeavor was to dismiss Mexicans completely by attributing their behavior to “Aztec” heritage (renowned among Anglos for human sacrifice and cannibalism). Eventually, this myth would find fuller articulation as the “Black Legend.” In the meantime, Texans demonstrated that their loathing and fear of Mexicans hardly depended upon the elucidation of such meticulous racial “theory.”³⁸

³⁷ “A Declaration of the Causes which Impel the State of Texas to Secede from the Federal Union,” The Avalon Project at Yale Law School: Documents in Law, History, and Diplomacy (<http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/csa/texsec.htm>).

³⁸ On the historical development of the Black Legend, see Charles Gibson, ed., *The Black Legend: Anti-Spanish Attitudes in the Old World and the New*, (New York: Knopf, 1971); William S. Maltby, *The Black Legend in England: The Development of Anti-Spanish Sentiment, 1558-1660*, (Durham: Duke University

As the regiments marched toward New Mexico, the symbolism of the Texas revolution and the specter of Mexican treachery remained powerfully motivating. Gathering in San Antonio, the launching point of the campaign, the historical significance of the place was not lost upon them. “[We] pitch our Camp on Alamo Plaza,” noted a Texan, “and immediatly in front of the old Alamo Church, where Davy Crockett and his brave comrades were inhumanly butchered by the Greasers.” When volunteers discovered that Union authorities in New Mexico were recruiting from the native population, it raised their ire to new heights. “We did not care to fight the New Mexicans,” insisted one, “but they have dared to raise their arms against us, and far off we can hear the wailing cry of anguish from the dungeons of Perote. It comes from the Texan prisoners placed there by the treachery and wiles of these New Mexicans. Even on our march we can see the ‘footprints of blood’ left upon this long and weary road by the Santa Fe prisoners. Those who have read the stirring history . . . can easily appreciate the feelings of Texans who find the same men in arms against us. They will call upon their patron saints in piteous tones to save them from the just indignation and vengeance of the ‘Tejanos.’” As Sibley’s army entered the territorial capital of New Mexico in early 1862, the conquering Texans again called forth memories of prior Mexican transgressions. “We soon got to the historic town of Santa Fe, a place well known to Texans for its treachery and cruelty,” recounted an officer. “Every man in the command remembered well the sad an unhappy fate of the Santa Fe Expedition under the administration of [president] Mirabeau B. Lamar.” Unlike Union volunteers, Confederate Texans clearly had a score to settle against New Mexicans. Though they did not go into battle with cries of “Remember the Alamo,” they plainly remembered that their ancestors had, and the role of vengeance as an explanation for their actions cannot be easily dismissed.³⁹

Whether they came as liberators, conquerors or avengers, for the soldiers engaged in the struggle to control New Mexico the “inferior” nature of the land and its inhabitants

Press, 1971); Arnolde De León, *They Called Them Greasers*, 63-74; E. Shaskan Bumas, “The Cannibal Butcher Shop: Protestant Uses of las Casas’s *Brevísima relación* in Europe and the American Colonies,” *Early American Literature*, Vol. 35, No. 2 (September 2000), 107-136; J.N. Hillgarth, *The Mirror of Spain, 1500-1700: The Formation of a Myth*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000).

³⁹ Wiley, *Fourteen Hundred and 91 Days in the Confederate Army*, 11; New Orleans *Daily Picayune*, 27 March 1863, quoted in Hall, *Sibley’s New Mexico Campaign*, 57-58; Phil Fulcrod, “From Albuquerque to Glorieta,” *Civil War in the Southwest*, 90.

forced many to eventually reconsider whether the campaign warranted the sacrifices demanded of them. Texans, urged on by patriotic appeals to emulate the glorious deeds of their fathers and grandfathers, were particularly prone to disillusionment. “The country is unfit for any use at all,” wrote one Texan in March 1862. “Think this country was never intended for white folks. The first man that ever came to the country ought to have been killed by Indians.” This summation was written before the high tide of the Confederate offensive, but quickly became a common refrain. “The Territory of New Mexico is utterly worthless,” insisted another. “It will never be the abode of civilized man. This is out of the question. . . .The naturalist is the only character that could be benefitted from travelling here.” Union volunteers could be just as dismissive. “Mexico is much more a foreign country than is generally supposed,” decided a Coloradoan. “The country is dry, rude and unfinished, and must have been designed by nature for a race but slightly removed from the brute beasts that perish.”⁴⁰

Some volunteers, however, were unwilling to offer wholesale condemnations. The Southwest might yet prove productive, providing something could be done with the native population. “This valley if settled by *white citizens* . . . would be one of the richest Valleys in the world,” declared a Texan in the 4th regiment, “but if it remains peopled by this degraded race of Mexicans and Indians, it will forever remain in its present condition.” The implications of such a statement were unsettling, but it was an opinion evidently shared by Union volunteers, as well. The Mexican population seemed utterly incapable of self-improvement: “Our military authorities seem doing at Uncle Sams expense for the place what the inhabitants cannot do for themselves,” a soldier in Brownsville contemptuously observed. “The sign seems hung out ‘Come unto me all ye homeless houseless ones and I will take care of you & furnish your necessities’ & judging from the numbers that are fed at government expense should think the word had gone out among these Texas heathen.”⁴¹

Clearly, many soldiers considered Mexicans a people beyond redemption. More importantly, to imagine that they could ever be fully incorporated into the prevailing

⁴⁰ Faulkner, “With Sibley in New Mexico,” 136; W.H.S. to editor, “Special Correspondence of the Houston *Telegraph*,” reprinted in the Clarksville (Texas) *Standard*, 14 June 1862; Hollister, *Colorado Volunteers in New Mexico*, 247.

⁴¹ Gracy, “New Mexico Campaign Letters of Frank Starr,” 184; Tilley, *Federals on the Frontier*, 350-351.

“American” culture was patently absurd. Not only did they seem culturally and racially inferior, their existence posed an obstacle to continuing Anglo-Saxon progress. Like Indians, they were judged unworthy and undeserving of the land they possessed. Like African slaves, they were deemed incapable of achieving the higher levels of civilization on their own. Indolent, ignorant and morally deficient, they squandered whatever potential the territory might hold. Those who espoused such a view needed little provocation to become advocates of the next logical step: eradication. If Mexican-Americans would not oblige Anglos by quietly stepping aside or, better still, passively dying off, a more proactive solution to the “problem” might be required. Hence, volunteers who viewed New Mexicans as little more than a benign if irritating nuisance could, at the least sign of resistance, completely dehumanize them as “brute beasts” or “treacherous” cowards, thereby transforming a minor annoyance into a virulent threat. When, for example, Coloradoans apprehended a New Mexican they suspected of spying for Sibley’s Confederates, he received little sympathy from his captors. “He is a greaser and ‘plays *insane*,’” reported an incredulous volunteer. “Perhaps stretching his neck would have the desired effect. It would be no sin if he was an insane Mexican for the more of them are killed the better the country is off.”⁴²

Too often, however, what volunteers considered “resistance” New Mexicans considered a matter of survival. With no great attachment to the United States and a bitter enmity toward Texas, they could only watch apprehensively as two unsympathetic Anglo armies flowed into the territory, consumed scarce supplies, impressed livestock, and created the inevitable hardships that always followed in the wake of a campaign.

3.2.3 The New Mexico Campaign

When General Sibley petitioned President Davis for permission to undertake the campaign in New Mexico, he predictably put the best possible face on the venture to assuage any doubts his commander-in-chief might hold. As a former officer in the regular army, Sibley had spent much of his career in the West, ranging from Utah to Texas to New Mexico. His familiarity with the region gave him an aura of authority, and he pressed his case with irrepressible optimism. The Federal army was in disarray, he

⁴² Mumey, *Bloody Trails*, 72.

insisted, and the area was filled with secessionists who readily support the Confederate cause. He even suggested that the Hispanic population would gladly contribute to the effort, supplying provisions and recruits. Further, the conquest of the Southwest could be completed with minimal expense to the Richmond government. The army, Sibley noted, could simply live off the land and the supplies they captured from Union forces. The promise of great success with little sacrifice was too good to be true, but that did not prevent Davis from granting Sibley a commission as brigadier-general and sanctioning the campaign. In hindsight, Sibley's plan suffered from a multitude of problems, not the least of which was the general's losing battle with alcoholism which consistently hindered his ability to lead. Of more immediate concern were his interrelated claims that his army could expect enthusiastic support from native New Mexicans and subsist off what supplies could be gotten in the territory. Both estimations proved to be wide of the mark.⁴³

With some foundation, Union leaders doubted that Hispanics would enthusiastically rally behind the United States. In June 1861, for instance, rumors of a planned New Mexican uprising against all Anglos in the territory reached US authorities. Allegedly set to begin simultaneously at Taos and El Paso, the shadowy insurrectionists purportedly planned to cut the throats of their white oppressors wherever they may be found. Though the rumored date of the rising passed uneventfully, the credence given to such stories betrayed the uncertainty of Federal officials. "The Mexican people have no affection for the institutions of the United States," Canby warned in January 1862. "They have a strong, but hitherto restrained, hatred for the Americans as a race, and there are not wanting persons who . . . have secretly but industriously endeavored to keep alive all the elements of discontent and fan them into flames."⁴⁴

Though Canby considered Mexicans "ignorant" and "impulsive," of dubious loyalty, and prone to the machinations of Southern sympathizers, he failed to take into account their feelings toward Texans. Whatever general ill-will they harbored against Americans was far outweighed by a specific hatred of the *Tejanos*. Just as Texans recalled with bitterness past examples of Mexican treachery so, too, did Mexicans call

⁴³ Josephy, *The Civil War in the American West*, 52-53.

⁴⁴ Miller, "Hispanos and the Civil War," 106-107; *OR*, Ser. 1, Vol. 4, 84-85.

forth memories of Texan “barbarity.” The attempted invasion of 1841, in particular, remained an effective rallying point. Fearing that the population might actually support the Texans in their cause, New Mexican officials had issued horrific warnings that little mercy could be expected from the Texans: they would murder, rape, and pillage indiscriminately, leaving behind a swath of destruction. Though the tiny, poorly-prepared force of Texans did no such thing (in stunning contrast to the Mier Expedition), and those fortunate enough to survive the campaign received shameful treatment at the hands of Mexican authorities, the incident generated fears that had yet to be dispelled twenty years later. *Tejano* became a byword for bogeyman. New Mexican mothers disciplined recalcitrant children by threatening to hand them over to the *Tejanos* when they returned; adults looked with anxiety to the day when the frightening tales might become reality. In 1861, the image of the savage Texan was still being used with great effectiveness, as territorial authorities urged men to volunteer not out of loyalty to the United States, but to protect their families from the dreaded *Tejanos*.⁴⁵

Native New Mexicans made no secret of their hatred for Texans, and Sibley’s failure to acknowledge that fact can be attributed to nothing less than willful ignorance. If he genuinely expected New Mexicans to actively support his cause, he must have been disappointed. All told, just forty-two natives joined the Army of New Mexico – a number which included the Mesilla Brass Band. In contrast, by February 1862 some 2,800 New Mexicans had enlisted in Union regiments. Whatever he may have wished to believe, the decision of a Southern-sympathizing oligarchy of *ricos* and Anglos to create the Confederate Territory of Arizona hardly represented the majority will. The failure to recognize that the conquest of New Mexico would also require a conquest of hearts and minds was a colossal mistake. Another false assumption compounded it: contrary to Sibley’s assertion, in the arid Southwest it would be extraordinarily difficult for an army to “live off the land.” By necessity, food and forage would have to be procured at the expense of the citizenry. Such a strategy not only presupposed that supplies would not be purposely hidden from the army and that impressments would not be forcefully resisted, but that supplies could be readily gotten. The territory little resembled the breadbasket states of Pennsylvania and Georgia, however, where massive armies could subsist for

⁴⁵ Miller, “Hispanos and the Civil War,” 108-109.

weeks on the enemy's resources and still leave enough behind to prevent a civilian famine. The population was barely self-sustaining. Soldiers starved, or citizens starved; the territory could not support both. Given the low regard in which most Confederates held New Mexicans, it is extraordinarily unlikely that they possessed either the wherewithal or patience to accomplish the delicate task of convincing the population of the righteousness of their struggle. That they opted to forage with impunity and, indeed, ruthlessness – thereby saving themselves while damning civilians – guaranteed that New Mexicans would be fighting against them rather than rallying to their cause.⁴⁶

In December 1861, shortly after his army crossed into New Mexico, Sibley issued a proclamation to the people of the territory. It was a seemingly magnanimous decree, published in English and Spanish, which fully reflected a misplaced optimism. The Confederate Army of New Mexico, he assured the native population, came not as conquerors but “liberators.”

Upon the peaceful people of New Mexico the Confederate States wage no war. To them we come as friends . . . to liberate them from the yoke of a military despotism erected by usurpers upon the ruins of the former free institutions of the United States; to relieve them from the iniquitous taxes and exactions imposed upon them by that usurpation; to insure and to revere their religion, and to restore their civil and political liberties. . . . Follow, then, quietly your peaceful avocations, and from my forces you have nothing to fear.

Regardless that most New Mexicans had not asked for liberation, had Confederates acted in the spirit of the proclamation it may have gone a long way in wooing support for their cause. There was, however, a degree of ambiguity about the message. Though Sibley may have been certain of New Mexican support, his missive also indicated mistrust. In contrast to the lofty rhetoric of liberation, the policies themselves smacked of occupation. He promised salvation from a “military despotism,” yet the territory remained under martial law, citizens were forced to swear oaths of loyalty to the Confederacy, and the “iniquitous exactions” of the United States were replaced by a Confederate equivalent. Most importantly, though he pledged to protect private property, Sibley also made clear that he expected the population to make available on the “open market” the forage and supplies necessary to sustain his army, to be reimbursed with Confederate dollars at “fair

⁴⁶ Ibid., 107; Martin H. Hall, “Native Mexican Relations,” 171-172.

prices” – an interesting claim given the worthlessness of Southern currency. But citizens would hardly be given a choice in the matter, and he promised stiff penalties for subterfuge. “If destroyed or removed to prevent me from availing myself of them, those who so co-operate with our enemies will be treated accordingly, and must prepare to share their fate,” he sternly declared. It was an uncompromising and foolish warning, one which eliminated any middle ground. By failing to distinguish between civilians who concealed supplies in order to aid the Union from those who did so to prevent starvation, Sibley, by his own definition, rendered nearly everyone in the territory an enemy of the Confederacy.⁴⁷

Sibley’s men, from the time they entered the territory, acted very much as a hostile army in a foreign country. That they considered New Mexicans an inferior people made it that much easier to simply take what they needed with little remorse. One Union informer thought they resembled a mob more than a disciplined army. “They have acted about El Paso in such a manner as to enrage the whole community against them,” he reported in February 1862. “All Mexicans are down on them, and they will find very little sympathy when they return. . . .Blankets, onions, wine, and everything they can lay their hands on they carry off.” Their actions in El Paso were but a prelude. When Colonel Baylor entered Mesilla in the summer of 1861 and anointed himself governor of Arizona Territory, his small force of 300-odd men did not create much of an imposition on the local population. The arrival of the Sibley Brigade, in contrast, created economic chaos. The thousands of soldiers who thronged the town consumed an enormous amount of resources, and though individual contractors (usually Anglos) managed to profit, many small farmers were driven to financial ruin and hunger by the rising cost and scarcity of food.⁴⁸

In procuring supplies, individual soldiers had their own ideas of what constituted a “fair price,” stealing what they needed, grazing their horses in New Mexican wheat fields, and cheating vendors already reluctant to accept Confederate money. In what was likely an apocryphal story, the *Mesilla Times* related how a volunteer, upon being charged four bits for boot repair, presented the *zapatero* with a two-dollar bill, explained

⁴⁷ *OR*, Ser. 1, Vol. 4, 88-89; The proclamation appeared in the January 15, 1862 edition of the *Mesilla Times* in Spanish and English.

⁴⁸ *OR*, Ser. 1, Vol. 50, Pt. 1, 1012-1013; Frazier, *Blood & Treasure*, 136.

its value, and demanded change. The transaction completed, the cobbler later made an unpleasant discovery: “On taking [the bill] to the store to make a purchase, the Mexican learned it was not a government bond, but an order for the Doctor – worthless *of course*,” reported the paper. “The *carajo* [expletive] that followed this intelligence can be better imagined than described.” Though the editor was undoubtedly pleased with this amusing tale of Anglo cleverness and Mexican ignorance, the story contained more truth than the pro-Confederate *Times* probably realized or cared to admit. Simply put, rebel soldiers habitually plundered their way through New Mexico. Texans, for their part, naturally denied the charge, or claimed extenuating circumstances. “Some malicious people charged upon [the Confederate soldier] that he would fight all day and steal pigs, chickens and turkeys all night,” wrote a veteran of the campaign. “But I rather think this was a slander, as . . . the Confederate soldier was a paragon of honesty and proper conduct and would no more interfere with swine or poultry along his line of march, unless under very extraordinary circumstances, than the devil would touch holy water.”⁴⁹

Aquatic proclivities of the devil aside, Confederate depredations in Mesilla put New Mexicans on guard, and supplying the army turned increasingly difficult. Civilians who initially welcomed the opportunity to sell what little surplus they possessed now shied away, unwilling to have their goods stolen, confiscated or paid for in worthless scrip. Soldiers who had assumed the population would provide for them grew increasingly perplexed. They forcibly quartered themselves in houses of reluctant hosts and had to threaten village officials before they would provide even basic commodities, such as firewood. Many believed New Mexicans concealed their goods at the behest of Federal authorities, and though there was truth in the charge, their more immediate concern was protecting themselves from the ravenous horde of Confederates in their midst. “My special duty was to . . . scour the country for food and provisions,” recalled one rebel forager. “The enemy moved everything to eat out of the country and persuaded the Mexicans to hide their corn and wheat and drive their cattle and sheep beyond our reach.” In a period of three days, he managed to secure over 100 bushels of wheat, 200 bushels of corn, and several mules. Such excursions continued as the army wound its

⁴⁹ Hall, *Sibley's New Mexico Campaign*, 56; *Mesilla Times*, 15 January 1862; William Davidson, “The March to New Mexico,” *Civil War in the Southwest*, 12.

way up the Rio Grande Valley. Near Valverde, they confiscated goods in excess of \$3,000, teams of oxen, and a sizable flock of sheep. At Santa Fe, \$30,000 worth of “government property” was seized as residents scrambled to conceal personal possessions. It was a desperate situation, both for hungry Confederates and frightened civilians. “Our poor and distant territory has not been spared,” reported the mother superior of Loretto Academy in Santa Fe. “The Texans without provocation have sacked and almost ruined the richest portions and have forced the most respectable families to flee from their homes The terror which I felt is inexpressible.”⁵⁰

Yet, no matter how efficiently they foraged, hunger was a constant companion. With the loss of their supply train at Glorieta Pass – burned by Federal forces – Confederates faced the unpleasant choice of starving or retreating. In the end, they did both. “Our army cannot be subsisted here,” admitted a Texan following the disaster, “and the enemy has only to wait a few weeks till famine runs us out, to possess the country quietly again.” Sibley’s plan to support his army through foraging proved not only impractical, however, but counter-productive. Colonel Baylor confided as much to a subordinate, remarking that the “good will” of the people had been destroyed by the actions of Sibley’s troops. Other observers agreed. “The Southern soldiers . . . have consumed and destroyed everything, even to the growing crops,” a resident of Mesilla reported. “The people here are with their eyes open toward the North, in the hope of being relieved from the devastation of these locusts.” Texans, in turn, blamed “ignorant” New Mexicans for sabotaging the campaign, seeming not to realize that their own actions had much to do with the behavior of the population. “They looked upon us with fear, having been told that we had come to revenge the treatment of the *Santa Fe Prisoners* [of 1841],” insisted one. “They will favor the most powerful side, and all the time that we were there they doubted our ability to hold the country, and took every opportunity to keep the enemy well informed of our proceedings and movements.” Sibley, too, was widely censured for the failure, having spent much of the campaign confined to an ambulance – drunk, it was rumored. But as the commanding general, he could escape the wrath of his soldiers. New Mexican civilians could not. “My troops,” he keenly

⁵⁰ Faulkner, “With Sibley in New Mexico,” 137; Hall, “The Journal of Ebenezer Hanna,” 26; William Davidson, “From Socorro to Glorieta,” *Civil War in the Southwest*, 78-79; Alberts, *Rebels on the Rio Grande*, 52, 88; Straw, *Loretto*, 19-22.

observed, “have manifested a dogged irreconcilable detestation of the Country and the People.”⁵¹

Ragged, hungry, harried by Union forces, disgusted with officers and civilians alike, the disillusionment and anger felt by volunteers eventually gave way to a sense of panic, and the Confederate retreat back to Mesilla in the spring of 1862 turned into a nightmarish experience. As the army had stripped the valley of supplies during the northern advance, there was little to sustain them on the return trip. Still, the foraging continued unabated, and with a renewed zeal. Livestock, wheat, corn, whiskey, tobacco, and even strings of red peppers found their way into the hands of Confederate foragers. One resident of Las Lunas reported that soldiers confiscated \$4,000 worth of his property. A small detachment even crossed the border into Mexico, plundering the town of Piedras Negras before setting it on fire. Toward the end, the army practically dissolved. An El Paso merchant who observed the withdrawal presented a picture of utter defeat and desperation. “The Second Regiment [Colonel Thomas Green’s 5th Texas] is scattered in parties of 15 or 20 along the road . . . committing outrages upon the inhabitants they meet upon the highway,” he reported to General Canby. “They are almost on the point of starvation The Mexican population are much enraged against them on account of their rude treatment.” So thoroughly had the Army of New Mexico cleaned out the Mesilla valley region, he feared a famine might result among the people.⁵²

Emboldened by the Confederate retreat, New Mexicans completely refused to accept Confederate scrip and demanded hard currency. Foraging expeditions led to bloody conflicts, increasing the animosity between Texan and New Mexican. If volunteers still subscribed to the idea of Mexican “indifference,” their beliefs were rudely dispelled. In April, near the village of Los Padillas, a citizen militia surrounded a dozen Texans as they camped. Taken by surprise, one of the volunteers dropped his pistols to

⁵¹ W.H.S. to editor, “Special Correspondence of the Houston *Telegraph*,” reprinted in the Clarksville (Texas) *Standard*, 14 June 1862; Jerry Thompson, ed., *The Civil War Journal and Sketches of Morgan Wolfe Merrick*, (El Paso: Texas Western Press, 1991), 31; Testimony included in a letter from governor Henry Connelly to General Canby, 15 June 1862, *OR*, Ser. 1, Vol. 50, 1140-1141; Gracy, “New Mexico Campaign Letters of Frank Starr,” 184; General Sibley to General S. Cooper, 4 May 1862, in John P. Wilson and Jerry Thompson, eds., *The Civil War in West Texas and New Mexico: The Lost Letterbook of Brigadier General Henry Hopkins Sibley*, (El Paso: Texas Western Press, 2001), 142.

⁵² Miller, “Hispanos and the Civil War,” 56; *OR*, Ser. 1, Vol. 9, 675-676, 678.

signal his surrender. The militiamen, uninterested in prisoners, ignored the gesture and shot him through the chest. In the ensuing firefight, another Texan was killed and one wounded. Word of the encounter left Texans enraged. “We heard this morning that two of our men were killed last night sometime, or this morning, by the citizens . . . and a company was sent back to demolish the town,” reported a 4th Regiment Texan. The extent of the retribution they enacted is unknown, but they evidently killed several New Mexicans. “Before they left the place,” a volunteer recounted, “they sent a few greasers to their father, the devil, in payment for their treachery.”⁵³

By May, Sibley had fled the territory, leaving his tattered army to fend for itself. For the next several months, as the remainder of the volunteers made their way first to Mesilla, and then across the scorching plains of west Texas toward San Antonio, they continued to battle with civilians. “Instead of fighting Yankees since Sibley left, we have to fight the Mexicans,” declared a volunteer. “They refused to let us have transportation, and we went to press them into service, thereby creating a civil war with them.” Near the villages of Isleta and San Elizario, a forage party rounded up what cattle they could find and, having nothing to offer in exchange, simply seized them. When a village official threatened to attack if the livestock were not promptly returned, the Texans took cover and prepared for a fight. They shot and killed a civilian rider, whom they surmised was running for help, and later made their escape under the cover of darkness. In early July at Mesilla, a clash between New Mexicans and another foraging party left one officer and six soldiers dead and as many as forty civilians killed or wounded. The fighting had been close and personal, with a Confederate lieutenant allegedly stabbing three civilians with his bowie knife. What was perhaps the most violent confrontation between civilian and soldier, however, occurred not in New Mexico but in Socorro, Texas. A tiny village in the western part of the state, it had the misfortune of lying directly in the path of the retreating army. In mid-June, an officer of the 7th Texas requisitioned a number of beeves from the citizens and, in what appears to be a deal gone sour, refused to pay when they were delivered. A gunfight followed, leaving several Confederates wounded. Not to be outdone, the Texans trained their artillery on the village. “We killed 20 and

⁵³ *OR*, Ser. 1, Vol. 9, 722; Alberts, *Rebels on the Rio Grande*, 103; Captain Jerome B. McCown, Fifth Texas, to editor of the Bellville (Texas) *Countryman*, 7 June 1862, quoted in Frazier, *Blood and Treasure*, 241-242.

wounded a great many,” wrote one soldier, “besides destroying their church and otherwise damaging the town.” Several weeks later, yet another detachment of foragers paid a visit to the residents of Socorro. Wise to the ways of Texans, a mob of some fifty citizens quickly ran them out.⁵⁴

Though New Mexicans suffered horrendously at the hands of their Texan “liberators,” their treatment by Union forces was not much better. Uncertain about the loyalty of the citizens, officials enacted harsh policies designed to counter a suspect population as much as a Confederate invasion. Much as Sibley had done, Union authorities ordered citizens to make supplies available for military use. Draft animals, forage, weapons and other provisions necessary to sustain an army might be purchased or seized outright. Men, too, were also pressed into service – a full year before military conscription became national law. Though territorial officials exhorted men to defend their families from the ravages of the *Tejanos*, it seems they were not content to wait for volunteers. Scattered evidence suggests the policy and its sometimes brutal implementation were widely resented. In early January 1862, a Colorado volunteer noted the conspicuous absence of men from a village in the northern part of the territory. “There are no men in the town,” he wrote. “They are skulking over the Mts to keep out of sight of the Territorial pressman who are knabbing every man who is able to carry a musket and into the militia they go.” Hesitant to leave their families unprotected, the reluctance of New Mexicans to join the poorly equipped and poorly paid militia is not difficult to comprehend. Regardless, they were commonly branded as cowards, and the altercations between unwilling recruits and the military can be easily imagined. The experience of one would-be recruit near Peralta, recounted by a Texan fortunate enough to secure a meal at the man’s house, suggests that Union recruiting policies may have been counter-productive. “They knocked him down, and he showed us a bayonet wound where they stabbed him trying to force him along anyhow,” he recorded. “He told us that

⁵⁴ John A. Kirgan to editor, *Houston Tri-Weekly Telegraph*, 18 August 1862; Frazier, *Blood and Treasure*, 281; San Antonio *Semi-Weekly News*, 21 July 1862.

there was many a man sick that they had forced into the service, but that no one was allowed to stop or rest on that account, but was forced along by the federals.”⁵⁵

As the recruiting practices implied, Union officials looked upon New Mexicans not as a people to be defended, but as a resource to be exploited. Nowhere was this more apparent than in the wide-spread foraging that occurred during the course of the campaign. Suffering from the same subsistence problems that plagued Confederates, Union volunteers gobbled up supplies wherever they could be located. Coloradoans, in particular, made a fetish of plundering the countryside, rivaling even Texans in their thoroughness. When word of their depredations reached Denver, one of them felt obliged to defend their actions. “Rumors have probably reached you, with a thousand tongues, of the jay hawking propensities of the members of the Colorado First,” he explained in a letter to the *Rocky Mountain News*. “Our duty was onward, and onward we marched, seizing all that was necessary to assist us in preventing the traitor’s foot from impressing the soil of New Mexico, and in doing it, though it might inflict individual losses, we believed we were doing our duty.” In his diary, a 2nd Colorado cavalryman was more frank about the matter. “The Col 1st are death on chickens and sheep or beef,” he confided. “they steal all they see along the road. they stole an *entire store* in Los Notres. there was about \$1000 worth of goods in it.” The reasoning behind their actions was closely intertwined with their conceptions of New Mexicans, and no doubt resonated among many: “they say if the Mexicans will not fight for their country they must support those who will” The notion that New Mexicans, as cowards, traitors, cheats and thieves, were somehow deserving of such treatment was a common refrain. Others, such as a Colorado volunteer who helped sack the town of Sandias, brushed off any issues of conscience by insinuated that their actions were no worse than those of the native population. “A man that won’t steal,” he quipped, “has no business in New Mexico.”⁵⁶

With the departure of Sibley’s Texans and the arrival of General James H. Carleton’s California Column, a modicum of order was restored in the territory. Still, it was not precisely liberation, as martial law remained in effect and would so until the end of the war. Citizens forced by Sibley to swear an oath of loyalty to the Confederacy were

⁵⁵ Mumey, *Bloody Trails*, 60; Alberts, *Rebels on the Rio Grande*, 58.

⁵⁶ Denver *Rocky Mountain News*, 5 April 1862; Mumey, *Bloody Trails*, 99; Hollister, *Colorado Volunteers in New Mexico*, 221.

now compelled to proclaim their allegiance to the Union. The army also confiscated the property of suspected Confederate collaborators, forced men to labor on fortifications without compensation, and ordered citizens to make their crops available for purchase at the ridiculously low price of three dollars per *fanega* (about one and a half bushels) or risk confiscation. The effort to concentrate foodstuffs in the hands of the military met with much civilian resistance, prompting one of Carleton's subordinates to declare all residents found with more than a two month supply as enemies of the United States. Rather than comply with the directive, many simply abandoned their lands and carried their surplus into Mexico.⁵⁷

All of these policies were designed to thwart future incursions from Texas, and though Carleton did not intend to tyrannize the population, he made perfectly clear his willingness to sacrifice them to prevent such a reoccurrence. In the event of another invasion, he ordered his lieutenants to counter the Texans with a scorched-earth campaign. All foodstuffs taken from the citizens were to be either transported out of the valley or destroyed to prevent their use by the enemy. Mills throughout the southern part of the territory were to be burned. Lumber, ferry boats, and other supplies that could not be removed were like-wise to be put to the torch. Women and children would be encouraged to migrate to northern Mexico, thereby consuming the resources in that area and robbing Confederates of potential sustenance. "Leave no particle of property in his track that can be of the least service to him," explained the Colonel of the 1st California to a subordinate. "You must make a desert of the country" As a final impediment to a Confederate advance, Carleton also urged a rather astonishing measure, in effect proposing that New Mexicans wage a people's war against the Texans should they return. "Remind the Mexicans of how they were robbed before," he ordered his subordinates,

and animate them . . . with a settled determination to attack the enemy from every cover; to shoot down his teams; to stampede his stock when grazing; to destroy the bridges over the acequias; to hover by night around his camps; to set fire to the grass and all kinds of fodder which his animals might otherwise get; to shoot down his men at night and then before day to scatter singly in all directions⁵⁸

⁵⁷ *OR*, Ser. 1, Vol. 50, Pt. 2, 132-133, 239; Miller, "Hispanos and the Civil War," 116.

⁵⁸ *OR*, Ser. 1, Vol. 50, Pt. 2, 232-233; *OR*, Ser. 1, Vol. 15, 599-601.

Here was a dangerous proposition. An inherently ugly business, irregular warfare became all the more brutal when fanned by racial animosity. If the sporadic guerrilla action that marked the end of the New Mexico campaign was any indication, a renewed conflict with official sanction was likely to become an extraordinarily bloody affair. Indeed, the excessive and indiscriminate violence engendered by guerrilla war had motivated Northern and Southern leaders alike to assiduously condemn it, to decry guerrillas as “brigands” and “outlaws,” and to support their summary execution when captured. Though guerrilla activity flourished throughout the country, and some leaders (including Jefferson Davis) toyed with the idea of sanctioning it, as official policy guerrilla war never received serious support – even in the most dire of circumstances. As the Army of Northern Virginia approached Pennsylvania in mid-1863, for instance, Union officials hardly urged citizens to embark on a bushwhacking campaign against Lee’s men. Similarly, though the Georgia legislature, in a final act of desperation, had implored citizens to resist Sherman to the last, their subsequent ignominious flight from the state capital rendered suspect the earnestness of their appeal. Carleton, by contrast, was very much in earnest and suggested the use of guerilla warfare not as a last resort but as a primary defense. Why he felt justified in calling for partisan action when leaders in similar straits shied away from such a drastic measure is difficult to determine. Because New Mexicans had already demonstrated their readiness to oppose Confederate depredations, perhaps Carleton believed he was merely sanctioning the inevitable. Regardless, his willingness to exploit their passions evidenced a startling disregard for the consequences. That Mexicans, rather than Anglos, would bear the brunt of Confederate reprisals doubtless made the decision more palatable.

Fortunately for New Mexicans, the high tide of the Confederacy in the Southwest had passed, and the extreme measures advocated by Carleton proved unnecessary. The strategic importance of the territory and a continuing Indian threat, however, ensured that a significant military presence, and the problems attending it, remained. In August 1862, for example, an officer in a New Mexico regiment complained of what appeared to be a regular occurrence at Polvadera, a hamlet situated between Socorro and Albuquerque: “Government trains passing up and down this route commit depredations on private citizens in turning cattle into their fields and destroying their crops or only subsistence,

maltreating animals, occasionally killing one without necessity.” Individual pillaging and foraging also continued, despite the best efforts of officers to stop the practice, and after January 1, 1863 – the day Lincoln’s emancipation proclamation took effect – soldiers began to “steal” people, as well. Though the document made no mention of peonage, even had it done so New Mexico was legally exempt from its stipulations (it applied only to those areas “in rebellion” against the government). Never ones to be hampered by legal niceties, volunteers liberally interpreted the order: peonage or slavery, it was all involuntary servitude. Though peonage might still have a legal basis, much as slavery did in border states, soldiers did not necessarily feel an obligation to protect the institution. An incident that occurred near Fort McRae, involving a sergeant in the 1st California and a young female peon, illustrates the point. Watching the ragged-looking girl as she chopped wood in freezing weather, he took pity on her. “To make a long story short, she being willing to come with me, I told her to let her master come for his own wood & axe,” he wrote. “My female friend was well pleased with our camp and the idea of getting out of slavery.” It was not long before the owner and a group of men came to reclaim her, sparking a heated debate over the girl’s legal status. As her rescuer recounted, “The Capt. immediately sent for me and opened the conversation: ‘Sergeant, have you a peon – this man’s – in your tent?’ ‘No sir.’ ‘He says you have.’ ‘I’ve a small girl, sir, whom I found in a state of destitution. She said she was a slave and, in accordance with the Proclamation of our respected President, I confiscated her.’” The explanation satisfied everyone except the owner, who stormed off “choking with rage,” while the emancipated peon found employment with the Californians. “She is now dressed up and right good looking is our co. laundress, and every man in Co. ‘G’ would fight two greasers each for our little washwoman.”⁵⁹

The relationship between Union volunteers and native New Mexicans remained uneasy throughout the occupation. American resentment against “greasers,” and Mexican wariness about the intention of *soldados*, always held the potential for violence. J. Ross Browne, the *Harper’s* correspondent, revealed some of this tension as he traveled with a detachment of Californians through southern Arizona. After a few of the men

⁵⁹ Jerry Thompson, “‘Gloom Over Our Fair Land’: Socorro County During the Civil War,” *New Mexico Historical Review*, Vol. 73, No. 2 (April 1998), 99-119. Quote is from page 106; Carmony, *The Civil War in Apacheland*, 145-146.

broke down a fence to use as firewood the property owner, with a village official in tow, confronted them and demanded compensation to the amount of five pesos. Browne, incredulous, cited it as an example of “the shifts to which these wretched beings resort to procure the means of subsistence.” But the citizen and the official stood their ground, rejecting a counter-offer of fifty cents, as well as a proposal that the soldiers simply return what they had taken. The haggling apparently did not sit well with the Californians, who felt they were being swindled: “To avoid the unpleasant results of a storm that was gathering in the faces of our volunteers, who were spoiling for a chance to raze the town, we repacked the wagons, and proceeded on our journey.” Whether the dispute was ever resolved to the satisfaction of either party was left unanswered.⁶⁰

Though Browne wrote glowingly of the restraint shown by the Californians, claiming that “not one of them stole a pig or a chicken during the entire trip [fencing apparently did not count],” others did not always exhibit the same self-discipline. In August of 1863, a dispute between a California volunteer and a resident of Mesilla led to charges of murder. The incident likely arose over the affections of a woman. As a volunteer left the house of woman with whom he had been “intimate,” he was accosted by a man on the street. Both were wounded in the scuffle that followed, and the Mesilla man was tossed in prison. He later made his escape, but not before being shot in the leg by a guard. When a comrade of the battered soldier spotted the wounded escapee on the streets the next day, he approached him for the purpose of “persuading” him to return to prison. During the course of the conversation, the man turned on the soldier, allegedly attacking him with a hatchet. Though the events leading up this point are rather vague and one-sided, the results of this second encounter are not disputed. The volunteer unloaded all six chambers of his revolver on his attacker. He then left the scene, returned with a shotgun, and fired both barrels into the prostrate man. Apparently unsatisfied with his handiwork thus far, he administered the coup de grâce by splitting the attacker’s skull with his own hatchet. In a Rasputin-esque performance, the now-mutilated recipient of this gratuitous display of violence lived for three hours before finally expiring. “Everyone said it was a justifiable case,” insisted a volunteer of his comrade’s actions,

⁶⁰ J. Ross Browne, “A Tour through Arizona,” *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine*, Vol. 30, No. 176 (January 1865), 149.

“but the U.S. judge of the territory, he said it was willful murder and Genl. [Joseph R.] West ordered him confined.” Concerning New Mexicans, volunteers obviously labored under unique juridical assumptions.⁶¹

⁶¹ Carmony, *The Civil War in Apacheland*, 134.

3.3 Conclusion

Manifest Destiny, Reprise

The New Mexico Campaign resulted in several significant consequences for the Southwest. The defeat of Sibley's Texans effectively ended the Confederate bid for a transcontinental empire. The influx of Anglo soldiers, particularly Californians and Coloradoans, also wrought important cultural and demographic changes. Once considered a national backwater, the territory of New Mexico and the newly established Arizona received a good deal of publicity during the events of 1861-1862. Many Union volunteers permanently settled there, while their letters and descriptions of the territory (more generous than those of the jaded Texans) attracted thousands more, contributing to a process of "Americanization." In the wake of the Confederate retreat, however, these eventualities were not immediately apparent. In the meantime, the most visible result of the campaign was the widespread devastation between Mesilla and Santa Fe and the famine that followed as a result. The war hit Socorro County particularly hard. In 1860 it boasted a population of 5,700 residents. Three years later, that number had dropped to less than 3,700. Some villages, their residents unable to sustain themselves, virtually disappeared. "The population of this district, until last year, was much larger than at present," noted a Union officer who conducted a census in 1863. "In every town there are houses locked up and their owner having left in search of food."¹

As important as noting the extent of the devastation is the rapidity in which it occurred. Though the zeal in which Confederate and Union soldiers could plunder the countryside was legendary by 1864, in early 1862 the morality of such widespread "foraging" was still hotly disputed. The war required years of escalation before Sherman could justify his famous march. In New Mexico, there was no comparable grace period. Depredations began immediately. While the fears of starvation might explain Confederate actions in the final stage of the campaign, it does not explain their mob-like behavior during the first weeks in Mesilla. Similarly, though it may account for why Coloradoans resorted to foraging and looting, it does not explain why they did so with

¹ For an account of Californians' influence on the territory, see Andrew E. Masich, *The Civil War in Arizona: The Story of the California Volunteers, 1861-1865*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2006); Thompson, "Gloom Over Our Fair Land," 110-112. Quote from page 112.

such apparent glee and self-righteousness, nor their continuing propensity to run roughshod over New Mexican sensibilities even after the Confederate threat had been blunted. The notoriously poor discipline among volunteers certainly explains some of the behavior, as well, but the ideological undercurrent that pervaded their actions makes this an unsatisfying answer.

Reactions to the depredations shed some light on the matter. In neither case has this author discovered a soldier – Texan, Coloradoan, or Californian – who expressed an iota of regret over the hardships inflicted upon New Mexicans. This is especially striking when one considers how even Sherman’s men (or Lee’s in Pennsylvania), though insisting on the necessity and righteousness of their actions, often managed to sound sincerely remorseful. A Confederate officer who entered Pennsylvania determined to avenge the destruction of his own home, for example, was incapable of acting on his anger after he came face to face with terrified civilians. “Though I had such severe wrongs and grievances to redress . . . when I got among these people I could not find it in my heart to molest them,” he confided. “They looked so dreadfully scared and talked, so humble, that I have invariably endeavored to protect their property” An officer in an Ohio regiment, plainly aware of the devastation caused by the army as it maneuvered toward Atlanta in the summer of 1864, expressed similar sympathies. “I don’t see what the people in this country are going to do next winter,” he pondered to his wife. “There will not be anything left for them to live upon. . . . I sometimes feel sorry for the poorer class as they were not to blame in bring[ing] on this war. There is more of what is called poor white trash than I had any idea of.” The expression of pity, a sentiment always in short supply, assumed the ability of volunteers to empathize with the victims of their actions. Empathy, of course, required the recognition of some commonality, a prerequisite which volunteers campaigning in the alien culture of New Mexico were hard-pressed to meet. Hence, while the plight of the Pennsylvania “Dutch” and Georgia’s “white trash” evoked genuine concern, actual starvation among New Mexican “greasers” met only with indifference.²

² William Steptoe Christian to “My own darling wife,” 28 June 1863, in Frank Moore, ed., *The Rebellion Record: A Diary of American Events, volume 7*, (New York: 1864), 197; Josiah Dexter Cotton to wife, 5 June 1864, Josiah Dexter Cotton Papers, LC.

Volunteers, in fact, exhibited much more compassion and restraint toward their avowed enemies than toward the civilians in their midst. During the battle at Valverde in February 1862, in which Sibley's Texans routed Canby's Federals, the retreating Union forces left many of their wounded on the field. According to one rebel, some of them refused to surrender: "[A soldier] of Capt. Nunn's Company, in the fight shot down a man and noticing that though wounded he was still shooting, he said: 'Captain, yonder is a d---d son of a ----- that I have shot who is lying behind a tree shooting at us. May I go out and kill him?' Capt. Nunn gave the permission, and he went out, but the wounded man begged so hard that he did not kill him" In the aftermath of the battle, Federals and Texans worked side by side tending to the wounded. Months later, many of the Confederates wounded at Valverde still languished in a makeshift hospital under US supervision. "Poor fellows!" exclaimed a Coloradoan. "The climate and Uncle Sam's boys have sadly wasted them. . . . Many, very many, 'softly lie and sweetly sleep low in the ground.' Let their faults be buried with them. They are our brothers, erring, it may be, still nature will exact a passing tear for the brave dead." In describing the Texans captured during the fight at Glorieta, a Colorado private perhaps unwittingly revealed that the bond behind such sentimentalism went far beyond mere soldierly camaraderie: "They are the most ignorant set of *white people* I ever came across in my life [emphasis mine]. If I was asked once, I was twenty times, in good earnest, if it was a fact that Abe Lincoln was a Mulatto." The Coloradoan's response revealed the enduring brotherhood of Anglo-Saxonism; Confederate queries revealed its exclusiveness.³

As a common Anglo identity bound the belligerents, so did common assumptions of New Mexican identity influence their actions. To fully understand the implications, it is necessary to view the campaign in a wider, ideological, context. Despite Sibley's reassurances to the people of New Mexico, the invading Texans cared little about "liberating" them from a tyrannical government. They came, as numerous sources attested, to realize their manifest destiny. Union forces, too, cared little about the inhabitants. Indeed, they seemed more determined to protect the fruits of their own manifest destiny, realized some fifteen years earlier when the United States first acquired

³ Alberts, *Rebels on the Rio Grande*, 44; William Davidson, "Valverde to Socorro," *Civil War in the Southwest*, 72; Hollister, *Colorado Volunteers in New Mexico*, 168-69; Quoted in Frazier, *Blood & Treasure*, 230.

the territory after a dubious war with Mexico. It is important to recall, too, the suppositions which informed the American philosophy of expansionism: namely, exploitation and Anglo hegemony. Both Union and Confederate volunteers tended to view the territory as an untapped natural resource squandered by an indolent native population. As a diamond in the rough wasting under the aegis of Mexican sloth, it demanded an Anglo industriousness which had yet to take root. Given these assumptions, the pillaging and excesses carried out by volunteers should be interpreted not as acts of desperation or a failure of discipline but as the physical manifestation of the mid-nineteenth century Anglo-American worldview. Simply put, their actions were driven by a sense of entitlement to the land and contempt for its people. Far from pillaging for the sake of pillaging, volunteers were making a profound social statement.⁴

Despite a few glaring exceptions, however, the disdain soldiers exhibited toward New Mexicans did not approach the type of violence or extreme reaction that marked the Indian wars. In March 1862, for instance, Colonel John Baylor, in an infamous order that cost him his position as Arizona governor, instructed volunteers under his command to exterminate Apaches when caught and to sell their children to defray the expenses of the operations. General Sibley, in a much less scandalized report, suggested a similar solution several months later. Frustrated with Navajo raids on his command, he “determined as good policy to encourage private enterprises against that tribe and the Apaches and legitimize the making of slaves of them.” Few volunteers (but not all) would have approved of similar measures against New Mexicans. Rather, the violence visited upon New Mexicans more resembled the sporadic vigilante-type actions that marked Anglo relations with African-Americans who temporarily “forgot their place,” so to speak. The propensity of soldiers to simply push New Mexicans aside rather than employing a sustained campaign of more measured brutality is attributable to the position they occupied in the Anglo socio-racial hierarchy. Compared with the “savage” Indian, whose very existence posed a threat to the foundations of “civilized” society, the “half-

⁴ Paul Foos, in *A Short, Offhand, Killing Affair*, makes a similar argument concerning the actions of US volunteers in the Mexican-American War. Conversely, Martin H. Hall in *Sibley's New Mexico Campaign* and Donald Frazier in *Blood & Treasure* mostly attribute troop behavior in the Southwest during the Civil War to a lack of discipline that stemmed from, as Hall describes it, the “individualism that had always characterized the frontier . . .” (56) Though the observation is not inaccurate, it is difficult to believe that among soldiers operating in the same region a scant thirteen years after the Mexican-American conflict that echoes of Manifest Destiny had been completely extinguished.

civilized,” indolent Mexican appeared decidedly benign. Volunteers scornfully looked upon them as little more than passive bystanders, their existence more a nuisance than a threat. These notions were plainly at work in Anglo-American assumptions as to their ultimate fate. Though Mexican racial flaws clearly negated the possibility of complete assimilation, they also doomed them to eventual extinction, thereby rendering a prolonged future conflict unlikely. Like Neanderthal before Homo Sapiens, in time they would nebulously “pass off” on their own accord (and in stark contrast to the ferocious opposition posed by Native Americans).⁵

Yet, no matter how wistfully Anglos might look to the day when the impure Mexican would disappear, reality forced them to address the fact that, for the time being, he appeared an intractable presence. The official handling of this issue, and its implications for the fate of Mexican-Americans, is illuminating, exposing as it does the ambiguity inherent in the concept of “race.” On July 21, 1845, as Texans hammered out a new state constitution in preparation for annexation by the United States, a remarkable debate occurred among the convention’s delegates over the qualifications for citizenship and the right to vote. As originally spelled out, the constitution limited citizenship to “free white male persons over the age of twenty one years.” Those groups denied citizenship outright included “Indians not taxed, Africans, and descendants of Africans.” The clause seemingly accorded with typical nineteenth century American citizenship requirements, but the use of “white” as a qualifier raised surprising objections. Convention president Thomas J. Rusk led the charge: “If, as decided by the courts of the United States, all others except Africans and the descendants of Africans are white, where is the necessity in retaining it?” he asked. Fearing that the ambiguity of the word would lead to the disenfranchisement of significant number of Mexican-Texans, he called for its removal. “Every gentleman will put his own construction upon the term *white*. It may be contended that we intend to exclude the race which we found in possession of the country when we came here. This would be injurious to those people, to ourselves, and to the magnanimous character which the Americans have ever possessed.” Others agreed that the inclusion of “white” might bar Mexican-Texans from voting, which was clearly not the intent of the law. Many had sided with their Anglo counterparts in the bid for

⁵ *OR*, Ser. 1, vol. 50, pt. 1, 942; Wilson and Thompson, *The Civil War in West Texas and New Mexico*, 141.

independence, and few desired to see them punished. “[T]he Mexican people . . . are unquestionably entitled to vote,” insisted one delegate who thought that “white” would imply otherwise. “[The word] is odious, captious and redundant: and may be the means at elections of disqualifying persons who are legal voters, but who perhaps by arbitrary judges may not be considered as white.” Those who objected to the removal of the word did so on the grounds that it might allow so-called “white negroes” to make an end run around African proscription, but delegates concerned that its inclusion would inevitably proscribe greater numbers of Mexican-Texans won the day. “White” was stricken from the final draft of the constitution, and Mexican-Texans were granted (in theory) full citizenship and protection under the law.⁶

The 1845 Texas constitution would not be the only official document to either place Mexicans under the umbrella of “whiteness” or to grant them political rights. The 1846 “Kearny Codes,” promulgated by General Stephen W. Kearny upon the conquest of New Mexico, established a civil government that likewise entitled “all free male citizens” to vote and granted the protection of civil liberties under a bill of rights. The 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which officially ended the Mexican-American War, contained, at the behest of Mexican authorities who feared that Mexicans living in the annexed territories would be relegated to a status similar to African-Americans, articles and provisions to ensure that they would receive protection and citizenship rights under United States law. Finally, the 1850 territorial constitution of New Mexico, though specifically allowing the vote only for “free white male inhabitants,” clearly enfranchised native New Mexicans as well: “The right of suffrage . . . shall be exercised only by citizens of the United States, *including those recognized as citizens by the treaty with the Republic of Mexico* [emphasis mine]” Predictably, the territory explicitly denied those same rights to blacks and Indians.⁷

⁶ 21 July 1845, The Constitution of Texas (1845), Debates of the Texas Convention, Wm. F. Weeks, Reporter; published by authority of the convention, (Houston: J.W. Cruger, 1846), 156-159, Texas Constitutions, 1824-1876, Tarlton Law Library/Jamail Legal Research Center at the University of Texas Law School, University of Texas at Austin, (<http://tarlton.law.utexas.edu/constitutions/pdf/1845debates/00000016.pdf>).

⁷ Organic Law for the Territory of New Mexico, Compiled under the Directions of General Kearny; September 22, 1846, The Avalon Project at Yale Law School: Documents in Law, History, and Diplomacy, (<http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/states/nm/terorg.htm>); Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo; February 2, 1848, The Avalon Project at Yale Law School: Documents in Law, History, and Diplomacy,

One suspects, judging by the Texas constitutional debates, that the assertion of Mexican “whiteness” spoke more to an underdeveloped system of racial categorization (Chinese were also considered white) than to a recognition of genuine equality with Anglos. Still, the sum significance of these laws should not be underestimated or dismissed. It is easy to forget, in the face of the racial oppression and legal ambiguity (particularly concerning the 1848 treaty with Mexico) that allowed Anglos to undermine Mexican-American rights, dispossess them of their land, relegate them to second-class status and exploit them economically that they were, in fact, still legally considered *citizens* of the United States. As such, and even more so than under Mexican rule, they enjoyed a significantly higher standing vis-à-vis blacks and Native Americans. They had, in theory, recourse to the courts, codified civil liberties and, occasionally, even a (very) tenuous claim to “whiteness.” Though time would prove these rights to be mostly fictitious, African-Americans and Indians did not enjoy even the pretense of such privileges.⁸

The official conferral of civil rights suggests that Anglos viewed with approval at least some aspects of Mexican society. Most notably, the Mexican recognition of private property and acceptance of agriculture – features conspicuously absent from many Native American cultures – conformed to the republicanism that served as a cornerstone of

(<http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/diplomacy/mexico/guadhida.htm>); John P. Victory, et al., *Compiled Laws of New Mexico*, (Santa Fe: New Mexican Printing Company, 1897), 42-43.

⁸ The ambivalence of Mexican “whiteness” in the nineteenth century has received some investigation. The very politicians who decided to grant political rights to Mexicans often spoke of their inferiority as a race. Though Texas never passed an anti-miscegenation law, Mexican spouses were commonly listed as “Spanish” in origin, suggesting an attempt to “whiten” them as much as possible. See David Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas, 1836-1986*, (Austin, 1987); and Neil Foley, *The White Scourge: Mexicans, Blacks, and Poor Whites in Texas Cotton Culture*, (Berkeley, 1997).

Though Hispanics enjoyed a higher status in comparison to Indians and blacks in the US, they would have ostensibly enjoyed a greater degree of egalitarianism overall had they remained under Mexican control. Under Spanish rule, Mexicans lived within a complex caste system which, much like the United States, valued “whiteness” (in the form of the “pure” Spaniard) and denigrated “blackness” (in the form of the African or Indian). Following independence from Spain in 1821, Mexican authorities abolished such distinctions, theoretically setting blacks, Indians, mestizos, and *criollos* on an equal footing. Unsurprisingly, the United States ended this experiment in interracial democracy.

Several issues have been raised concerning the 1848 treaty, including a revision of Article 9 which struck out the word “equality” in relation to Mexicans and Anglos, and the total removal of Article 10, which would have guaranteed the recognition of previous Mexican land grants. Though the US explained these alterations as insignificant, and insisted that former Mexican nationals would receive the same rights guaranteed to foreign nationals under the terms of the Louisiana Treaty, some have argued that the vagueness of the agreement allowed for future exploitation. See Richard Griswold Del Castillo, *The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo: A Legacy of Conflict*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1990).

Anglo-American society. In rare instances, soldiers might even discern reflections of their own communities in New Mexico, as did a Texan in Albuquerque who saw “several things that look a little similar to a civilized country, viz, dry goods, stores, church, [and] frame work about houses” Arguably a condescending observation, its importance becomes apparent when contrasted with that of an Ohio trooper in Idaho Territory concerning the transitory nature of Native American encampments. “An Indian village,” he concluded, “is not like a human village.” Though racial assumptions resulted in the oppression of the vast majority of Mexican-Americans, the granting of legal citizenship, and the tacit if ambiguous acknowledgment of “community” and “civilization” thereby, went far in guaranteeing they would not be subjected to exterminationist policies. In the Anglo-American caste system of the Southwest, the “half-civilized” Mexican would ultimately serve as an intermediate race, united with “civilized” Anglos against the “savage” Indian, yet subordinated to them under the guise of American paternalism as an eventual source of “docile” and “cheap” labor.⁹

It is vital to note, however, that alongside the image of the sometimes-white-but-mostly-indolent Mexican there existed a “treacherous” “Aztec” counterpart. Though the volunteers ostensibly placed New Mexicans above the Indian, they also remembered that New Mexicans were partly *of* the Indian. This easily-blurred distinction was not a trivial one, for though the former might be allowed to pass quietly out of existence (after being suitably exploited), the latter demanded immediate extermination. Future Anglo capitalists might view New Mexicans as a potential source of labor; the transient Union and Texan volunteers who marched through the territory in 1862 were hardly constrained by such economic foresightedness. As Anglo soldiers among a racially “inferior” and “foreign” people, there always lurked the danger that perceptions of the population as a

⁹ Thompson, *Westward the Texans*, 93; William E. Unrau, ed., *Tending the Talking Wire: A Buck Soldier's View of Indian Country, 1863-1866*, (Salt Lake: University of Utah Press, 1974), 118; In 1859, Sylvester Mowry, an American booster of mining operations in the Southwest, had this to say about the advantages of Mexican labor: “The question of labor is one which commends itself to the attention of the capitalist: cheap, and under proper management, efficient and permanent. My own experience has taught me that the lower class of Mexicans . . . are docile, faithful, good servants, capable of strong attachment when firmly and kindly treated. They have been ‘peons’ (servants) for generations. They will always remain so, as it is their natural condition.” Quoted in Sylvester Mowry, *Geography and Resources of Arizona and Sonora*, (New York: A. Roman & Co., 1863), 67; Mario Barrera, in *Race and Class in the Southwest* (1979), has argued that the Southwest became an “internal colony” of the United States, with “Chicanos” reduced to a colonial labor force.

mere nuisance might be superseded by perceptions of the population as a menace. The existence of this dichotomous image, proof both of the fluidity and contingency of “race” and its utility in war, became most apparent during the Confederate retreat when New Mexicans attempted to defend themselves against rebel depredations. By doing so, they shattered the patronizing stereotype of the half-civilized but harmless simpleton. Far from dispelling the myths of Mexican indifference and cowardliness, however, in the eyes of plundering Texans they had merely confirmed their treacherous and savage nature. And as the indiscriminate shelling of Socorro demonstrated, such affronts to Anglo superiority and civilization would not be suffered lightly.

Section 4: African Americans and the Civil War

4.1 Introduction

The vast majority of Union volunteers did not enlist to destroy slavery, but to preserve the Union. In a textbook case of historical irony, the war to preserve the Union soon turned into a war against slavery, for it was obvious to all that the institution was “somehow” the cause of the nation’s troubles. Though many soldiers were reluctant to admit it, the decision first to free African-Americans and then to recruit them as laborers and soldiers was predicated upon a reconsideration of cherished racial assumptions. Northern society had effectively marginalized blacks from the political, economic, and social realms, casting them aside as a lesser, inferior people. Nevertheless, Union volunteers determined the cause of Union to be more important than racial repression. Not without hesitation, they endorsed emancipation as well as black military service. By war’s end, many white volunteers had come to consider blacks in their various capacities as an indispensable component of the war effort. More, some even came to appreciate them as something other than a permanent underclass.

Southerners, conversely, experienced no such sea change in their racial perceptions. They unabashedly seceded over a desire to protect slavery, never wavered from the image of blacks as inferior beings, and only played upon variations of that theme. They had founded a nation predicated upon a belief not just in black inferiority, but in black enslavement. The institution had, in fact, become inextricably entwined with white identity and white society. To even consider African-Americans as something other than slaves threatened to upset fundamental cultural norms. More importantly, given the context of war, rebel soldiers remained haunted by the specter of slave rebellion. For them, African-Americans could never be anything more than indolent and contented carefree slaves or savage and treacherous barbarians.

In either case, Anglos once again exposed the fluidity of “race,” how it might be altered to suit circumstances, and how its projection could inflict unnecessary suffering upon civilians in time of war.

4.2 Union Perceptions of African Americans

4.2.1 “That Is Good Logic”: Northern Views on Race

In early 1863, the 25th Wisconsin Infantry, mustered into service the previous September, finally arrived in Kentucky after helping to quell the great Sioux uprising in Minnesota. Recalled to Fort Randall in November, they at last received marching orders. By riverboat, train, and foot, they slowly made their way first to Cairo, Illinois, a major launching point of Federal operations, and then on to their final destination of Columbus. Few of the Wisconsinites had been so far from home, and they inevitably commented on those things tourists are apt to comment upon: the weather, the landscape, and particularly the people they encountered. Though they noted the presence of “scowling” secesh, it was not the white folk who most fascinated them. “We are really in the ‘sunny south,’” wrote one volunteer to his parents in March:

“The slaves, contrabands, we call them, are flocking into Columbus by the hundred. . . . You never meet one but he jerks his hat off and bows and shows the whitest teeth. I never saw a bunch of them together but I could pick out an Uncle Tom, a Quimbo, a Sambo, a Chloe, a Eliza or any other character in Uncle Tom’s Cabin. The women take in a lot of dimes washing for the soldiers, and the men around picking up odd jobs. I like to talk with them. They are funny enough, and the stories they tell of slave life are stories never to be forgotten. Ask any of them how he feels and the answer nearly always will be, ‘Sah, I feels mighty good sah,’ or ‘God bress you massa, I’s se so proud I’s se a free man.’”¹

That Harriet Beecher Stowe’s anti-slavery novel could serve as an interpretative filter for how a great many soldiers initially viewed African-Americans demonstrates an utter dearth of first-hand knowledge concerning the reality of slavery or enslaved people. Indeed, most had very little if any contact with African-Americans in the North. Though more urbanized than the South, Northern society remained overwhelmingly rural, and most its four hundred thousand free black residents remained clustered in the great cities or along a narrow strip of borderland stretching from southern Illinois to southern Pennsylvania. Of the all “foreign” aspects of the South – from its “changeable” weather to the strange fauna, to the lordly plantations and the tobacco-chewing women – it was

¹ Chauncey Herbert Cooke to “Dear folks at home,” 5 March 1863, in *Soldier Boy’s Letters to His Father and Mother, 1861-1865*, (News-Office, 1915), 25.

the enormous population of enslaved African-Americans that volunteers found the most exotic. Though most had never encountered a black person, let alone a slave, did not imply that they were devoid of opinions and preconceived notions as to the nature of their “race.” Despite Southerners’ overblown fears that the Union army filled out its ranks with radical abolitionists and “miscegenators” bent on enforcing equality and free love between white and black, the North was hardly a bastion of racial tolerance. Indeed, alongside their rifles and haversacks, many volunteers also carried an intense aversion to African-Americans.

In 1776, the year thirteen colonies declared their independence of British slavery, racial slavery legally existed within every colony. The rhetoric of the Revolution, which threw into sharp relief the hypocrisy of holding a people in perpetual bondage based upon their supposed inferiority, did much towards its ultimate extinction, at least in the North. But the institution died a slow death. In some states, a process of gradual emancipation – which mandated only the manumission of slaves born after its enactment, and only then upon reaching a certain age – assured that slavery would linger for decades. Connecticut, which passed a bill for gradual emancipation in 1784, still counted dozens of slaves in the 1840 census. In New Jersey, where gradual emancipation had been adopted in 1804, a few residents still held blacks in bondage as late as 1865, when passage of the Thirteenth Amendment finally abolished the institution. In the Northwest Territories, the Federal Ordinance of 1787 explicitly prohibited slavery, yet the institution not only took root, but also proved remarkably resilient. In Illinois, for example, slave owners avoided the Federal stipulation through a simple legal maneuver. Reclassifying their property as “apprentices,” they continued to evade the law even after Illinois was admitted as a free state in 1818. In 1824, pro-slavery Illinoisans tried to legalize slavery. Anti-slavery advocates defeated the measure in a state-referendum, but its supporters garnered 42% of the vote.²

² For an overview of slavery and its abolition in the North, see Leon F. Litwack, *North of Slavery: The Negro in the Free States, 1790-1860*, (University of Chicago Press, 1965), especially chapter one, “Slavery to Freedom;” Edgar J. McManus, *Black Bondage in the North*, (Syracuse University Press, 1973); James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton, *In Hope of Liberty: Culture, Community and Protest among Northern Free Blacks, 1700-1860*, (New York: Oxford, 1998); and Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998). On the Illinois

As important as the pro-slavery element's show of strength were the motives for those Illinoisans who rejected slavery's legal introduction. Revolutionary faith in the equality of man may have inspired earlier emancipation legislation, but it had long since subsided. Opponents of slavery were hardly concerned with either the appearance of hypocrisy or the welfare of African-Americans. Rather, like most Northerners, Illinois residents now based their opposition on narrow racial self-interest. The aristocratic pretensions they associated with slavery flew in the face of the republican ideal of the independent, self-sufficient farmer. If slavery were allowed to flourish, so went the argument, this class of people, who Jefferson considered so vital to the survival of the nation, would be snuffed out: subjugated by a planter elite. The fear that slavery, if left unchecked, would undermine and degrade free white labor informed much of the anti-slavery sentiment of the mid-nineteenth century. "How natural it has been," asserted Senator William Henry Seward of New York in 1860, "To assume that the motive of those who have protested against the extension of slavery, was an unnatural sympathy with the negro instead of what it always has really been, concern for the welfare of the white man."³

As the language employed by Congressman David Wilmot of Pennsylvania and others suggests, Northern objections to slavery on economic grounds were often hopelessly intertwined with a rampant and irrational Negrophobia. The artificial social construct of race, created to justify the enslavement of an "lesser" people for material gain, had been centuries in the making, and it would not be easily undone. Slavery cast an indelible stigma upon those who had been ensnared by it, and all blacks, former slaves and free-born alike, were looked upon as an inferior species with a peculiar set of

slavery debate, see William W. Freehling, *The Road to Disunion: Secessionists at Bay, 1776-1854*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 138-141; and James Simeone, *Democracy and Slavery in Frontier Illinois: The Bottomland Republic*, (Dekalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2000). De facto slavery also existed in Indiana and Ohio, where its elimination likewise depended less on Article Six of the Northwest Ordinance, which Congress hesitated to enforce with consistency, and more on the opposition of its residents. See John Craig Hammond, *Slavery, Freedom, and Expansion in the Early American West*, (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2007).

³ On the connection between free labor and anti-slavery sentiment, see George M. Frederickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817-1914*, (New York: Oxford, 1971), 130-164; and Eric Foner's *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party before the Civil War*, (New York: Oxford, 1995); William H. Seward, speech made in Detroit, 4 September 1860, in *The Works of William H. Seward*, Vol. 4, George E. Baker, ed., (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1884), 312.

deficiencies and weaknesses. That Free Soilers and their Republican successors gained such wide support in the North in comparison to the much-maligned abolitionist movement – epitomized by William Lloyd Garrison – owed much to their ability to formulate an anti-slavery message which exalted white over black. Espousing containment rather than emancipation and, perhaps more importantly, acknowledging the reality of subordination rather than equal rights, they were able to capitalize politically on white sensibilities in regard to race. “When we say that all men are created equal,” insisted Republican senator Lyman Trumbull in 1859, “we do not mean that every man in organized society has the same rights. We do not tolerate that in Illinois. I know that there is a distinction between these two races because the Almighty himself has marked it upon their very faces”⁴

That Northerners despised blacks as much as the system which enslaved them quickly became evident upon its abolition. Feeling it impossible, even detrimental, for Anglo and African to live together, many anti-slavery advocates endorsed deportation of emancipated slaves and free blacks. Despite its impracticality, it remained for decades a popular, if inchoate and utopian, solution for anti-slavery advocates who viewed the potentiality of mass numbers of free blacks with trepidation. Abraham Lincoln, though

⁴ For David Wilmot's defense of his proviso which would have banned slavery from territories acquired from Mexico, see *Appendix to the Congressional Globe*, 29th Congress, 2nd Session, 317; Senator Lyman Trumbull, *Congressional Globe*, 36th Congress, 1st Session, (8 December 1859), 58-59; Representative Joshua Giddings, *Congressional Globe*, 35th Congress, 2nd Session, (12 January 1859), 346; Speech of Samuel Carey, quoted in Michael Burlingame, *Abraham Lincoln: A Life*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), Vol. 1, 1446. It should be pointed out that abolitionists, while subject to vigilantism, enjoyed the benefit of not having to stand for election. Much of the more extreme rhetoric attributed to Republicans appeared during campaigns when they were forced to defend against Democratic charges of being the “nigger party.” Because African-Americans could not vote, little was lost in casting them aside. Political speeches, therefore, did not necessarily reflect actual beliefs. Though few Republican leaders truly believed in the possibility of racial equality, there existed a wide range of attitudes toward blacks. Some despised them, while others adopted a more benevolent, if paternalistic, view. On the other hand, that elected officials felt it necessary to employ such rhetoric to ensure their political survival demonstrates the extent of anti-black feeling in the population at large. See Kenneth M. Stampp, *The Imperiled Union: Essays on the Background of the Civil War*, (New York: Oxford, 1981), particularly chapter 4, “Race, Slavery, and the Republican Party of the 1850s.” On the origins of race and the extent of anti-black feeling in the antebellum North, see Leon Litwack, *North of Slavery*; Winthrop D. Jordan, *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1968); George M. Frederickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817-1914*, (New York: Oxford, 1971), Alexander Saxton, *The Rise and Fall of the White Republic: Class Politics and Mass Culture in Nineteenth Century America*, (London: Verso, 1990); Theodore Allen, *The Invention of the White Race*, 2 Volumes, (London: Verso, 1994); and Joanne Pope Melish, *Disowning Slavery: Gradual Emancipation and Race in New England, 1780-1860*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998).

he eventually acknowledged its infeasibility, nevertheless admitted colonization's continuing appeal. "My first impulse," he declared in an 1854 speech, "would be to free all the slaves, and send them to Liberia, - to their own native land."⁵

While Northerners looked forward to a day when the country might be cleansed of all blacks, they meanwhile were forced to contend with the reality of their presence. In Ohio and Illinois, for instance, white citizens, cognizant of the Southern desire to expel free blacks, clamored for immigration restriction. Both states eventually passed legislation requiring would-be black émigrés to provide proof of their free status and post a prohibitive bond as a guarantee of good behavior. Under state law, those who violated white notions of "proper" conduct might be fined, whipped, expelled, or, as was the case in Illinois, sold at public auction. Other states, fearing that such restrictions would serve to funnel asylum-seeking blacks across their borders, considered similar legislation, including Pennsylvania and Massachusetts. Though immigration restriction went far in relegating African-Americans to second-class status, it was hardly the only method utilized by whites to marginalize free blacks. Indeed, it was but one weapon in an arsenal of discriminatory legislation, collectively referred to as "Black Laws," that existed in various form throughout the Northern states and territories. From Massachusetts to Oregon, African-Americans, if not barred outright, were commonly disenfranchised, prevented from joining the militia, denied the right to serve on juries or testify against whites, banned from public schools, and excluded from professional positions.⁶

⁵ John Hope Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of African-Americans*, (Knopf, 7th ed., 1994), 168. On the history of the colonization movement, and the debate over its "anti-slavery" credentials, see P.J. Staudenraus, *The African Colonization Movement, 1816-1865*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961); and Eric Burin, *Slavery and the Peculiar Solution: A History of the American Colonization Society*, (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005). In 1828, the American Colonization Society reported the existence of "Auxiliary Societies" in nearly every Northern state, including Connecticut, Vermont, and New Hampshire. See *The Eleventh Annual Report of the American Society for Colonizing the Free People of Colour of the United States*, (Washington: James C. Dunn, 1828), 97-120. Abraham Lincoln, Speech on the Kansas-Nebraska Act at Peoria, Illinois, 16 October 1854, in *Lincoln: Speeches and Writings, 1832-1858*, Don Edward Fehrenbacher, ed., (Library of America: Fifth Edition, 1989), 316.

⁶ Litwack, *North of Slavery*, 66-72; See also, *Report of the Debates and Proceedings of the Convention for the Revision of the Constitution of the State of Indiana*, (Indianapolis, 1850), 572-575. In most instances, immigration restriction was irregularly enforced, serving more as a weapon to terrorize blacks who actually resided within the states than as a barrier to new arrivals. In 1829, for example, Cincinnati officials, who had paid little attention to the immigration law, suddenly announced their intention to enforce it, giving black residents a month to comply or leave the state. Pressure from Irish laborers, who feared that a sudden influx of black immigrants would drive down wages, had prompted the city to act; those same laborers, impatient with legalities, shortly thereafter rampaged through black neighborhoods in a murderous riot. Hundreds of free blacks subsequently took permanent leave of the state, at last finding refuge in Canada.

Because Northerners tended to base their opposition to slavery on racial and economic self-interest rather than concern for the enslaved, their stance is better viewed as pro-white rather than anti-slavery. That said, it should come as no surprise nor should it seem paradoxical that many could reject the expansion of slavery while simultaneously rejecting emancipation. To eliminate slavery, so went the fear, was to risk freed slaves flooding into the North, who would inevitably compete with white labor (or, conversely, become a public charge), increase racial tensions, and otherwise sully the body-politic. It was not a circumstance, as the existence of immigration restrictions and Black Laws suggest, that whites were willing to tolerate. Consequently, there remained among many whites a willingness to countenance and even support continued black enslavement. Some, especially those in Midwestern states whose ancestors had emigrated from the South, went even further in their support, viewing black slavery not merely as a distasteful but necessary method of racial control, but as a natural and even divine institution. During the course of the Civil War, as black freedom became inseparable from the larger effort of suppressing rebellion, such views would come to plague the Lincoln administration. As one Indiana soldier explained with some exasperation from Louisiana in early 1863, an “ignorant portion” of his regiment vehemently opposed emancipation because “they was raised to believe that slavery is one of the sacred things instituted by God”⁷

To be sure, the abolitionist movement, spearheaded by activists like Garrison, added a much needed counter-perspective to the anti-black prejudice which pervaded the North. Even among the more devoted abolitionists, however, there remained a reluctance or inability to view African-Americans as true equals. Some, while advocating emancipation and humane treatment, still clung to notions of racial inferiority. Others

See Litwack, *North of Slavery*, 72-74; and Nikki M. Taylor, *Frontiers of Freedom: Cincinnati's Black Community, 1802-1868*, (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2005), 80-105.

For an overview of the Ohio Black Laws, see George W. Knepper, *Ohio and Its People*, (Kent, OH: The Kent State University Press, 1997), 204-207; and Stephen Middleton, *The Black Laws: Race and the Legal Process in Early Ohio*, (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2005). For an overview of the Black Laws in the Northwest, see Stephen Middleton, *The Black Laws in the Old Northwest: A Documentary History*, (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1993). Northern legislation, in fact, closely resembled Southern laws enacted against free blacks. See Ira Berlin, *Slaves without Masters: The Free Negro in the Antebellum South*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1975).

⁷ William Moore Parkinson to “Sarah Ann,” 24 February 1863, William Moore Parkinson Letters, <<http://www.geocities.com/cindyparkinson/page71t.html>>

approached from a different angle, viewing blacks not as subhuman, but as innocent children. Harriet Beecher Stowe, for instance, who went far in exposing the evils of American slavery with her 1852 novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, and whose characters often found their way into the letters of Northern soldiers, was herself a proponent of this view. The story's protagonist, though portrayed as a man deserving of sympathy, was nonetheless said to exemplify the "soft, impressible nature of his kindly race, ever yearning toward the simple and childlike" Decidedly more benign than the prevailing images of black depravity, it was a view no less stereotypical – and perhaps, because of its very benignity, more insidious. Still, in making her case for the immorality of slavery, Stowe might be forgiven her dalliance with such "romantic racialism." Though she offered an imperfect representation, her intent was neither to denigrate nor belittle the African-American, but to hold him up as a pillar of virtue, a shining example of decency and moral uprightness to be emulated by others. By juxtaposing the kindly, gentle, God-fearing behavior of Uncle Tom with the patriarchal, acquisitive, exploitative, hypocritical, heathenish, and brutal behavior exhibited to various degrees by Arthur Shelby, Dan Haley, Augustine St. Clare, and Simon Legree, she sought to highlight and condemn through the use of counter-image what she believed to be the predominant vices of white American society.⁸

Most whites, it should be pointed out, agreed with Stowe's premise, if not her romanticism, that in the African-American might be found a childlike counter-image of the Anglo-Saxon. Unfortunately, because they viewed their whiteness and its connotations in a much more positive light than did Stowe the Christian abolitionist, the image they manufactured was far less flattering.

4.2.2 White Soldiers, Black Slaves, and the Mechanics of "Race"

Bequeathed with a racist world-view, the volunteers who marched south in 1861 soon encountered African-Americans in greater numbers than they had ever before seen. In their letters and diaries, they continued to demonstrate not only the

⁸ Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin, or, Life among the Lowly*, (New York: Houghton Mifflin/Riverside Library, 1952, 1852), 156; For a discussion of the African-American as counter-image, especially as used by Stowe and other "romantic racialists," see Frederickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind*, 97-129.

pervasiveness of racialist thought, but also the ideology of Anglo superiority which too often accompanied it. That Northern volunteers believed in the existence of biologically distinct “races,” each marked by particular traits or behaviors, was in itself unremarkable, for among nineteenth century Anglos the belief was near universal. Unlike the abolitionists, who espoused a racial philosophy which might be described as “different but equal,” volunteers, representing a greater swath of Northern society, were much more likely to view blacks as “different and inferior.” Hence, their observations and comments – and they commented often – should be viewed less as objective statements of “fact,” and more as subjective assertions of black inadequacies. Those assertions, building blocks in the construction of the racial “other,” spoke to the values and fears of the racializers more than to any specific traits exhibited by the racialized, for what volunteers chose to see in the African-American was but an inverse reflection – a counter-image – of what they most cherished in their own “race.” In creating such an image, volunteers followed a predictable and systematic pattern of racial construction which allowed them to simultaneously denigrate blacks while trumpeting their own supposed superiority.

Perhaps the most obvious manifestation of this process can be found in the observations of what struck volunteers as the most salient features of the African “race” – their physical characteristics. It is immediately apparent that soldiers were not simply partial to “whiteness,” but that they viewed “blackness” as a liability. Pointedly referring to African-Americans as “darks” and “darkies,” they offered descriptions that bordered on the grotesque. Soldiers mockingly commented on their “thick” lips, “flat” noses, “greasy” skin, “ivory” teeth, and “wooly” heads. They were said to resemble apes more than humans, and to exude an offensive stench. One volunteer’s contempt was astounding. “As I was going along this afternoon,” he wrote from New Orleans in 1863, “a little black baby that could just walk got under my feet and it look so much like a big worm that I wanted to step on it and crush it, the nasty, greasy little vermin was the best that could be said of it.”⁹

That “blackness” signified much more than skin color, however, is readily apparent from surprised observations that not all African-Americans were indeed

⁹ Captain F.M. Abbott to brother, February [no day] 1863, quoted in Bell I. Wiley, *The Life of Billy Yank: The Common Soldier of the Union*, (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1951), 109.

“black.” The Wisconsinite who discerned characters from *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* among the freed people he observed also reported with wonder that “the slaves are not all black as we in the north are apt to suppose. Some of them are quite light. Those used as house servants seem to have some education and don’t talk so broad.” A surgeon the 13th Iowa was likewise bewildered by the slaves in Holly Springs, Mississippi. “I saw several females in houses at doors or windows or in the yards that I was surprised when I noticed their hair to see that they were Negroes,” he wrote to his wife. “Negroes? Were they Negroes? They were slaves, but they were white.” He was particularly entranced – and unnerved – by one “beautiful woman” who he noticed standing, with white child in arms, among several slaves in the yard of stately mansion. A freedman hired out by the regiment as a servant also took notice and, crying out in recognition, trotted over and greeted her warmly. Assuming her to be white, the surgeon inquired if she was his former owner. “You ought to have heard the darkies laugh and seen them show their eyes and teeth as Bill replied, ‘What dat dar woman what I spoke to, why she is a Nigger, yah, yah, yah.’ I saw more white ‘Niggers’ in Holly Springs than I ever saw before.”¹⁰

The existence of “white slaves,” which hinted at the liberties masters might take with their human property, demonstrated to volunteers not only the unseemliness and brutality of the “peculiar institution,” but also the perplexing subjectivity of “race.” For soldiers who took great pride in and attached special significance to their own supposed racial purity, evidence of the permeability of the sacrosanct color line could indeed be troubling. Of more immediate importance, however, was how volunteers used Anglo preconceptions of race to impute specific qualities and traits onto the bond people before them. Effectively creating a tier within a tier, they viewed light-skinned African-Americans, carrying the mark of a “civilized” people, were more likely denoted as beautiful, handsome, and intelligent. Dark-skinned “Congoes” and “genuine Africans” who were “blacker than the ace of spades,” meanwhile, were made to embody the exact opposite features. Repulsive, ignorant, and marked by a crudity and coarseness in their behavior, they stood as vestiges of barbarism within an otherwise civilized nation.

¹⁰ Chauncey Herbert Cooke to “Dear folks at home,” 5 March 1863, in *Soldier Boy’s Letters*, 25; Seneca B. Thrall to wife, 3 December 1862, in “An Iowa Doctor in Blue: The Letters of Seneca B. Thrall, 1862-1864,” Mildred Throne, ed., *Iowa Journal of History*, Vol. 58, No. 2 (April 1960), 119-120.

To be sure, their observations were not wholly without foundation. Southerner slave owners, reflecting the Anglo predilection for white skin, tended to treat light-complexioned slaves as special. “Mulatto” women, in particular, were much in demand, and often used in a “domestic” capacity either as house servants, concubines, or both. Though there were no explicit rules governing the matter, as domestics they might receive a rudimentary education, schooling in etiquette, and be expected to display a proper civility in their behavior. “Buck negroes,” on the other hand, more often found themselves assigned to field work or other manual labors and kept in ignorance. As the overwhelming majority of enslaved people encountered by volunteers consisted of this latter group, it is not surprising that their comments reflected to a degree the reality of slavery. Even so, such observations completed a vicious circle, for many volunteers, like Southern masters, simply assumed that blackness precluded the ability for higher-order thinking. What they saw before them, therefore, was not evidence of slaveholder bias or the debasing effects of slavery, but proof of that assumption. After General William T. Sherman appropriated the numerous rice mills outside of Savannah, Georgia in December 1864 to supply his army, an Illinois volunteer watched as soldiers, teamsters, and freed people went about the tasks of operation and transport. “The most grotesque feature of the scene was that in which the African figured,” he insisted. “Every shade, every caste, every size; all varieties of form and physiognomy were there represented – the handsome octoroon, the *natural* negro, and the uncouth, animal looking blacks who seemed scarcely one remove from the ourangoutang,” the latter a “type of the very lowest form of humanity [who] scarcely realized their own wretchedness.” Even for light-complexioned African-Americans, however, the “benefits” of the Anglo-imposed hierarchy went only so far. Though soldiers may have viewed them more favorably than their darker-skinned brethren, the acknowledgment of whiteness was more descriptive than ascriptive. No matter how light their skin, slaves could never achieve “whiteness” in the ideological sense, with all the privileges that status accorded. Hence, soldiers qualified their descriptions, referring to them as “mulattoes,” “quadroons,” “octaroons,” “white slaves” or, more poignantly, “white niggers.” So branded, they might be safely excluded from

the ranks of Anglo-Saxonry and relegated to the same category which included the darkest-hued field hands.¹¹

The epithet “nigger” and the somewhat less offensive “darkey,” terms regularly employed by volunteers, conjured several interrelated images, all of which were informed by the assumption that blacks were akin to children. The first of these, and the rarest, was epitomized by Stowe’s “Uncle Tom.” In this construction, blacks were viewed as docile, sensitive, emotionally expressive creatures, possessive of those feminine virtues which so clearly contrasted with the Anglo archetype of stoic manliness. This romantic view of African-Americans, championed almost exclusively by abolitionists, sometimes found expression among white officers who commanded black troops. Unsurprisingly, what abolitionists considered redeeming qualities often translated into military liabilities. “They are simple, docile, and affectionate almost to the point of absurdity,” wrote the colonel of the 1st South Carolina volunteers of those under his command. Men who stood battle with “perfect coolness,” he noted, “have come to me blubbing in the most irresistibly ludicrous manner on being transferred from one company in the regiment to another.” Somewhat less charitably, another officer referred to the same qualities as a “wonderful supineness.” Though he lauded their courage in battle, he maintained that they lacked the “mental energy and vigor” which allowed whites to overcome personal adversity. “In this regiment if you degrade a negro who has once tried to do well,” he insisted, “you had better shoot him at once, for he gives right up and never attempts to redeem himself.” Unlike many of his comrades, however, he refused to attribute such behavior to race, viewing it instead as the inevitable result of a unique Southern brand of slavery, a soul-destroying system of oppression which left its victims meek, submissive, and compliant: “the personification of humanity reduced to a wet rag.”¹²

Most soldiers, neither abolitionists nor officers in command of black soldiers, tended to reject the romantic vision of African-Americans, focusing instead on the ridiculously “clownish” appearance and “antic” behavior of those they observed. They

¹¹ Stephen F. Fleharty, *Our Regiment: A History of the 102nd Illinois Infantry Volunteers*, (Chicago: Brewster & Hanscom, 1865), 125-126.

¹² Diary of Thomas Wentworth Higginson, 27 November 1862, in *Army Life in a Black Regiment*, (Boston: Lee and Shepard, 1882), 10; Charles Francis Adams, Jr. to father, 2 November 1864, in *A Cycle of Adams Letters, 1861-1865*, Vol. 2, Worthington Chauncey Ford, ed., (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1920), 215-217.

saw before them not a meek and pensive Uncle Tom, but the comical Sambo: fawning, easily amused, eager to please, and apparently carefree. The impression quite often stemmed from the reactions of slaves who, cognizant of the implications of the arrival of Yankee soldiers, rejoiced in their imminent emancipation. Crammed onto open-air flatcars, the Illinois volunteers who rode the rails from Tusculumbia to Decatur, Alabama in early August 1862 proved a conspicuous sight – especially to the enslaved people on the plantations adjacent to the tracks. “About 40 negro women who were clearing a piece of woodland dropped their axes and picked and came out to the road as the train passed,” related a passenger. “They were by odds the most antic and amusing lot of slaves I have yet seen. So clumsily ludicrous, with their close-curved wool, great white and black eyes, and heavy-ended motions.” As the Union navy positioned itself for a run against New Orleans in the summer of 1862, soldiers and sailors took some satisfaction in the contrasting responses which their presence provoked among the locals. On the banks of the river, wrote one officer, white women scowled and turned their backs to the fleet, but slaves showed a bit more excitement. “As we passed the groups of darkies,” he noted, “such demonstrations of joy, such jumping and bowing, and such antics and grins as could only be imagined by those who are familiar with the monkey traits of the negro character.” Nor did the impression necessarily abate after further contact. When the military organized freed slaves to gin and bale cotton around Lake Providence, Louisiana in early 1863 the operation drew many a curious observer from nearby camps. “I was over today to see them work,” wrote a surgeon in the 13th Iowa. “Four little niggers were driving who seemed to have been selected on account of their comical appearance, grinning, laughing, singing, cracking their whips, talking to their mules, they seemed so perfectly careless and happy. Their Negro melodies so cheerful that they themselves did not know what care is.”¹³

¹³ Diary of Charles W. Wills, 7 August 1862, in Mary E. Kellogg, ed., *Army Life of an Illinois Soldier: Letters and Diary of the Late Charles W. Wills*, (Washington, DC: Globe Printing, 1906), 122; Captain Thomas T. Craven to “My Dearly Beloved Wife,” 3 June 1862, “Extract from the private letter of Captain Craven, U.S. Navy, commanding USS *Brooklyn*, regarding operations in the Mississippi River,” *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of the Rebellion*, 30 Vols, (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1895-1922), Ser. 1, Vol. 18, 529. Hereafter referred to as “ORN.” Diary of Jacob Heffelfinger, 11 June 1862, Civil War Times Illustrated Collection, USMHI; Seneca B. Thrall to wife, 20 February 1863, “An Iowa Doctor in Blue, 135.

As any reader of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was aware, however, Sambo was not all humor and jest, for he also possessed a darker side marked by a certain decadence and deviousness. Hopelessly ignorant, morally corrupt, and lacking the initiative, self-reliance, and personal responsibility which informed Anglo notions of virtue and progress he was, in short, the anti-republican. Observing the desolation along Virginia's Pamunkey River in 1864, a Massachusetts volunteer ruminated on the destruction of what he imagined had been an idyllic setting. "The planters' houses were all closed, not a white face to be seen, but the niggers were plenty enough," he remarked with evident distaste. "[They] were gathered in groups around their miserable quarters and seemed as listless and lazy as you can imagine." If he doubted their initiative *sans* white oversight, a sergeant in the 75th Indiana expressed doubts of a more fundamental nature. "The Slaves here are more monkey than human," he wrote of those he encountered in South Carolina. "I cant understand half they say." Then, too, there was the perception of black delinquency. A Wisconsinite, learning of his parents' decision to hire a "darkey" farmhand, cautioned them to remain vigilant. "Some of them are the worst liars and thieves in the world," he warned. "Be careful. We soldiers have lots of dealings with them. . . .When they are faced with the facts of their lying they put on the most pitiful look of innocence. I am trying to find excuses for them when I remember what you told me about them. I don't doubt but the whites would be liars and thieves too if they had been slaves for two hundred years." In considering their flaws, a Michigan officer presented a less than optimistic prognosis. "It is true there are many of the blacks well qualified to take care of themselves," he admitted, "but the masses are lazy and shiftless & would become worthless vagabonds if free. . . .They have for generations been dependent & treated like children & mentally they are nothing else."¹⁴

The debate over the essence of African-American "character," and whether soldiers defined them as docile and effeminate, contented and carefree, or lazy and

¹⁴ Eugene H. Freeman to "Dear Father and Mother," 1 June 1864; to "Dear Parents," 6 June 1864, in Warren H. Freeman and Eugene H. Freeman, *Letters from Two Brothers Serving in the War for the Union to Their Families at Home in West Cambridge, Massachusetts*, (Cambridge: H.O. Houghton and Company, 1871), 117, 119; Diary of William Bluffton Miller, 12 February 1865, in *Fighting for Liberty and Right: The Civil War Diary of William Bluffton Miller, First Sergeant, Company K, Seventy-Fifth Indiana Volunteer Infantry*, Jeffrey L. Patrick and Robert J. Willey, eds., (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2005), 308; Chauncey Herbert Cooke to "Dear Parents," 3 August 1863, *Soldier Boy's Letters*, 54-55; Diary of Oliver Lyman Spaulding, 25 December 1862, Spaulding Family Papers, LC.

deceitful, necessarily influenced their views as to the ultimate fate of blacks. Some soldiers assumed, as they did of free blacks in the North, that Southern blacks were naturally debased, and that the “child-like” behavior they observed was inherent to the African “race.” More animal than human, slavery or some other permanently subordinate status was their proper place. Others, while recognizing the degrading effects of slavery rather than “race” as the cause of their condition, nonetheless assumed that bondage had all but obliterated the humanity of slaves and considered the idea of regeneration through freedom a futile pipe dream. Still others, while hesitating to espouse racial equality, hoped that slaves, once freed, might at least be raised above their present wretched status and allowed to live with a modicum of dignity.

The common denominator in all of these speculations, of course, was a firm belief in black inferiority. That belief, often challenged but never completely surmounted, would heavily influence the volunteers’ relationship with slaves, freed people, and free blacks throughout the war. Nevertheless, as it became more apparent that they were destined to play an influential role in the conflict and its outcome, the debate over black character assumed a new significance and urgency, and came to involve not only questions as to the future of African-Americans, but of the nation itself.

4.2.3 The Emancipation Debate

In August 1861 near Great Falls, Maryland, a slave catcher arrived in the camp of the 34th New York seeking the return of a bondsman who had absconded from his owner in Georgia. The New Yorkers, who had hired the man as a cook, were outraged. “The fiery ones swore that he should not go and even got their guns,” reported one volunteer. There was little they could do, however, as orders stated all slaves should be returned to their owners. “The darkey was taken away,” he continued, “but woe to the Man that took him if some of the boys ever get a chance at him. It was the bitterest pill I ever swallowed to stand by and see the old Dark going off to bondage but could not help him. That is about the first working of the Hellish System that I have seen.”¹⁵

¹⁵ Henry C. Lyon to “Dear Brother and Friends,” 3 August 1861, in Emily N. Radigan, ed., *Desolating This Fair Country: The Civil War Diary and Letters of Lt. Henry C. Lyon, 34th New York*, (McFarland & Company, 1999), 34-35.

Such altercations between slave catchers and volunteers were extraordinarily common during the first year of the war, especially in border states which had not seceded. “Loyal” owners, assuming that they still enjoyed the rights and privileges of loyalty, expected the cooperation of the military in the return of fugitives. Nor were their expectations without foundation. The Lincoln administration, not wishing to antagonize tepid loyalists and hoping to avoid playing into the hands of secessionists by confirming their charges of “abolitionist war,” forbade the military to harbor escaped slaves. Volunteers, heedless of the administration’s political anxieties, viewed the situation differently. Some objected to the policy on moral grounds and attempted, not always with success, to evade it. An Ohio volunteer, who had watched helplessly as officers returned an enslaved woman to the custody of her owner, lamented the fundamental injustice of the situation. “Poor Woman!” he confided in his diary. “She had been deceived – having been informed that we were battling for human rights and universal freedom she had not learned until then that our humanity was limited by color and that the poor wretch who had sought shelter was beyond the pale.” More often, volunteers who harbored fugitives did so not out of sympathy for the oppressed, but because it allowed them to strike back against the people they held responsible for the war. An Illinois infantryman wrote with great satisfaction of the fate of one slave catcher who entered his regiment’s camp near Versailles, Kentucky in 1862. “An immense crowd gathered and told Mr. Negro Catcher to flee for his dear life,” he informed his wife. “He did not start and in less time than I am writing this there were half a dozen boots taken from the seat of his pants.” An officer attempted to intervene, but to no avail. The man was run out of camp amid jeering troops. “I tell you, Mattie,” he resolutely concluded, “we never came here to catch niggers for anybody.” Of course, not all soldiers were particularly keen on the army’s emancipationist tendencies, especially those from the border states where slavery still existed. In early December 1862, for example, a volunteer in the 21st Kentucky disgustingly reported that “many of our officers have been complaining and murmuring . . . on account of alleged interferences in Ky with private property (niggers) on the part of some northern regts.” He dismissed their grumblings, believing them an excuse to resign from the army, but the resentment was genuine.¹⁶

¹⁶ Diary of Channing Richards, 28 May 1862, Filson Historical Society; Charles Calvin Enslow to wife

Opposition to emancipation became more pronounced with the passage of the Second Confiscation Act, which allowed the army to retain slaves who entered the lines as “contraband” of war. In the months preceding full emancipation and in the wake of its enactment, anti-abolition sentiment from within the ranks was sufficiently widespread that the prospect of a mutiny could not be ruled out. “I enlisted to fight for the Union and the Constitution,” complained one Kentuckian in January 1863, “but Lincoln puts a different construction on things and now has us Union men fighting for his Abolition Platform and thus making us a hord of Subfugators, house burners, Negro thieves, and devastators of private property.” By no means did Kentucky volunteers enjoy a monopoly on the opposition to emancipation, nor was that opposition primarily grounded in the ideas of inviolable property rights. The words of an irate Indianan indicate that much more was at stake than a loss of wealth or a violation of Constitutional guarantees. “Old Abe's ‘free papers’ to all,” he noted with dismay of the Proclamation, “including Africans and the rest of mankind, also the apes, orangoutangs, and monkies in South America caused me an hour’s hearty laugh, two hour’s steady cry, four hours big with mad, and I am swearing in all the languages known to Americans or Europeans” It was a shame, he thought, that Lincoln “did not kill himself when a youth splitting rails on bets.” An Ohio volunteer, unable to surmount his prejudices, denounced the entire effort. “I dont like the policy this war is carried on at all,” he complained after emancipation became official. “It is nothing but – but a nigger war at best” He thought it outrageous that white men, the “rightful heirs” of the country, should sacrifice themselves on the behalf of black slaves. “I firmly believe that freedom of slaves would be a greater curse to the north than slavery is to the nation now [and] if I so have to fight to free any of them I will then turn round and shoot them. If I have my choice between shooting a white man or a nigger, I will shoot the nigger first for I still think a white man is a little better than a nigger.”¹⁷

(Marthan Ann), n.d. [probably 1862], Charles Calvin Enslow Papers, LC; Thomas Morris Gunn to mother, 3 December 1862, Gunn Family Papers, UK Special Collections-King Library.

¹⁷ John T. Harrington to sister, 19 January 1863, John T. Harrington Letters, KHS; Prock (William Landon) to “Friend Greene,” 8 January 1863, in “Fourteenth Indiana Regiment, Peninsular Campaign to Chancellorsville: Letters to the Vincennes *Western Sun*,” *Indiana Magazine of History*, Vol. 33, No. 3 (September 1937), 341; Unidentified Ohio soldier to “Dear Brothers,” 27 January 1863, William Gladstone Collection, USMHI.

Despite the protestations, many troops early on supported emancipation, and the overwhelming majority eventually came to accept it. Even among those who initially considered emancipation to be a mistake, the transition could occur almost overnight. In May 1862, a Vermont volunteer described for his hometown paper the prevalent opinions on the subject among his comrades. “Negro prejudice is as strong here as anywhere,” he admitted, “and most of the boys would think it a humiliating compromise to the dignity of their work to have it declared that the object of their services was to free the repulsive creatures from slavery, and raise the negro to an equality with themselves.” Should the government decide to emancipate, he predicted dire consequences. “I verily believe if such a declaration was made today, a majority would be inclined to lay down their arms and quit the service in disgust.” Events would eventually prove that supposition to be false, but even before January 1, 1863, this particular Vermonter had already shifted his stance on the issue. In a follow-up missive a month later, he denounced the practice of returning fugitive slaves to owners who swore an oath of allegiance as a “sugar-plum policy” of conciliation, and derided Congress for its failure to pass an emancipation bill. “They may fire upon our flag and trail the Stars and Stripes in the dust,” he quipped, “but no matter, only swear allegiance when you are caught, dear rebels, and we will return you your niggers. Why won’t the rebels appreciate the wondrous magnanimity of our government?” On January 7, 1863, nearly a week after emancipation was signed into law, members of the 21st Iowa listened as the proclamation was read aloud to them. “When it was finished the whole Regiment gave it three times three cheers,” noted one volunteer who did not share their enthusiasm, “but it is my opinion that if they live with the niggers for awhile they will come to give three times three groans for that Proclamation.” Two weeks later, in the wake of several severe marches which tested his fortitude, he relented in his opposition. “I want us to fight the rebels so that they will never come to think about doing this again,” he insisted with renewed determination. “I would not like to see Lincoln take back a single word of his Proclamation as incorrect as it is. I would see that our government does all that it takes. I have enlisted in order to help defeat the rebels and I shall not stop fighting with them before they are whipped even if the war continues for 10 years”¹⁸

¹⁸ Wilbur Fisk (Anti-Rebel) to “Editor Freeman,” 20 May, 7 June 1862, Wilbur Fisk Papers, LC; Gilbert

As the above examples suggest, volunteers who endorsed emancipation interpreted it as a war measure rather than a social policy. Their support should not be confused with concern for the plight of slaves. Indeed, sentiment for emancipation thrived most when implications of racial equality were ignored or rejected. An Iowa surgeon, taking note of popular sentiment in November 1862, was explicit on this point. “A very large majority of that portion of the army that I am with . . . are *unqualifiedly* in favor of *any* and *all* measures for the vigorous prosecution of the war,” he insisted. “They regard [emancipation] as a military expedient and necessity to crush out the rebellion, and are in favor of its enforcement . . . not because they favor abolition of slavery, or the freedom of the negro, but because the Rebels use them as essential aids to their cause, because it is their vulnerable point and because the nigger is the . . . cause of the rebellion.”¹⁹

4.2.4 The “Negro Question”

For Union volunteers, the act of “freeing” the slaves was a relatively simple process. As the armies penetrated deeper into Southern territory, absconding slaves fled into their lines. They arrived in ones and twos, individually and with entire families, in possession of nothing at all or all their worldly possessions. Many soldiers, stunned at the numbers, expressed a general sense of unease at their presence. After a short stay in Memphis, one Iowa volunteer regaled his father with stories of a city overrun. “Contrabands were coming in by the hundred,” he insisted, “little wooly niggers looking more like a new species of monkey were piled up on the wagons, men and women walking by the side.” They also toted a wide assortment of furniture of the “best quality,” stolen from their masters, he assumed, before they took their leave. “I wonder what is to be done with them,” he pondered. “They are a kind of people I would not like to have for neighbors.” When the 13th Connecticut entered Thibodaux, Louisiana with band playing and flags flying, “no welcome greeted us from the white race,” remarked one soldier, but “the negroes from far and near swarmed to us. Every soldier had a negro, and every negro a mule. Many of the blacks also brought with them horses, wagons,

Gulbrandson to parents, 8 January, 23 January 1863, Harrisburg Civil War Round Table Collection, USMHI.

¹⁹ Seneca B. Thrall to wife, 15 November 1862, in “An Iowa Doctor in Blue,” 109-110.

house-furniture, provisions, bundles of clothing, bedding, with their wives and infants, till the bayou was thronged with them for miles. The question became exceedingly perplexing, ‘What to do with them?’”²⁰

Indeed, the so-called “negro question” did not lend itself to an easy solution, especially after emancipation. Previously, soldiers might use the cover of law to turn them away; some had even taken to shooting at them when they approached the lines. Forced to address the issue, many thought the situation a hopeless one. “I believe that very few of them appreciate the responsibilities of freedom and only a small number of them are able to take good care of themselves now,” wrote an Indiana officer in August 1862. “We of the North have helped to make them the shiftless besotted creatures that they are and we are paying the penalty for our share in the business and after this war is over we will have to be taxed to take care of them until they learn to take care of themselves.” Soldiers debated the fate of freed people among themselves, with friends and family back home, and even with the enemy when the opportunity presented.²¹

Precisely what was to be done with freed people was an issue that most soldiers cared not to address, and pervasive racialism, coupled with military preoccupations, ensured that any humanitarian concerns would be given short shrift. “The boys think it their duty to put down rebellion and nothing more,” complained a Vermonter, “and they view the abolition of slavery in the present time as saddling so much additional labor upon them before the present great work is accomplished.” Others, revisiting a time-honored solution to a complicated “problem,” thought it best to simply deport them. “Banish the Black Race from our soil, or colonize him and learn him something,” wrote an Illinois volunteer in March 1863. “The Emancipation Proclamation is good in its place, but now is no time for it. The Union, then the Proclamation and Nigger question.” After observing a “gang of Negroes” at work along a Mississippi road, another Illinoisan

²⁰ Peter Wilson to “Dear Father,” 6 April 1863, “Peter Wilson in the Civil War, 1863-1865,” *Iowa Journal of History and Politics*, Vol. 40, No. 4 (October 1942), 359-360; Homer B. Sprague, *History of the 13th Infantry Regiment of Connecticut Volunteers During the Great Rebellion*, (Hartford: Case, Lockwood & Co., 1867), 92.

²¹ James H. Goodnow to wife (Nancy), 29 August 1862, James H. Goodnow Papers, LC; Journal of Captain L.W. Allen, 40th Battalion Virginia Cavalry, n.d., Soldier Diary Collection, MOC.

expressed appreciation that they were not in his state. “Candidly, I’d rather see them and a whole crop of grindstones dumped into the Gulf,” he announced.²²

Though deportation – whether to Africa or the ocean – was never seriously entertained, the enslaved people who escaped to Union lines in fact found themselves in a colony of sorts: the so-called “contraband camps.” Official contraband camps – those explicitly designed for the care of refugees – were administered and supplied by the military, but usually placed under the management of chaplains and staffed by organizations such as the United States Sanitary Commission or the Society of Friends (organizations assumed to be more sympathetic to the plight of freed people). The sheer numbers of refugees who sought protection within Union lines, however, ensured that ordinary military commanders would be forced to deal with them on a more make-shift basis. To the chagrin of many officers and soldiers, shanty towns housing escaped slaves and their families often sprung up on the fringes of camps if the army remained stationary for any amount of time. In either case, lack of resources and outright neglect often led to atrocious conditions. In February 1863 Mary T. P. Mann, a Sanitary Commission volunteer from Massachusetts, composed a searing indictment of the shameful management of a camp outside of Helena, Arkansas. Neglect, inadequate shelter, poor food, and substandard medical facilities joined with robbery, abuse and murder to create an alarming mortality rate among the refugees. As an example of the indifference which reigned, she reported the case of a freedwoman who fell ill while quartered with a squad of soldiers as a laundress. The soldiers, receiving orders to depart, simply struck their tent and left her lying on the ground, where her husband subsequently discovered her – dead. The camp’s chaplain attempted to retrieve the body for burial, but a storm delayed his efforts and he could do little but cover the corpse with a blanket until the weather broke. When the burial team returned, they made a shocking discovery. “In the morn. they found her babe, a few months old, lying with her under the blanket,” Mann wrote, “some person having become tired of it placed it there for the Chap. to see to.”

²² Wilbur Fisk (Anti-Rebel) to “Editor Freeman,” 20 May 1862, Wilbur Fisk Papers, LC; Edward Leroy Tabler to “Dear Brother,” 15 March 1863, 51st Regiment Illinois Volunteers, <http://51illinois.org/Tabler_3_15_63_murfr.pdf>; Diary of Charles W. Wills, 19 June 1862, *Army Life of an Illinois Soldier*, 106.

The abandonment of mother and child was, unfortunately, symptomatic of more pervasive problems. “The barbarities from *our soldiers* are unparalleled,” insisted Mann, and were encouraged by what she described as “brutal,” “proslavery” military administrators. Of twenty slaves who arrived at the camp as a family, she noted, all but seven had died within two months. Weather and disease took their toll upon them, as did the soldiers who robbed them of their clothes and bedding. When their master arrived seeking their return, most of them reluctantly chose to accompany him rather than sharing the fate of their relatives. She excoriated the camp surgeon for his failure to monitor his assistant, a petty tyrant who instilled such fear into the refugees that many refused to seek treatment. At one point, she overheard him instructing his staff to whip any patient afflicted with diarrhea who made “trouble” without getting from their bed. “It was often done, & to some who were dying,” she wrote. “One surgeon said, “tie all who do so, to a tree in the yard by ropes.” When a well-liked hospital ward master recruited from the camp’s population was illegally arrested and sent back to his mistress in town, the Chaplain sought to intervene on his behalf. His remonstrations were wasted upon the guard, who coolly hinted that “he’d rather shoot an abolitionist any time than a secessionist.” As scandalous as the overall situation may have been, however, Mann remained pessimistic as to the likelihood of its rectification. “This sickly, pestilential, crowded post, is very unfavorable for their colonising,” she concluded, “but Gov’t has much to do, & here there is little interest manifested.”²³

The journey to freedom could be an arduous one encompassing hundreds of miles, and slaves often arrived in a dismal condition which the camps failed to improve. Worse, for soldiers prone to racial fault-finding, camp life presented blacks in the worst possible light, contributing to the image of African-Americans as frail, inferior beings. “The health of the Regt. is Good,” reported a volunteer in the 7th Iowa, “but the Contrabands are dropping off like sheep. They are certainly the most miserable looking set of human beings that I have ever set eyes on.” Dirty, ragged, and sick, quartered in a

²³ Mary T.P. Mann to “Dear Elisa,” 10 February 1863, Mary T.P. Mann Papers, LC. See also the report of Adjutant General Lorenzo Thomas to Secretary of War Edwin Stanton, 1 April 1863, in Ira Berlin, et al., *Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation, 1861-1867*, Ser. 2, “The Black Military Experience,” (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 487-489; and Rev. Josias Stevenson to “Brother Kerr,” 18 February 1864, in Ira Berlin, et al., *Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation, 1861-1867*, Ser. 1, Vol. 1, “The Destruction of Slavery,” (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 314-315. Both describe endemic problems within the camps.

“corrall” inside the lines, and fed by “Uncle Sam,” he thought the bulk of them perfectly useless and “fit for nothing.” Living in idleness and squalor, ravaged by crime and disease, and dependent upon the government for subsistence, the plight of refugees could indeed present a pitiful sight. Unfortunately, soldiers’ pity could also be infused with a healthy dose of annoyance and contempt. For many, the mass of wretched humanity which stood before them presented not an image of an independent people who had taken the initiative to seize their freedom, nor even that of a people victimized by circumstances beyond their control. Instead, what many soldiers discerned was an explicit counter-image of the republican ideal and, too often, proof positive as to the inferiority of African-Americans. “We have a good many [freed people] with us since we came here,” wrote another volunteer from Middleburg, Tennessee in late January 1863, “but they are more bother to us than they are worth, and I wish we hadn’t any. A few of them will work . . . but the most of them will not do a stroke unless driven to it, and would rather steal their living any time than work for it.” Though firm in his support for emancipation, he was pessimistic as to the freed people’s ultimate fate. “I am sure I don’t see what we are going to do with them,” he admitted. “I don’t believe the present generation can be made or educated to be worth anything. What can be done with the next, time may show. As it is, they are a great burden to us, and their own condition in a great many instances is not at all bettered. Wherever they are gathered together in any large numbers and kept at government expense, they are neglected . . . and die off rapidly in consequence, and everybody seems to feel as if that was about the best way to get rid of them.”²⁴

Such attitudes, coupled with an inability or unwillingness on the part of the military to care for large numbers of refugees, often led to tragic situations. In late March 1863, near Providence, Louisiana, members of the 11th Illinois, while engaged in ferreting out and seizing thousands of bales of cotton hidden by the local residents, received unexpected assistance. Hundreds of slaves appeared on the banks of the river, loading cotton they had seized themselves, and pointing out for the troops where their masters had hidden other supplies. The work completed, the volunteers departed, leaving

²⁴ Frank Malcom to “Dear Wife,” 20 March 1864, in “‘Such Is War:’ The Letters of an Orderly in the 7th Iowa Infantry,” James I. Robertson, Jr., ed., *Iowa Journal of History*, Vol. 58, No. 4 (October 1960), 326; Samuel Henry Eells to “Dear Aunt & Uncle,” 24 January 1863, Samuel Henry Eells Papers, LC.

the slaves to fend for themselves. “They thought we would bring them with us when we left, but poor things, they were sadly disappointed,” reported one soldier. “We left them on the bank of the river - men, women, and children, nearly all crying. They said we treated them mean, that we had taken nearly everything they had to eat and made them work hard, and then left them to starve, and be killed by their masters for showing us the cotton, and helping us work. I thought a pity of the poor things, but I think it was out of [the general’s] power to bring them along. I do not know what he could [have] done with them. We have heard that four of them was shot dead by their masters in ten minutes after we left, and I have no doubt of it.”²⁵

A similar incident, one which gained a great deal of notoriety and triggered an informal investigation by Secretary of War Edwin Stanton, occurred during the course of Sherman’s march through Georgia in December 1864. During the campaign, Sherman’s men had to contend not only with supply shortages and rebel cavalry but also, to the general’s great annoyance, slaves who took advantage of the army’s presence to escape from bondage. The “nigger brigade,” as one soldier derisively referred to the parade of black refugees who attached themselves to the blue columns, eventually numbered in the thousands. Though Sherman discouraged their presence, fearing that they would hinder his advance, able-bodied males were quickly put to work as pioneers, while others – women, children, and the elderly (often family members of the laborers) – held on as best they could. Most clung to the tails of the advancing corps, but many ingratiated themselves with the troops, offering to work in exchange for rations.²⁶

Sherman’s corps commanders generally tolerated their presence, as did the men in the ranks, who found them useful and even befriended them. General Jefferson C. Davis, commander of the 14th Corps, proved a notable exception. An Indiana Democrat who blamed abolitionists for instigating the war, he did not hold African-Americans in particularly high esteem, lamented the necessity of emancipation, and did not look keenly upon the hundreds of blacks who now impeded his column’s drive toward Savannah. His

²⁵ William Moore Parkinson to “Sarah Ann,” 31 March 1863, William Moore Parkinson Letters, <<http://www.geocities.com/cindyparkinson/page77t.html>>

²⁶ James E. Morrow Diary, 19 November 1864, Civil War Times Illustrated Collection, USMHI. For secondary accounts of the refugee issue, see Joseph T. Glatthaar, *The March to the Sea and Beyond: Sherman’s Troops in the Savannah and Carolinas Campaign*, (New York: New York University Press, 1985), 52-65; and Noah Andre Trudeau, *Southern Storm: Sherman’s March to the Sea*, (New York: HarperCollins, 2008).

views, suffice to say, were not unique, and were shared by many enlisted men. Davis, however, in a position of some authority, possessed the power to inflict considerable hardship upon them if he so chose, and early on he made clear his distaste at their presence. On November 20, he issued General Orders No. 22 which, along with addressing several practical problems inherent to the march – such as the unauthorized discharge of weapons and the procurement of draft animals – also took at aim at the “useless negroes” who followed his command. Davis forbade them from riding in wagons or otherwise impeding his march, and reminded his subordinates of the necessity of preserving mobility and provisions, both of which were compromised by the presence of large numbers of freed people.²⁷

The orders were irregularly enforced, but even had they been stringently applied, they would not have resolved Davis’s underlying dilemma. Consequently, he adopted more proactive measures to rid himself of the refugees for good. In early December, after his corps had crossed Buckhead Creek, he ordered his engineers to take up the pontoon bridge which they had constructed for the purpose – leaving the trailing refugees on the other side. The creek apparently did not pose much of an obstacle, however, for several hundred freed people were still with the corps when it came upon Ebenezer Creek a week later. The “creek,” in fact, was actually a formidable river, and the construction of a bridge consumed several days. As the pioneers and engineers went about their work, pickets periodically skirmished with Confederate cavalry under the command of General Joseph Wheeler who, though doing little to impede Union progress, imparted a sense of urgency to the movement. On December 8, the bridge finally completed, Davis’s men and pioneers began the crossing, an undertaking not completed until daylight of December 9. As the last men reached the other side, the general once again ordered the bridge to be taken up, despite the fact that several hundred refugees, many of whom had family members among the pioneers, had yet to cross. According to witnesses, the ensuing scene was a particularly unpleasant one. Realizing they were being abandoned, a number of panicked refugees threw themselves into the river. Some managed to reach

²⁷ The only published biography of Davis, Nathaniel Cheairs Hughes, Jr. and Gordon D. Whitney’s, *Jefferson Davis in Blue: The Life of Sherman’s Relentless Warrior*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2002), discusses the army’s reaction to black refugees, as well. For the specifics of General Orders No. 22, see *OR*, Ser. 1, Vol. 44, 502.

the opposite bank, but a few drowned in the process. Most, particularly the young and the elderly, had little choice but to remain behind. Of those determined refugees who braved the icy river, their ordeal had not yet ended. At Lockner Creek, but a short march from Ebenezer, Davis repeated the tactic for a third and final time before finally reaching Savannah.²⁸

As the soldiers marched away from Ebenezer and Lockner Creeks, they could only speculate as to the fate of the people they had marooned. Wheeler and his troopers surely captured many of them, and most were probably returned to slavery. Confederate volunteers, however, and Wheeler's men in particular, had a reputation for brutalizing and even executing slaves who assisted the enemy, as did masters. In what light they viewed those they captured at Ebenezer Creek is unknown. General Davis, in defending his decision to abandon the freed people who followed him, insisted that the survival of his corps and the success of the campaign depended on it. To his command, harassed by enemy cavalry and precariously low on supplies, they were simply an intolerable albatross. Sherman, himself possessing no great affection for African-Americans, defended his subordinate's actions with an air of frustration. Responding to a warning from General Henry Halleck about rumblings in Washington concerning his army's treatment of slaves, he went on the offensive. "I know enough of 'the people' to feel that a single mistake made by some of my subordinates will tumble down my fame into

²⁸ For details of the events at Ebenezer Creek and the ensuing controversy, see Glatthaar, *The March to the Sea and Beyond*, 64; Trudeau, *Southern Storm*, 380-384; and especially Hughes and Whitney, *Jefferson Davis in Blue*, 305-314. The exact number of refugees abandoned by Davis is difficult to determine. At least one study has placed the number in excess of five thousand, though that figure seems improbably high. See Edward M. Churchill, "Betrayal at Ebenezer Creek," *Civil War Times Illustrated*, Vol. 37, No. 5 (October 1998), 52-58. In his response to Halleck, Sherman claimed that his Left Wing, commanded by General Henry Slocum, had a following of 17,000 refugees. Given that he wished to demonstrate the burden they posed to his army, the number was likely exaggerated. General O.O. Howard, commander of the Right Wing and Davis's superior, could only measure his following in "thongs." See Oliver O. Howard, "Sherman's Advance from Atlanta," in *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, Vol. 4, Robert Underwood Johnson, et. al., eds., (New York: The Century Co., 1888), 664. Lieutenant-Colonel James Connolly, a staff officer in one of Davis's divisions who personally witnessed the crossing at Ebenezer Creek, estimated that "five or six hundred black women, children, and old men," were abandoned. Connolly, who despised Davis and referred to him as an "infernal copperhead" for his decision to remove the bridge, would have had great reason to portray the general and his actions in the poorest possible light. His assertion that Davis left behind hundreds, rather than thousands, of slaves therefore deserves consideration. See James A. Connolly, *Three Years in the Army of the Cumberland*, Paul Angle, ed., (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1959), 354-355.

infamy,” he wrote contemptuously. “But the nigger? Why, in God’s name, can’t sensible men let him alone?”

If it be insisted that I shall so conduct my operations that the negro alone is consulted, of course I will be defeated, and then where will be Sambo? Don’t military success imply the safety of Sambo and vice versa? Of course that cock-and-bull story of my turning back negroes that Wheeler might kill them is all humbug. I turned nobody back. Jeff. C. Davis did at Ebenezer Creek forbid certain plantation slaves – old men, women, and children – to follow his column; but they would come along and he took up his pontoon bridge, not because he wanted to leave them, but because he wanted his bridge.²⁹

The assertion that Davis had simply “wanted his bridge” was a bit disingenuous. A more plausible explanation was to again couch the decision as a military necessity, and Sherman took special care to note the dangers which the thousands of free blacks who had not been abandoned posed to the army. “Had I encountered an enemy of respectable strength,” he maintained, “defeat would have been certain.” Davis, therefore, could not be blamed for acting in the best interest of the army, a rationale shared by some men in the ranks. A volunteer in the 125th Illinois attested that though many were blacks were put to good use, “employment could not be furnished for the half of them, and they were getting to be an incubus for the army.” The order to abandon them, he insisted, was cruel, “but it was necessary” As Davis’s biographers have pointed out, however, the excuse of “military necessity” rings hollow. None of the other corps commanders felt it necessary to jettison the hangers-on, and the Confederate resistance, while annoying, hardly imperiled his command. Indeed, they describe Davis’s actions as “inhuman,” “ethically indefensible,” and fueled by racial contempt. While it is doubtful that he actually wished for Wheeler’s cavalry to kill them, he certainly understood what awaited the people he left behind, a fact which at the very least suggests a depraved indifference to their well-being. That his decision spoke more to his antipathy toward blacks than military necessity is also amply demonstrated by comparison to a near-identical set of circumstances which had developed in Dakota Territory a few months prior to the events at Ebenezer Creek. Discussed in greater depth in the following chapters, the Dakota incident likewise involved a Union general, harried troops deep within “enemy” territory,

²⁹ H.W. Halleck to W.T. Sherman, 30 December 1864, *OR*, Ser. 1, Vol. 44, 836-837; W.T. Sherman to Major-General Halleck, 12 January 1865, *OR*, Ser. 1, No. 47, Pt. 2, 36.

and burdensome refugee-emigrants whom the commander and many soldiers held in contempt. Though the danger of annihilation – from Indians, rather than Confederates – was much more immediate than was the case with Davis in Georgia, it will be noted that casting aside the Anglo emigrants as so much dead weight was never considered as a viable option.³⁰

Apathy, indifference, annoyance, and repugnance informed a significant aspect of Union volunteers' relationship with freed people, and though leading to heartbreaking scenarios, so too could the anger and fear which their presence also elicited. Some soldiers, though correctly attributing the cause of war to the institution of slavery, nevertheless held abolitionists rather than secessionist-minded slaveholders accountable for the late hostilities. "There is not difference in a Suthron trator and a northern Abolitionist," contended an Illinois volunteer in February 1864, "[and] if thare is I Would always say that the man who fights for his prinsable is the best man of the too." As to which group was more "prinsabled," he left little doubt: "May God have mursy on the Abolitionists but I cannot" Slavery, insisted an Ohio volunteer, was clearly a great curse, but not so great as to justify the present war. "This glorious Union is worth more than *anything* else on earth," he opined, "[and] the *Abolitionists* must feel themselves in some measure the cause of it, as their persistent and untimely *meddling* had little effect, save to engender hard feelings between the north and south" From blaming the war on abolitionist agitation, it required but a short leap to arrive at the conclusion that slaves themselves bore ultimate responsibility for its onset. A sergeant in the 27th Iowa noted that the volunteers of his regiment were "a good deal divided in their oppinion of how this war ought to be carried on. Some think it would be right to shoot all the Negroes we could find. They don't seem to know enough to know that the Negroes are not to blame for being here."³¹

³⁰ W.T. Sherman to Major-General Halleck, 12 January 1865, *OR*, Ser. 1, No. 47, Pt. 3, 36; Robert M. Rogers, *The 125th Illinois Volunteer Infantry: Attention Battalion!*, (Champaign, IL: Gazette Steam Print, 1882), 152; Hughes and Whitney, *Jefferson Davis in Blue*, 314.

³¹ Joseph A. Fardell to parents, 6 February 1864, Joseph A. Fardell Papers, MHS; William G. Bentley to "My dear Bro," 9 August 1864, in Barbara Bentley Smith and Nina Bentley Baker, eds., *Burning Rails as We Pleased: The Civil War Letters of William Garrigues Bentley, 104th Ohio Volunteer Infantry*, (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2004), 108-109; Charles Oscar Torrey to wife, 3 February 1863, Charles Oscar Torrey Papers, LC.

The misplaced antipathy which volunteers expressed toward slaves on this front was all too prevalent, and often intermingled with lingering fears that emancipation would evolve into social equality. "It appears you boys differ some on the Nigger question," one volunteer wrote to his brothers in Illinois. "If you thought as little as them as I do, you would not think it worth your while saying anything about them." Though he supported black freedom, he made clear that he did not equate emancipation with the radical social agenda often attributed to abolitionists. "As far as having the Negro free, and to live with him, I am further from being an Abolitionist than I ever was before," he assured them. The perception that blacks received preferential treatment from authorities at the expense of soldiers further enraged these conditional emancipationists. From Kentucky in late 1862, an Indiana volunteer bristled at the insinuation that he had turned abolitionist. "If I had been one at home," he informed his father, "I have seen enough to make me a Negro hater since I came here." Following an expedition to the town of Versailles, his regiment had returned with scores of freed people in tow. "They got to ride when we came back and we walked with 56 lbs on our Backs, so much for being white," he wrote with evident anger and disgust. *"It makes my Blood Boil to think of it."* In a similar vein, an incensed Massachusetts infantryman promised to write a letter to his hometown paper exposing the "privileged" treatment of blacks. "There has been many a warm day when soldiers were sick . . . and tried to get into an Ambulance and it would be full of great fat lazy niggers that were able to walk," he complained to his parents. "If a fellow has a black face he can go any where without a pass." A volunteer in 29th Iowa, whose regiment had been hard hit by disease over the winter of 1862-1863, did not receive kindly the rumors that they were soon to be crowded onto river transports for a campaign against the rebel stronghold of Vicksburg. It was, he thought, little more than "wholeSale murder" to move sick men around as so many cattle. "But government does not care for a few poor Soldiers," he griped. "when this war first broke out, there was nothing good enough for a Soldier that would leave his home and friends to fight the

battles of his country. but now the meanest nigger in the South is more thought of than a private Soldier in the army of his country.”³²

Antipathy towards African-Americans as the cause of war and a latent fear of social equality proved an explosive combination, one which led to tremendous abuse of this most vulnerable class of people. In many instances, their liberators became their tormentors. As a soldier in the 133rd Indiana acknowledged, “Down here the darkies . . . are really the only friends we have yet whenever they come to camp the boys curse them and threaten them.” One Iowan described for his parents the unsavory behavior of his comrades towards blacks they encountered in Missouri. “As we march along the road,” he wrote, “we meet occasionally Negroes and then many of the soldiers shout and make fun of them and ask why they are so black, and if they are riding or driving they curse them and say ‘A Nigger can ride and a White Man must walk – God damn you get off there!’” As every freed person they met professed what seemed to be genuine support for the Union cause, the behavior of his comrades left him perplexed. “They cannot help they are black and therefore we must answer to our Maker for making fun of them.”³³

Freed people often served as the butt of malicious practical jokes. “They have nigger dances in town sometimes,” related one volunteer from Bowling Green, Kentucky. “They are sometimes broken up by some wag sprinkling a little cayenne pepper over the floor which rises up under their clothes! & becomes obnoxious.” A few volunteers in the 6th Iowa filled an oyster can with gunpowder, armed it with a slow fuse, and covered the device with a cracker box. After persuading a freedman to dance on top of it, they lit the fuse and waited in suspense. “The ‘nigger’ was blown full 20 feet,” wrote an amazed Illinois soldier who witnessed the event. “He landed, fortunately, without injury, but so badly scared he was crazy for an hour.” Further, though Union volunteers were non-

³² Edward Leroy Tabler to “Dear Brother,” 15 March 1863, 51st Regiment Illinois Volunteers, <http://51illinois.org/Tabler_3_15_63_murfr.pdf>; William Allen Clark to “Dear Father,” 15 October 1862, in Margaret Black Tatum, ed., “‘Please Send Stamps’: The Civil War Letters of William Allen Clark,” *Indiana Magazine of History*, Vol. 91, No. 1 (March 1995), 95-96; Alfred Edward Waldo to “Father & Mother,” 13 March 1863, The Civil War Letters of Alfred Edward Waldo (1844-1864) of Stoughton, Mass. <<http://www.stoughtonhistory.com/waldoletters.htm>> Originals held by the Stoughton Historical Society; Charles O. Musser to “Dear father and mother,” 17 February 1863, in *Soldier Boy: The Civil War Letters of Charles O. Musser, 29th Iowa*, Barry Popchock, ed., (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1995), 27-28.

³³ Jabez T. Cox Diary, 10 August 1864, “Civil War Diary of Jabez T. Cox,” *Indiana Magazine of History*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (March 1932), 52; Gilbert Gulbrandson to parents, 16 November 1862, Harrisburg Civil War Round Table Collection, USMHI.

discriminatory in their seizure of property (white and black Southerners were plundered equally), they often took advantage of black expectations that Union soldiers, because they had freed them, also desired to help them. One Georgia slave learned too late that a visit from the Yankees could be a mixed-blessing. Sometime in early December 1864, a foraging party from Sherman's army visited his master's plantation and gutted it in short order. The slave, whose owner had allowed him to accumulate a surprising amount of personal property and livestock, was also relieved of his possessions – including 800 pounds of bacon, fifteen hogs, seven cows, 210 pounds of rice, thirty ducks, and a wagon which was used to haul away the goods. “When they came there & begun to take my things,” he later testified, “I asked them ‘Massa’ you going to take all, & leave me nothing to live on, & they said we are obliged to, we come to set you free, & we must have something to eat” He was willing enough to rationalize the loss of property, as he believed it be assisting the Union cause. The confiscation of sixty-five dollars in bank notes, however, seemed to him little more than thievery, and he tracked down an officer to ask that the money be returned. Not only was the money never located, for his efforts he was also robbed of his remaining funds. On his return home, he had an unfortunate encounter with a few blue-clad rogues. “Some soldiers asked me if I could change some money for them,” he reported. “I told them Yes & took out my pocket-book & they grabbed it out of my hand in the road.”³⁴

Such petty torments were a defining characteristic of the volunteers' relationship with Southern blacks, and often evolved beyond verbal abuse, “harmless” pranks, and thievery. Irish troops, according to many volunteers, evinced a particularly hostile attitude toward them. As members of an ethnic group which faced serious Anglo prejudice (they were often classified as a separate “race” and denounced as being little better than “niggers”), Irish-American volunteers might well have empathized with the plight of Southern blacks. Rather than making common cause with them, however, they tended to view them as a grave threat to their own precarious social position, and became notorious for their zealous and violent persecution. In December 1862, a Wisconsinite described a “disgraceful row” outside of Oxford, Mississippi, in which a hired black

³⁴ William H. Bradbury to wife, 12 December 1862, William H. Bradbury Papers, LC; Diary of Charles W. Wills, 27 September 1863, in *Army Life of an Illinois Soldier*, 192; Testimony of Samuel Elliot, 17 July 1863, in Berlin, *Freedom*, “The Destruction of Slavery,” 146-150. Quotes are from pp. 148, 149.

servant was mercilessly beaten. “A Battery on our left had a number of men drunk, and they are mainly low Irish who hate Niggers with a perfect hatred,” he reported. “It so happened that one of our Niggers went past them to get water from the creek, on which one or two drunken men set upon him and they were soon joined by others, so by the time that one of our men got there to remonstrate with them they were ready to fall upon him and thrashed him some.”³⁵

A particularly violent altercation which may also have been attributable to ethnic tension occurred at Hatteras Inlet in North Carolina in early 1862. On March 11, several companies of the 48th Pennsylvania – a regiment with a heavy Irish contingent – were ordered to reinforce General Ambrose Burnside’s expedition against New Bern. When they arrived at Hatteras Inlet for transport, however, they found that the steamer which awaited them at the wharf had run aground. Forced to bivouac on the beach with little to do until the vessel was freed, their stay ought to have been pleasant enough. Unfortunately, they were not alone at their seaside resort. Eager for business, civilian sutlers converged on the camp, pedaling their wares as well as a substantial amount of whiskey. Nearby stood the “Hotel de Afrique,” a collection of ramshackle buildings where escaped slaves had sought refuge. Bored white soldiers, alcohol, and freed people did not a good combination make, and a veritable race riot ensued in short order. “Slept Very little last night on account of the men who ware drunk bawling around the shelter like a lot of mad men,” wrote an officer in his diary on March 13. “About 12 o’clock, Midnight, a lot of drunken men, mostly of Compny C, got into a building occupied by Conterbands [contrabands] and abused them most shamefully, using bayonets and Knives, Cutting severel very severely. Old Gallaway, [the Colonel’s] Coulered servent, having bin in for the night, received a Cut in the stomach which will undoubtedly prove fatal. A Contarband had a finger Cut off, the sinew of his left hand Cut.” The injured servant did indeed die from his wounds. Short of a lecture from the colonel, however, in

³⁵ Joseph Lester Journal, 14 December 1862, Joseph Lester Journal and Letters, LC. On the attitude of Irish-Americans toward the war, emancipation, and African-Americans see Susannah Ural Bruce, *The Harp and the Eagle: Irish-American Volunteers and the Union Army, 1861-1865*, (New York: New York University Press, 2006).

which he wrung a promise from his men to abstain from drink, no one was punished for participating in the brawl.³⁶

By no means, however, did Irish-Americans hold a monopoly on violence. As part of a planned assault against Charleston, South Carolina, Federal forces occupied the Sea Island of Saint Helena in early 1862. “Soon after we landed,” reported a Pennsylvania officer, “some of the New England troops committed an unwarrantable assault on the negro families living near their camps. Their shanties were burned down and the inmates much abused.” When the 127th New York occupied Charleston in 1865, reports of abuse against the black population arose almost immediately. “[They] insulted the colored people everywhere,” wrote one observer, “stoned them, knocked them down, and cut them.” Their behavior became so obnoxious that they were eventually confined to patrolling the (mostly white) southern section of the city, their former beat assumed by the 21st USCT. There were, of course, numerous instances of individual acts of petty cruelty, as well. The regimental historian of the 27th Massachusetts recalled how a comrade, determined to procure eggs from an enslaved girl in North Carolina, threatened her with – of all things – the mule on which he rode. Impatient with the woman’s hesitancy to empty the hen house, “he backed the mule toward her, and applied the spurs, when the animal let its feet fly at her face like a vicious tedder,” he claimed. “[He] clung desperately to the animal, exclaiming ‘Get some eggs, or I’ll kick your head off!’” During the Vicksburg campaign in the spring of 1863, a Union chaplain from Illinois (one of only four to win the Medal of Honor during the Civil War) attended to a dying freedwoman whose recently amputated arm had turned gangrenous. He subsequently learned, to his dismay, that she had sustained her injuries during a dispute over a frying pan when a soldier, furious that she refused to relinquish it, shot her in the arm. “When we came she, with all other slaves, recognized us as her city of refuge and at the risk of her life ran into our arms for safety, to be shot down like a beast!”³⁷

³⁶ Diary of James Wren, 13 March 1863, *Captain James Wren’s Diary: From New Bern to Fredericksburg*, ed. John Michael Priest, (Shippensburg, PA: White Mane Publishing, 1990), 8-9; Oliver Christian Bosbyshell, *The 48th in the War: Being a Narrative of the Campaigns of the 48th Regiment, Infantry, Pennsylvania Veteran Volunteers during the War of the Rebellion*, (Philadelphia: Avil Printing Co., 1895), 38-39.

³⁷ William Watts Hart Davis, *History of the 104th Pennsylvania Regiment*, (Philadelphia: Jas. B. Rodgers, 1866), 189; Loyal Citizen to *Standard* Editor, *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, 30 September 1865, quoted in Robert J. Zalimas, Jr., “A Disturbance in the City: Black and White Soldiers in Postwar Charleston,” in

Black women, just as likely as men to be targets of abuse, were much more likely to be sexually victimized than were white women. That sexual relations between soldiers and freedwomen occurred was widely known. One civilian, writing to a cousin in the 166th Pennsylvania of his own carnal escapades, feigned sympathy over the privations volunteers were forced to endure. “i guess you soldiers don get much down where you are only what you get of them black women,” he teased, “but i heard some of the soldiers say it was as good as enny in the dark.” The wife of an Indiana volunteer, who no doubt heard similar stories, apparently expressed some anxiety over the matter to her husband. “I won’t be unfaithful to you with a negro wench, as you mentioned in your last letter,” he reassured her. “Yes, men who have wives at home get entangled with these black things, who, when you pass them in summer at the opposite side to the wind, smell so strong that they spoil a white man’s appetite for a week.” As indicated by the regular use of “wench,” however, there existed a tendency to conflate African-American women who might legitimately be called prostitutes and all black women, in general. A common perception among white Northerners and Southerners was that of the African-American woman as a lascivious and licentious creature, possessing a sexual shamelessness which stood diametrically opposed to the supposed chastity of white females. The consequences of this skewed vision were predictable. General Rufus Saxton, military administrator of the South Carolina Sea Islands (a plantation colony of freed slaves), catalogued some of the problems he encountered in a complaint to Secretary of War Stanton in 1864. “I found the prejudice of color and race here in full force, and the general feeling of the army of occupation was unfriendly to the blacks.” Soldiers physically and verbally abused freed people, vandalized their property, and stole what they did not destroy. “The women,” he wrote, “were held as the legitimate prey of lust, and as they had been taught it was a crime to resist a white man they had not learned to

John David Smith, ed., *Black Soldiers in Blue: African-American Troops in the Civil War Era*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 366; W.P. Derby, *Bearing Arms in the Twenty-Seventh Massachusetts Regiment of Volunteer Infantry during the Civil War, 1861-1865*, (Boston: Wright & Potter, 1883), 158; Milton L. Haney, “From Shiloh to Atlanta: Memoirs of Chaplain Milton L. Haney, 55th Illinois Volunteer Infantry,” in *The Spirit Divided: Memoirs of Civil War Chaplains: The Union*, (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 2007), 154.

dare to defend their chastity. Licentiousness was widespread; the morals of the old plantation life seemed revived”³⁸

The assumption of black sexual promiscuity certainly made it easier for soldiers to look upon the rape of black women as a lesser crime, if indeed they considered it a crime at all. When a volunteer in the 8th New Hampshire assaulted a black woman in North Carolina, he was court-martialed for his efforts. The slave, whose testimony was recorded, offered revealing statements as to the mindset of her victimizer. “He took hold of me and attempted to throw me down and I hollered and he kicked me,” she reported. “He asked me if I wanted five dollars. I said no. He asked if he could stay with me. I said no.” A volunteer in the 87th Pennsylvania wrote from Virginia of his company’s “fun” experience with a “negro wench” they found hiding behind a stack of tobacco. “They all began to pitch in keen,” he described with rather sadistic glee. “Tom Michael held the light and she received about 60 big schloggers one after another. I nearly killed myself laughing. The darned old bitch could hardly stand.” During the course of Federal operations along coastal South Carolina in late 1861, a German-American volunteer reported with disgust the shadier aspects of the campaign. “While on picket guard I witnessed misdeeds that made me ashamed of America,” he attested. “For example about five miles from the fort 8-10 soldiers from the New York 47th Regiment chased some Negro women but they escaped, so they took a Negro girl about 7-9 years old, and raped her.”³⁹

Heinous acts such as these seem relatively rare. The crime of rape – against black or white women – occurred only infrequently, and it would be misleading to suggest them representative of Union conduct as a whole. Yet such abuse occurred with such frequency, and against a specific group, that it cannot be neatly dismissed as the deeds of criminals and miscreants. Rather, it fits a greater pattern evidenced in the abuse of black

³⁸ Levi Lichty to “Dear Cousin” (Reuben Florh, 166th Pennsylvania Volunteers), 11 February 1863, Eleanor S. Brockenbrough Library, MOC; Joseph Shelly to “Dear Pauline,” 6 November 1863, in Fanny G. Anderson, ed., “The Shelly Papers,” *Indiana Magazine of History*, Vol. 44, No. 2 (June 1948), 197; Rufus Saxton to Edwin Stanton, 30 December 1864, *OR*, Ser. 3, Vol. 4, 1029.

³⁹ Quoted in Andrew Ward, *The Slaves’ War: The Civil War in the Words of Former Slaves*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2008), 237; H.P. Hennon to ?, April 1865, quoted in Thomas P. Lowry, *The Story the Soldiers Wouldn’t Tell: Sex in the Civil War*, (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 1994), 39; John Bessemer to John Weissert, 17 November 1862, quoted in Wiley, *The Life of Billy Yank*, 114.

servants and the episodic attacks on freed people, in general. Namely, it served to reinforce the traditional racial hierarchy through a denial of black equality. Within the context of war, sexual abuse assumed even greater significance. Though white rape of black women could be used as a means to reinforce the racial hierarchy, it could also serve to intentionally disrupt it – especially when volunteers deliberately assaulted slaves within sight of their owners or white women. In April 1862, for example, a foraging party visited the residence of a Virginia slave owner in Prince William County. While some of the soldiers ransacked the house, one of the men captured a servant girl who attempted to flee. He raped her, just yards from the house, in broad daylight and in full view of the owner and his family, and was soon joined by at least seven others. “This brutal act,” insisted the owner, “caused my wife to appeal to me to send her and her nieces . . . to some other place where their persons might be safe from such outrage as had been imposed upon the Colored girl.” During the course of operations in western Louisiana in mid-April 1863, New York volunteers evinced a particular unruliness toward the civilians in their midst, and depredations appear to have been widespread. A few of them entered a plantation home in St. Mary’s Parish, looting as they pleased and taking their fill from the contents of the wine cellar. The female servants, alarmed, attempted to hide, only to be dragged out and raped. Their sobbing mistresses, horrified by the scene, were met with a gruff reply: “Dry up; we’ve seen enough of you Southern women’s tears.”⁴⁰

For the white women forced to witness these deeds, the message could not have been clearer: neither the army nor their male kinfolk could protect them, and they escaped similar treatment only because of the good graces of the Union volunteer. For the masters who watched the brutalization of their property, the message was of a related

⁴⁰ Quoted in Ervin L. Jordan, *Black Confederates and Afro-Yankees in Civil War Virginia*, (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1995), 133; *The Conduct of Federal Troops in Louisiana During the Invasions of 1863 and 1864: Official Report*, David C. Edmonds, ed., (Lafayette, LA: The Acadiana Press, 1988), 29-30. Most of the depredations occurred in the days following the battle at Irish Bend on April 14, according to a report filed by Brigadier-General William Dwight: “The scenes of disorder and pillage on these two days march were disgraceful to civilized war. Houses were entered and all in them destroyed in the most wanton manner. Ladies were frightened into delivering their jewels and valuables into the hands of the soldiers by threats of violence toward their husbands. Negro women were ravished in the presence of white women and children.” “Reports of Brig. Gen. William Dwight, Jr., U.S. Army, commanding First Brigade, of operations March 26 – May 1,” report of 27 April 1863, *OR*, Ser. 1, Vol. 15, 373.

but slightly different bearing. While the rape of black women in the presence of their mistresses was clearly meant as a threat, the failure to actually carry out that threat signified a continued attachment to the traditional ideal of womanhood. Conversely, for men whose identity and authority rested in large part on their ability to control and protect dependents (women, children, and slaves), such abuse undermined the essence of their masculinity. In these instances, though black women were the victims, their rape was unmistakably used to wage psychological war on white civilians.

4.3 African Americans and the Union War Effort

4.3.1 “Contrabands”: Will They Work?

In late June 1864, pickets from the 133rd Indiana were encamped along one of the pikes leading into Murfreesboro, Tennessee. As a sergeant picked up a rock to pound in his tent stakes, he noticed an “old darky woman” passing on the road, eyeing him intently. Tellingly, he reassured her that he did not intend to strike her with the rock, and one of his comrades, curious, asked her if she had any fear of Yankees. “Oh no sah,” came the reply, “I does not, hadent bin for the yankees dey a done had me used up afore dis time.”¹

Despite the risks involved in fleeing to Union lines, and uncertainty as to their reception by Union soldiers, slaves made clear that they preferred to take their chances among those who made possible their freedom rather than remain with those who kept them in bondage. Union authorities wisely concluded that simply allowing them to languish in camps squandered a valuable resource. If their absconding undermined the Confederate war effort, enlisting them in support of the Union cause against their former masters was an even greater blow. Hence, it was but a matter of time before they were drafted into service as paid laborers. “Contrabands, (a new name for the negro slaves) are building forts around here and felling trees across the road to keep the enemy’s cavalry from surprising us,” observed an Iowa volunteer in 1863. “A good many soldiers and people are bitterly opposed to having ‘niggers’ take any part in the War. I am not one of those kind of people. If a culled man will dig trenches and chop lumber and even fight the enemy he is just the fellow we want and the sooner we recognize this the quicker the war will end.”²

It was a difficult argument to counter. As soldiers generally despised the “grunt” work that dominated their daily routine, employing former slaves to dig trenches and construct fortifications, work which many whites felt beneath them (they had enlisted to save the republic, after all, not to haul dirt), seemed like a promising answer to the “negro

¹ Jabez T. Cox Diary, 22 June 1864, “Civil War Diary of Jabez T. Cox,” *Indiana Magazine of History*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (March 1932), 47.

² Cyrus F. Boyd Diary, 24 August 1862, in Mildred Throne, ed., *The Civil War Diary of Cyrus F. Boyd, 15th Iowa Infantry, 1861-1863*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1998), 63.

question.” Black labor would ensure that necessary tasks were completed, while the nature of those tasks ensured that blacks would retain a subordinate status. In fact, freedmen eventually occupied a wide range of auxiliary positions, acting not only as laborers, but as scouts, pioneers, teamsters, cooks, and personal servants. Though they performed necessary and in many cases imperative work, endured severe conditions, high mortality, unsympathetic overseers, and relieved white recruits from onerous duties, their efforts too often went unappreciated. A Vermont volunteer, for instance, who watched several hundred African-Americans toil away on the construction of redoubts on the outskirts of Baltimore, offered little in the way of observation but tired stereotypes. “A lazier damned set I never saw,” he wrote. “I do wish that the authorities would let a Dozen of old soldiers have charge of them instead of a lot of Citizens and then it would amount to something but now they do not earn their board and they get \$1.00 per diem. There had been considerable altercation between overseers and Negroes and many of the latter have had a touch of Uncle Sam’s steel.”³

Former slaves also found a niche within Union camps, and whatever volunteers may have felt toward this new class of people in their midst, they were certainly amused by them. “I have seen better dancing among them of the kind than I ever saw on any stage,” wrote a Michigan soldier, “and their singing beats any Ethiopian troupe that was ever got up.” In an era when minstrel shows served as popular entertainment, witnessing the genuine article was certainly a rare treat. When the 51st Pennsylvania camped near Lancaster, Kentucky in May 1863, escaped slaves from neighboring plantations routinely visited and performed in the company streets. Their songs, insisted one critic, were little more than “childish nonsense,” but their dancing “was truly wonderful, surpassing anything ever exhibited by . . . any ‘pale-faced’ Ethiopian band of minstrels.” Volunteers quickly discovered, however, that the “contrabands” who inundated their camps could provide a wealth of other diversionary activities. “They sing and dance until our sides are nearly bursting with laughter,” wrote a Rhode Island artillerist from South Carolina, “and then . . . an empty barrel is brought before the audience, [and] we then offer one of the niggers five cents, to butt the head in with his wooly pate.” A crew of Wisconsinites, growing bored with tossing pennies at a group of freedmen to hear them sing, goaded

³ Charles H. Richardson Diary, 20 June 1863, LC.

them into similar activities – five cents appearing to have been a standard wage. “They got the negroes to butting,” related one. “Alec Harvey gave five cents, I gave five, and a lot of others. The darkies would back off like rams and come together head to head. They said it did not hurt, but I believe it did. The boys kept setting them on by giving them 5 cent scrip. The darkies were kept about half drunk to give them grit.”⁴

When volunteers were not paying freed people to degrade themselves, they paid them in exchange for (mostly) legitimate services, and black laundresses, cooks, and laborers were common sights in camp, as well as the occasional prostitute. For Northern soldiers, the hiring of a black servant was a novelty, and many appear to have likened themselves to the Southern aristocracy whom they so despised. More than a few half-jokingly wrote to family members inquiring as to whether they could send one home. Others looked upon their hired help as endearing and comical pets, some even going as far as to give them new names. In January 1863, an Ohio volunteer described in a letter home a tremendous storm which toppled his tent in the middle of the night, drenching him and his servant. “I asked *Rufus* (that is the name we gave him) if he was getting wet, he said, I’s done soaked already, and sure enough he had been laying in the water and it was about two inches deep. That was nothing much for I have been in the same fix myself, but it was laughable to hear him talk about.” He also chuckled to hear him talk of how he acquired his “flat” nose. “He says he got it mashed, he says he ‘was on a steam boat going down de Ohio River, and he went to look out of de winder and de boat come so close to gedder dat it mashed his nose flat.’ He is a great darky.” An Indiana volunteer was especially proud of his servant, whom he considered something of a thoroughbred. “My colored servant, Peter Sa-Mith, has proved himself the Lightfoot of this Brigade ‘mongst the ‘gemmen ob color,’” he happily reported. “There has been great sport for a week past, and no little excitement over the darkie foot races. A considerable number of greenbacks, postage currency, and cheap watches have changed hands.” Men

⁴ Samuel Henry Eells to “Dear Aunt & Uncle,” 24 January 1863, Samuel Henry Eells Papers, LC; Thomas H. Parker, *History of the 51st Regiment of P.V. and V.V.*, (Philadelphia: King & Baird, 1869), 301-302; George M. Turner to “Dear Cousin,” 15 December 1861, in Nina Silber and Mary Beth Sievens, eds., *Yankee Correspondence: Civil War Letters between New England Soldiers and the Home Front*, (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1996), 85; Chauncey Herbert Cooke to “Dear sister,” 3 May 1863, in *Soldier Boy’s Letters*, 33.

of the 17th New Hampshire went as far as to adopt their lieutenant-colonel's servant, George, as the regimental "mascot." "George was a good boy," recalled a veteran in later years, "but he had a white soul, and has long since gone to the home where all are equal."⁵

Though African-Americans who found their way into the employ of volunteers were no longer slaves, neither were they considered equal, and soldiers made it quite clear that any relationship would be of a paternal character. As a Pennsylvania volunteer demonstrated, blacks had to be made to understand their place. "I used to be quite an abolitionist, as you know, but see how hard-hearted I've become," he informed his cousin. "A great lazy nigger whom the general had sent to cut wood for his cook, took advantage of my absence, and instead of cutting any wood, carried all mine into the cook's tent. Now I suppose you, out of sympathy for the oppressed, would have said nothing about it, but cut some more wood. I couldn't see it in that light. I persuaded the darkey to correct his mistake and pile the wood under my bed, and I fear I chuckled some over my good fortune in getting my wood in for nothing. If it had been a white man now, larger than myself, I should have forgiven him, but not a 'nigger.'" A New York surgeon, who wrote contentedly of the culinary skills of his servant, "Josh," nevertheless deplored the absence of "proper" dinner company. "It would not answer, you know, to have a *Nigger* eat at the same table with you, so to keep up the distinction which *man* has created, Josh has to keep back until his master is helped," he wrote his wife. "I can sometimes hear him swearing with the men back of the tent, about the *cold victuals* he has to eat after I am through. Well, if he does not like it he will have to leave, for with all my love for a black skin I never yet saw one with whom I would be willing to be on *perfect* equality." So far as he appeared to acknowledge "race" as a social construct rather than attributing it to biological or divine origins, his observations were unusual. Still, though he expressed an understanding as to the nature of his prejudice, he nevertheless felt compelled to act upon it, even going as far as to refer to himself as

⁵ Oscar Ladley to "Dear Folks at home," 23 January 1863, in Carl M. Becker and Ritchie Thomas, eds., *Hearth and Knapsack: The Ladley Letters, 1857-1880*, (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1988), 79-80. The practice of renaming servants most likely arose from the desire to replace ridiculously ironic titles such as "Caesar." Prock (William Landon) to "Dear Greene," 21 March 1864, in "The Fourteenth Indiana Regiment, Letters to the Vincennes *Western Sun*," *Indiana Magazine of History*, Vol. 34, No. 1 (March 1938), 86; Charles Nelson Kent, *History of the Seventeenth Regiment, New Hampshire Volunteer Infantry, 1862-1863*, (Concord: The Rumford Press, 1898), 73.

“master.” “Let me say it is not because I feel that by nature I am better than they,” he insisted, “but education – early as life itself is against it. It is engrafted in me – I cannot help it.”⁶

That “race” as an ideological construct was also “engrafted” in other soldiers – soldiers who more often than not failed to engage in even limited introspection in regards to their preconceptions of blacks – is evident. Consequently, most remained entrapped by them. For the Northern volunteer, blacks remained first and foremost children who required a certain amount of discipline. Recalcitrance, insolence, “sauciness,” a lack of due deference, perceived ungratefulness or laziness – any outward sign which violated Anglo notions of racial propriety – could not be tolerated, and the offending servant was liable to be rejected and exchanged in the much the same manner as one would a defective product. The reflective New York surgeon, himself unable to surmount his engrained beliefs, was finally forced to dismiss his servant after he impertinently asked for a raise. “I sent ‘Josh’ away yesterday,” he informed his wife. “He had become insolent and saucy, and demanded an increase in pay, so I thought he had better go. I can get another as good and cheaper.” And, of course, there existed any number of soldiers prepared to denounce all blacks because of the perceived shortcomings of a few. An Illinois volunteer admitted that his “pet negro got so lazy and worthless I was compelled to ship him. I’ll take back, if you please, everything good I ever said about free negroes. That Beauregard nigger was such a thief that we had to also set him adrift.” Another confided to his wife that, “though I live in the negro country, I haven’t changed my opinion of them, only strengthened it. They are not good for anything, unless driven to work, so you don’t need to be afraid that I will fall in love with them, though it is the case with many soldiers.”⁷

⁶ Oliver Wilcox Norton to cousin, 2 April 1863, in *Army Letters, 1861-1865*, (Chicago: O.L Deming, 1903), 145-146; Daniel M. Holt to “My dear Wife,” 18 December 1862, in James M. Greiner, et. al., *A Surgeon’s Civil War: The Letters and Diary of Daniel M. Holt, M.D.*, (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1994), 60-61.

⁷ Daniel M. Holt to “My dear Wife,” 17 February 1863, in Greiner, *A Surgeon’s Civil War*, 77; Diary of Charles W. Wills, 8 August 1862, in *Army Life of an Illinois Soldier*, 123; Joseph Shelly to “Dear Pauline,” 6 November 1863, in Fanny G. Anderson, ed., “The Shelly Papers,” *Indiana Magazine of History*, Vol. 44, No. 2 (June 1948), 197.

4.3.2 Soldiers: Will They Fight?

Emancipation proved to be a pivotal development in the war effort. So, too, was Lincoln's decision to finally allow African-Americans, both free and freed, to enlist in the military. Given the vigorous debate engendered by emancipation, it should come as no surprise that black soldiers became a topic of heated discussion. Freeing the slaves was one thing, to uniform and arm them was quite another, and many volunteers emphatically rejected the idea. "I will tell you what I think that about that," responded an Ohioan to his sister's broaching of the subject. "Take the Blacks and put them to work on the fortifications instead of giving them guns for they never can learn to use them & put them where they [can do] some good." Another, noting the large contingent of "contrabands" laboring outside of the army's camp in Tennessee, thought likewise. "I don't know how they would do for fighting, hardly the right material I am afraid, but we can get enough of them to do all the work there is to do and leave the fighting to us." An Iowa surgeon, too, thought it a mistake. "The idea of arming and equipping Negro Regiments for the purpose of making them soldiers is, to my mind, *worse* than ridiculous nonsense," he exclaimed in January 1863. "Niggers will *work if you make them do so*. I do not believe you could pick out one thousand Negroes out of 50,000 who would *fight* with *loaded* guns, or who would not run at the first appearance of danger."⁸

The charge that African-Americans – particularly freedmen – lacked the fortitude and aptitude for soldiering was a common argument against their participation. White soldiers, however, needed little excuse to protest their presence other than the fact of their blackness. On that score, arming African-Americans threatened to offset any numerical advantage that otherwise may have been gained by their inclusion. "The army of negroes will amount to nothing," insisted a Massachusetts volunteer, "for white men will not fight beside them." Indeed, the proposal was met with considerable grumbling, and the possibility that a significant portion of the army might simply quit rather than accept black soldiers was given much attention. As with emancipation, however, some groups were more opposed to the measure than others, as Adjutant General Lorenzo Thomas discovered in the spring of 1863. Traveling by train from Corinth, Mississippi to

⁸ Edward A. Webb to "Sister Libby," 20 July 1862, Edward A. Webb Papers, WRHS; Samuel Henry Eells to friends, 28 July 1862, Samuel Henry Eells Papers, LC; Seneca B. Thrall to wife, 20 January 1863, in "An Iowa Doctor in Blue," 126.

Memphis, he stopped at several stations along the way, giving stump speeches to assembled troops and boosting the President's directive. At one stop, his proposal of three cheers for the policy was met with groans and cries of "no wagger" from the audience. The individuals responsible for the cat-calls, insisted a Nebraska volunteer, were members of the 90th Illinois Infantry, "a regiment composed entirely of Irishmen, and I will say that two thirds of the Copperheads and men who oppose the war and government . . . are Irishmen." Thomas, taken aback by the protests, ordered the offenders confined. "For my part I always was in favor of the measure," reflected the Nebraskan. "And for the life of me I cannot see why these men, many of whom I can see no difference between them and an African, neither in an intellectual or moral point of view, except in color, should so strongly and bitterly oppose this measure."⁹

While the musing Nebraskan offered a glimpse of Anglo disdain for the Irish, his comparison of them to African-Americans also inadvertently touched upon the source of their opposition and, ultimately, the source of all white opposition. Despite their ubiquitous criticism of all things military, Northern white males valued their status as volunteers in the service of the United States as a symbol of racial privilege. They fought not just as men, but as free white *citizens* in defense of what they considered the most extraordinary nation in history. As had their fathers and grandfathers, they would lay down their lives to uphold its principles. To enlist the assistance of effeminate, indolent blacks, therefore, would not only undermine the honor they attached to serving, but would also deliver a significant blow to white masculine identity. Volunteers commonly complained of being treated no better than slaves, and the introduction of former slaves into the ranks threatened to make that accusation something more than hyperbole. As one Pennsylvanian declared: "We don't want to fight side and side by the nigger. We think we are too superior a race for that."¹⁰

Regardless, the great mutiny which some predicted never transpired, and most volunteers eventually reconciled themselves to the reality of African-American soldiers. "I suppose they will stop Rebel Bullets as well as a white man," surmised a crusty

⁹ Edwin O. Wentworth to "Dear Brother John," 13 February 1863, Edwin O. Wentworth Papers, LC; Thomas Edwin Keen to "My Dear Sister, 23 May 1863, in "I Thought it my Duty to Go': The Civil War Letters of Thomas Edwin Keen, First Nebraska Infantry," *Nebraska History*, Vol. 81, No. 4 (Winter 2000), 134-169.

¹⁰ Felix Brannigan to sister, 16 July 1862, Felix Brannigan Papers, LC.

Indiana veteran with a rather harsh pragmatism. Others insisted that allowing blacks to serve was but a matter of “fairness.” A Massachusetts volunteer, who had earlier denounced the measure, enthusiastically endorsed it year later. “I rejoice to see the negroes coming into the army,” he exclaimed in May 1864. “They are interested in the result and can do much to decide it. I am willing that they risk their lives as I mine. It is but fair.” In a similar vein, a volunteer in 104th Ohio admitted that “tho I am opposed to fighting with a Negroe, I think it is no more than right that they should help fight in the struggle that is destined to set them free at some future time.” Soldiers may have rejected racial equality, but they eagerly conceded that blacks deserved an equal opportunity to be maimed or killed.¹¹

In considering African-Americans as cannon fodder, soldiers accepted that color and manly fortitude made little difference, for a cowardly or inept soldier could die for his country just as well as the bravest Medal of Honor winner. Hence, Anglo acceptance should not be construed as an acknowledgment that blacks possessed the same strength of character as did whites. Some soldiers, however, rejected the premise that blacks would not fight, or would do so poorly. In fact, they expressed certainty that they would fight ferociously – not because they possessed the requisite courage, but because they would have no choice. “i say arm every nigger of them,” insisted an Iowa volunteer. “I know they will fight and like demons, too. they know their fate if taken as prisoners.” Not only did such a view preclude the possibility of true black manliness, but the reference to Confederate execution of black prisoners also showed a rather callous disregard for the circumstances under which they went into battle.¹²

Others insisted that blacks were peculiarly suited for military life – especially the infantry. A volunteer in the 100th New York, for instance, considered them “natural musicians” who kept better cadence and marched more smartly than white troops. Similarly, some volunteers, most notably those who officered black regiments, maintained that they would succeed not in spite of their shortcomings, but *because* of them. Personally invested in establishing black military competency, these officers, in a

¹¹ Diary of William Bluffton Miller, 23 March 1865, in *Fighting for Liberty and Right*, 325-326; Edwin O. Wentworth to wife, 3 May 1864, Edwin O. Wentworth Papers, LC; William G. Bentley to “My dear Bro,” 9 August 1864, in *Burning Rails as We Pleased*, 108.

¹² Charles O. Musser to “Dear Father,” 29 June 1863, in *Soldier Boy*, 58.

rather brilliant twist, explained how African-Americans might make for excellent soldiers – better, even, than white men – while still demonstrating their inferiority in the truly important matters. “The negro makes a good soldier,” wrote one, “particularly in those branches of the service where a higher order of intelligence is less required.” As cavalrymen or artillerymen, occupations which required a degree of self-sufficiency and autonomy, they were bound to fail, he asserted. Soldiering, however, depended less on the mental capacity of the individual infantryman than on his ability to unquestioningly follow orders. As former slaves, blacks fit this bill perfectly. “Negro infantry,” he insisted, “properly officered, would I believe be as effective as any in the world.” The colonel of the 1st South Carolina expanded on this theme. “It needs but a few days to show the absurdity of distrusting the military availability of these people,” he wrote. They comprehended the object of soldiering as well as white recruits, and easily grasped the mechanics of firearms. They also possessed a penchant for imitation which more than offset any mental “defect.” This last, he insisted, was most important, for “to learn the drill, one does not want a set of college professors; one wants a squad of eager, active, pliant school-boys; and the more childlike these pupils are the better.”¹³

For those who cared to give the matter much thought, the assertion that the alleged traits which made the African-American inferior to the Anglo also contributed to his superiority as a soldier would have posed quite an unpleasant conundrum. Either soldiering was easy – the admittance of which would denigrate the sacrifices of white soldiers, or it was not – which would imply that blacks, should they succeed, were as capable as whites. Neither explanation, of course, was suitable to whites, which explains in large part the conditional manner in which they accepted black soldiers. As with emancipation, soldiers who supported the enlistment of African-Americans did so as a military necessity rather than out of any sense of racial equality. Discussions of social justice, if they occurred, were incidental and mostly unwelcome. Once again, love of country prevailed over racial disdain but, once again, it could not completely eliminate it.

¹³ George H. Stowits, *History of the One Hundredth Regiment of New York State Volunteers*, (Buffalo: Matthews & Warren, 1870), 231; Charles Francis Adams, Jr. to father, 2 November 1864, in *A Cycle of Adams Letters, 1861-1865*, Vol. 2, 216; Diary of Thomas Wentworth Higginson, 27 November 1862, in *Army Life in a Black Regiment*, 10.

Though blacks would be allowed to serve, they would do so under severe restrictions designed to prevent the conundrum from being answered one way or the other.

Indeed, though the vast majority of African-Americans were enthusiastic about the opportunity to serve, such was not always the case. In many instances, white units acted as press gangs, forcibly conscripting slaves they had emancipated. For bond people who had been indoctrinated by masters as to the evilness of the Yankee, being torn away from home and family with no clear explanation as to where they were going or when they might return could be a terrifying experience. Northern blacks, too, were subject to such “conscription,” and inducted into the military in a manner which no white draftee would tolerate. On June 19, 1865, fifty-three members of a Kansas artillery unit signed a petition demanding that they be discharged:

We were pressed into Service [in the fall of 1864] by force of numbers without any Law civil or millitry to sanction it. many of us were knocked down and beaten Like dogs. others were dragged from our homes in the dead hour of [night] and forced into a Prison without Law or Justice. others were tied and thrown into the river and held there untill forced to subscribe to the Oath. Some of us were tied up by the thumbs all night. we were starved beaten kept out all night until we were nearly frozen and but one alternative to join the service or nearly suffer death.¹⁴

Whether or not blacks went willingly, military regulation codified their inferiority by paying them less than their white counterparts, barring them from holding a commission, and stipulating that they only be allowed to serve in segregated units led by white officers. Though some of these provisos were eventually abolished, discrimination remained a major obstacle. Blacks were disproportionately charged with and convicted of criminal activity – most notably rape – and were disproportionately executed. They were frequently issued substandard equipment and clothing, cheated of their pay by unscrupulous white officers, and abused by hostile white volunteers. Of the more than 180,000 African-Americans who served, the majority never saw serious combat. Instead, the government utilized them as laborers, garrison troops, and prison guards – positions which many white soldiers felt to be appropriate. “I thank the originators of the Corps d’Afrique for taking from us such labor as belongs to menials,” noted one volunteer after

¹⁴ Gabriel Grays et al. to Capt. H. Ford Douglas, 19 June 1865, in Ira Berlin, et al., *Freedom*, “The Black Military Experience,” 421-422.

observing black soldiers police the streets of Brownsville, Texas and toil away on fortifications. “They are a fine looking set of men – all fair specimen of their native Africa. And while our soldiers pride themselves on the nice condition of their arms, the Corps d’Afrique are proud of the conditions of their picks and spades.”¹⁵

Even with such limits placed on black participation – limits designed to relegate them to second-class status – some soldiers continued to express opinions which suggested that the mere appearance of uniformed blacks threatened their status as free white men. “I saw a *Nigger* Brigade this morning at Estell Springs, Tenn. clothed and armed,” reported an Indiana volunteer with disgust. “I do not believe it right to make soldiers of them and class & rank with our *white* soldiers. It makes them feel and act as our equals.” Soldiers of the 131st Illinois, while not disputing the right of African-Americans to wear a uniform, demonstrated that they did not exactly view them as comrades in arms. Before a Thanksgiving service at Benton Barracks, Missouri in 1863, they were rudely surprised by the appearance of volunteers from the 1st Iowa Colored Infantry. “the conal of that Regt marched a whole colm of the Wolleyheads in to the chaple and seated them,” related an incensed Illinoisan, “when at the same time thare was not room hardly for all of the White Soldiers that was thare.” Insulted, he and his compatriots departed in a huff. The chaplain conducting the services followed them into the street, remonstrating with them to stay. Speaking for the rest, one soldier made clear that Illinois volunteers would not stand for interracial services. “he was answerd in madness by the priest and told that the niggarr was as good as he was and that he had better keep his tung to him self. that is the honer that that faithful old soldier received for his faithful survis!”¹⁶

¹⁵ Diary of Benjamin F. McIntyre, 9 April 1864, in *Federals on the Frontier: The Diary of Benjamin F. McIntyre*, Nannie M. Tilley, ed., (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1963), 326-327. On the trials and challenges faced by black soldiers, see Dudley T. Cornish, *The Sable Arm: Negro Troops in the Union Army, 1861-1865*, (New York: Longmans Green & Co., 1956), James M. McPherson, *The Negro’s Civil War: How American Negroes Felt and Acted During the War for the Union*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1965), Joseph T. Glatthaar, *Forged in Battle: The Civil War Alliance of Black Soldiers and White Officers*, (New York: The Free Press, 1990), Ira Berlin, et. al., eds., *Freedom’s Soldiers: The Black Military Experience in the Civil War*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), and John David Smith, ed., *Black Soldiers in Blue: African-American Troops in the Civil War Era*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

¹⁶ Charles Harding Cox to “My Dear Katie,” 28 August 1863, in “‘Gone for a Soldier’: The Civil War Letters of Charles Harding Cox,” ed. Lorna Lutes Sylvester, *Indiana Magazine of History* 68, No. 1 (March 1972), 64; Joseph A. Fardell to parents, 6 February 1864, Joseph A. Fardell Papers, MHS.

Many volunteers, too, continued to express doubts as to soldierly competence of African-Americans. A Pennsylvania volunteer, serving as a guard at Rock Island prison camp, observed the arrival of a USCT regiment in September 1864. They were, he thought, “a fine body of men for darkies,” and appeared to be well-drilled. Even so, he thought something was amiss. “The uniform & musket and what ever els that is necessary to make solders of them will not take the niggars out of them,” he insisted. “some of there actions shows conclusively that they are not greatly improved over THE BABBOONE.” That untested African-American soldiers would be closely scrutinized by skeptical whites was unsurprising, but the issue of race made their ordeal especially trying. Praise was but grudgingly accorded, while failures were magnified. Some volunteers, wary of the implications if they should prove capable soldiers, openly wished for their failure. A corporal in the 35th Massachusetts speculated that “they will be rather poor if they are all like those [black laborers] that I have seen when the shells have been flying around thier heads. They would run and yell and fly around as if they were half killed.” Still, he was nothing if not curious. “I should like to see a nigger brigade go into battle once. I don’t want any of them to get hurt but I should like to see them run a little.” Others, who had the opportunity to witness black troops in the field, smugly pointed out when they failed to perform as well as white troops. An officer in the 104th Pennsylvania, in reviewing an action in South Carolina involving veteran white troops and raw African-American recruits, confidently described it as “a good trial of the endurance of the two races.” Though the entire command had suffered through a forced march, “the two negro regiments,” he insisted, “suffered much more than the white ones. The poor blacks dropped down by scores from exhaustion and heat of the sun, and could not stand, in their native clime, the same amount of fatigue as white men. The march was not more than six miles, and yet the two negro regiments did not reach our bivouac with one third their numbers.”¹⁷

Inevitably, black soldiers also served as convenient scapegoats for white failures. For the private soldier, attempting to make sense of a battle was often a hopeless

¹⁷ Captain Ralph Buckley to wife and mother, 27 September 1864, William Gladstone Collection, USMHI; Alfred Edward Waldo to “Father & Mother,” 21 February 1863, The Civil War Letters of Alfred Edward Waldo (1844-1864) of Stoughton, Mass. <<http://www.stoughtonhistory.com/waldoletters.htm>> Originals held by the Stoughton Historical Society. Davis, *History of the 104th Pennsylvania Regiment*, 317.

endeavor. For all intents and purposes, their world extended no further than the company level – and of course to the enemy in their front. They marched where ordered, fired when told, and remained mostly ignorant of the grander strategies to which generals were (in theory) privy. Defeat, consequently, often came as a surprise. Though they might successfully drive the enemy before them, developments on another part of the field could result in a general rout. It was easy enough to blame commanders for the outcome, of course, and many volunteers did just that. If black soldiers were known to be involved, however, it was even simpler – and more satisfying – to fault the inept and cowardly “nigger.” Such was the case during the Battle of the Crater outside of Petersburg in July 1864, when the Union army suffered a severe defeat after a promising breakthrough in the Confederate lines. Though responsibility for the debacle rested squarely with bungling generals, the participation of black soldiers – regardless of their admirable performance under fire – was all the explanation some troops required. “At Petersburg they have had a stunner,” reported a soldier in the 24th Massachusetts, “and would have done something if it hadn’t been for the *Nigger troops*. It was a little too warm for them and they took the back track leaving a gap open and the Johnnies rushed in and the troops that was on the right and left had to fall back to keep from being flanked.” A Connecticut volunteer concurred with this assessment. “We lost 3,000 men during the day,” he wrote. “This was all the fault of the nigger troops, for the Rebel force that opposed them was not more than one third as large as our own. Sad disaster has completely discouraged the white troops in [General Ambrose] Burnside’s Corps and they say (both officers and men) that they will never fight again as long as the nigger troops are with them.”¹⁸

Though the cause of the Union may have trumped racial prejudice, it was a photo finish. Northern volunteers, at least initially, thought of themselves as conservators of the Republic, not social revolutionaries – at least not in regards to racial equality. To achieve victory and preserve the Union they would see slavery destroyed, but all the while they

¹⁸ Lieutenant Aleck M. Hayward, 24th Massachusetts Infantry, to “Lizzie,” 3 August 1864, William Gladstone Collection, USMHI; Charles Smith to wife, 1 August 1864, in Annette Tapert, ed., *The Brothers’ War: Civil War Letters to Their Loved Ones from the Blue and Gray*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 210.

remained firmly wedded to a belief in black inferiority. In their determination to crush the Confederate rebellion, however, they drastically altered the social landscape of the South. Enslaved African-Americans, pariahs of American society, had not only been freed, but now actively contributed to the war effort against their former masters. They worked in the camps, sweated on fortifications, and bled as American soldiers. Though white volunteers sought to have their cake and eat it, too, emancipating and arming blacks but still denying them a legitimate place in society, others intuited that the process begun would not be reversed. An officer in the 5th Massachusetts Cavalry (Colored) noted with approval how the military had transformed a motley collection of mostly free blacks into respectable horsemen. He witnessed similar results among regiments of freedmen. “The army,” he insisted, “is the proper school for the race.” In lieu of indolence, they received instructed in the virtues of discipline and self-reliance. Ignorance necessarily gave way to the learning of skilled trades. “You cannot realize the industry, versatility and ingenuity called forth,” he wrote. “How far now is this war and its tremendous external influences going to revolutionize this miserable . . . race of slaves?”¹⁹

¹⁹ Charles Francis Adams, Jr. to father, 2 November 1864, in *A Cycle of Adams Letters, 1861-1865*, Vol. 2, 216-217.

4.4 African Americans and the Confederate War Effort

4.4.1 Racial Identity and the Founding of the Confederacy

Confederate soldiers, unsurprisingly, spent considerably less time analyzing African-Americans than did their Union counterparts. As nearly forty percent of the Southern population consisted of enslaved blacks, the novelty which prompted Northern discussion was wholly absent. Their relative silence on the subject is also attributable to the fact that issues of race had previously been addressed by much more “learned” men. In the decades before the Civil War, Southern intellectuals spent considerable effort constructing elaborate theories as to why the African race deserved to be enslaved. Thomas Jefferson, for instance, who so famously declared the equality of man, also opined in his *Notes on the State of Virginia* that blacks lacked the intellectual sophistication of whites, were naturally lazy, exuded an offensive odor, were animalistic (rather than “tender”) in their love relationships, that black men preferred white women as sexual partners, and that it might even be possible for a black woman to interbreed with an “Oranootan.”¹

While many nineteenth century slavery apologists continued to rely on Biblical passages to justify the institution others turned to pseudo-scientific racial theory for a defense, and social theorists, phrenologists, and medical experts later expounded on many of the same themes. Indeed, by 1860 such writings constituted a veritable home industry for the South. The Alabamian phrenologist Josiah Nott, for instance, posited that the African brain was ten percent smaller than that of an Anglo-Saxon. As a result, blacks were quite adept at mimicry, but could never achieve an advanced state of civilization on their own. Unlike the hopelessly savage Native Americans, however, blacks were inherently subordinate and obedient. Slavery, therefore, was their proper station. Freed from bondage, they would simply revert to their “savage” state, wreaking violence on white society or withering away in idleness. Dr. Samuel Cartwright, a native of New Orleans, reached many of the same conclusions concerning the natural inferiority of blacks, and insisted that they preferred to live in a state of slavery. “[It] is actually an

¹ Thomas Jefferson, “Notes on the State of Virginia,” (1785) in Philip S. Foner, ed., *Basic Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, (New York: Willey Book Company, 1944), 144-150.

improvement on the government of their forefathers,” he wrote in 1851, “as it gives them more tranquility and sensual enjoyment, expands the mind and improves the morals, by arousing them from that natural indolence so fatal to mental and moral progress.” That slaves often rebelled or absconded – acts which tended to undermine this assertion – was of little concern. A student of medicine, Cartwright simply attributed such behavior to various pathologies. “Dysesthesia,” for example, was a disease peculiar to blacks caused by poorly oxygenated blood. Symptoms included breaking tools, destroying crops, abusing livestock, stealing, and behaving insolently toward white men.²

Though hardly representative of the “common” Southerner, the clergy, statesmen, scholars, and scientists who so vigorously espoused the tenets of racial slavery nevertheless underscored what the poorest farmers and lordliest planters, each for their own reasons, held to be true: at best, blacks were the inferiors of whites; at worst, they were subhuman savages. The Declaration penned by Jefferson in 1776 might have declared all men equal, but, as one planter qualified it (and as Jefferson himself expressed with a bit more eloquence), “all men, niggers, and monkeys *aint*.” In 1861, a South Carolina volunteer likewise addressed the notion of equality with skepticism, dismissing as misguided the attempts of his fellow countrymen to link the ideals of the Revolution (the inalienable rights of man) with those of the new Confederacy. “I for one am fighting for no such absurdity,” he wrote. “It is insulting to the English common sense of race [to say that we] are battling for an abstract right common to all humanity. Every reflecting child will glance at the darkey who waits on him & laugh at the idea of such an ‘abstract right.’” Racial slavery, in short, *assumed* the superiority of white over black. As such, the racial philosophers of the mid-nineteenth century reflected popular opinion as much as they helped to shape it.³

These assumptions are evidenced in the nature of Southern slavery, predicated as it was upon the rejection of African-American humanity. There is perhaps no better exemplar of such assumptions than the public slave auction. Typically advertised in

² Knott’s more famous works on the subject of race include *Types of Mankind* (1855), and *Instincts of Races* (1866); Samuel A. Cartwright, “Report on the Diseases and Physical Peculiarities of the Negro Race,” *New Orleans Medical and Surgical Journal*, (May 1851), in Paul Finkelman, ed., *Defending Slavery: Proslavery Thought in the Old South*, (New York: Bedford, 2003), 157-173.

³ Quoted in Solomon Northup, *Twelve Years a Slave*, (New York: Miller, Orton, & Mulligan, 1855), 267; Charles Woodward Hutson to Mother, 14 September 1861, Hutson Papers, SHC, UNC.

newspapers along with cattle, hogs, or sheep, the sale constituted the pinnacle of human debasement. Slave traders stripped their wares naked and greased them for affect; potential buyers poked and prodded, observed muscle tone, and checked teeth as they would a horse. Before them stood not men, women, and children, not family members who grieved over permanent separation of loved ones, but chattel-animals to be used as the buyers saw fit. The dehumanizing nature of the system was poignantly captured by a former bondsman years after the Civil War. “If I thought, had any idea, that I’d ever be a slave again, I’d take a gun an’ jus’ end it all right away,” he told his interviewer. “Because you’re nothing but a dog. You’re not a thing but a dog.” Southern soldiers who marched to war in 1861 would have whole-heartedly agreed with the assessment.⁴

Though Confederate volunteers did not regularly indulge in detailed discussions of racial matters in their letters and diaries, specific events could elicit revealing comments on the subject. The commencement of war was one such occasion. Convinced that Lincoln and his “Black Republicans” sought to abolish slavery, volunteers vigorously asserted the righteousness of their cause and pledged to defend their homes, families, and property from a tyrannical Federal government. Given the substantial economic investment that slaveholders stood to lose in the event of emancipation, it should come as no surprise that soldiers from slaveholding families tended to be overrepresented in the ranks of the army. In Virginia, for instance, four of every nine men who fought for the Confederacy came from slaveholding families, though overall they represented only twenty-six percent of the population. Further, many more who did not own slaves were intimately connected to the system, depending on slavery for their livelihood. The plantation economy of the South was tentacle-like in nature, employing the services of doctors, lawyers, accountants, clerks, sales agents (for both humans and crops), and slave overseers. Plantation owners also commonly provided important financial services within their communities, making loans to neighboring farmers, renting land, and leasing slave labor. Hence, though the majority of volunteers did not own slaves, many still had a vested interest in defending the status quo, and the

⁴ Quoted in Ira Berlin, et al., *Remembering Slavery: African Americans Talk about Their Personal Experiences of Slavery and Freedom*, (New York: The New Press, 1998), 241.

dream of many smallholders not directly connected with the institution was to one day own a few slaves, themselves.⁵

Still, it is doubtful that utilizing a purely economic argument in favor of preserving slavery would have been capable of motivating most non-slaveholding Southerners to fight in its defense. To do so threatened to turn slavery into a class issue, thereby fracturing the support slaveholders so desperately needed. It was, therefore, much more common for Southerners to stress abstract threats to “property rights” and (white) liberty, rhetoric which was all the more compelling because it echoed that of the Revolutionary generation. Perhaps the most effective and time-honored method of avoiding class antagonism was through an appeal to racial solidarity. If the average volunteer did not fight in behalf of the slaveholder, he nevertheless proved willing to sacrifice his life to ensure that blacks remained enslaved. “Every effort will be made to crush the fiendish and black-hearted abolitionists who have waged this unholy war upon us . . . before we shall submit to this diabolical outrage upon our liberties, our rights, our homes,” insisted a Texas officer in 1861. “No! NO!! *we never shall submit* to this inhuman, unnatural, and unholy cause, of negro equality.”⁶

The racial unity evidenced between white Southerners on the eve of the Civil War marked the culmination of a two hundred year effort by the slaveholding elite to protect their interests. Beginning in the late seventeenth century, they had become increasingly wary of the possibility that disaffected whites and slaves might make common cause against them. “The answer to the problem,” as historian Edmund Morgan noted, “was racism, to separate dangerous free whites from dangerous slave blacks by a screen of racial contempt.” The process of creating a permanent and racialized underclass had been tortured and slow, but by 1860 their labor had come to fruition. The vast majority of white non-slaveholding Southerners not only viewed blacks as inferior, but relied on slavery as a significant component of their own identity as “free men.” In the rigid racial hierarchy of the South their whiteness marked them as part of the master class, establishing their patriarchal domination over dependants, with all the attendant claims to

⁵ On the social composition of the Army of Northern Virginia, see Joseph T. Glatthaar, *General Lee's Army: From Victory to Collapse*, (New York: Free Press, 2008), 29-32; James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era*, (New York: Oxford, 1988), 99; James Oakes, *The Ruling Race: A History of American Slaveholders*, (New York: Knopf, 1982), 230.

⁶ Clarksville (Texas) *Standard*, 13 July 1861.

manhood and honor the position provided. Emancipation and “negro equality,” through the granting of manhood to the black man, threatened to negate this privilege, leaving them effeminized to wallow among the debased masses of former slaves. It was simply unacceptable. “Not only will negroes be free,” remarked a Georgia volunteer, “but . . . we will all be on one common level.” (Many Confederates, it will be recalled, sniffed at the supposed “common level” society they found in Pennsylvania.)⁷

Fears of social leveling and its consequences, then, rather than a defense of slavery, per se, motivated significant numbers of Southerners to take up arms. As a cavalryman in the Army of Northern Virginia noted, the thought of interacting with African-Americans on a basis of equality weighed heavily on their minds – especially those who stood to lose the most. “Our poor men of the southern army say [the war] is to free the negro and make the negro equal with the poor man of the southern states and have free mixed schools and a negro can marry a white girl and etc.,” he observed. “[They] are saying they will wade in blood to their chins before such a thing will happen to our people.” Visions of black men eloping with white women, epitomizing the loss of white virility, served as a popular invective against emancipation. That image alone was likely sufficient to propel the South to war. “Better, far better!” cried a Virginia volunteer, “[to] endure all the horrors of civil war than to see the dusky sons of Ham leading the fair daughters of the South to the altar.” Indeed, as Sherman’s army advanced through the rugged terrain of northern Georgia in the spring of 1864, incredulous Wisconsin volunteers discovered this first-hand upon interrogating a few captured rebels. “Some of the boys asked them what they were fighting for,” related one, “and they answered, ‘you Yanks want us to marry our daughters to the niggers.’ Poor ignorant devils.”⁸

⁷ Edmund S. Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia*, (New York: Norton, 1975), 328; William J. Cooper, *Liberty and Slavery: Southern Politics to 1860*, (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2003, 1983), 248-249; Quoted in George S. Burkhardt, *Confederate Rage, Yankee Wrath: No Quarter in the Civil War*, (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2007), 35.

⁸ I. Norval Baker, “Diary and Recollections of I. Norval Baker,” in Garland Quarles, et. al., eds., *Diaries, Letters, and Recollections of the War Between the States*, (Winchester, VA: Winchester-Frederick County Historical Society, 1955), 100; Quoted in James M. McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades: Why Men Fought in the Civil War*, (New York: Oxford, 1997), 19; Chauncey Herbert Cooke to “Dear folks at home,” 10 May 1864, in *Soldier Boy’s Letters*, 67.

In their resentment of forced equality, the attitudes of white Southerners differed little from those of most Northerners. When it came to emancipation, however, Southern fears encompassed much more than the loss of social standing. Compared to the 400,000 free blacks in the North, emancipation in the South promised to unleash upon the population some four million people of an “inferior” race. Southerners hardly expected the transition to be an orderly one, with former bondsmen peacefully taking to agriculture and becoming productive members of society. To acknowledge such a possibility, to accept that blacks and whites could live in harmony, would undermine one of the fundamental tenets of racial slavery: namely, that African-Americans needed to be forcibly restrained lest they return to their “natural” state of barbarism. Plainly, the prospect of interracial marriage aroused fury not simply because it threatened to debase the white race. Rather, as a thinly veiled euphemism for rape, it exposed even greater fears that blacks, shorn of their chains, would seek revenge on their masters, violate the “fair ladies” of the South, and generally lay waste to the country. It struck a chord among Southerners, playing as it did upon the popular stereotype of blacks as lustful creatures incapable of controlling their passions.

Should white Southerners forget what was at stake, there was no shortage of fear-mongering. In a typical address to troops departing for war, an Arkansas woman asked several pointed questions: “Will brave men quietly submit to black republican rule? Shall our glorious South be made a second St. Domingo? Forbid it, soldiers! Forbid it, Heaven!” Confederate General James Longstreet explicitly connected emancipation with racial violence in a pre-battle speech to his soldiers in June 1862. “Already has the hatred of one of their great leaders attempted to make the negro your equal by declaring his freedom [a reference to General John C. Fremont’s aborted emancipation policy in Missouri]. They care not for the blood of babes nor carnage of innocent women which servile insurrection thus stirred up may bring upon their heads.” In 1864, with the Confederacy’s future in doubt, the Charleston *Mercury* presented an apocalyptic post-war vision of the South. “The midnight glare of the incendiary's torch will illuminate the country from one end to another,” warned the editor, “while pillage, violence, murder, poisons and rape will fill the air with the demoniac revelry of all the bad passions of an ignorant, semi-barbarous race, urged to madness by the licentious teachings of our

Northern brethren. A war of races – a war of extermination – must arise, like that which took place in St. Domingo.” Non-slaveholders, he concluded, rather than the wealthy planters, should most fear such an event, “because they are the people who will be exposed to it in the wreck of our institutions.” When Confederate volunteers claimed to be fighting in defense of hearth and home, they were not being disingenuous. The failure of their cause would result not simply in defeat, they felt, but in the literal destruction of society.⁹

A general slave uprising never occurred during the course of the war, but the potentiality weighed heavily on Southerners. “I understand that there is a strong union feeling rising in our county,” wrote one anxious volunteer to relatives in western Virginia in 1861. “I fear it will be carried too far and give encouragement to the negroes and may cause an outbreak with them.” The concern was widespread, and exposed one of the great paradoxes of American slavery. Masters seemed to have genuinely believed their own paternalistic rhetoric as to the “happiness” of their chattel, and often considered them part of the family. It was not uncommon for slaveholders in the army to offer salutations to their “property” in letters home, as did a Virginia infantryman who instructed his wife to “tel the Negres Howdy for me. I recen they wold be glad to here from me.” A long and bloody history of domestic insurrections, however, tended to undermine the façade, while internationally the revolution in Haiti (“St. Domingo”) presented Southerners with a nightmarish example of what to expect should a slave rebellion actually succeed.¹⁰

Historically, uprisings and rumors of uprisings were dealt with harshly. “Slaveholders,” Eugene Genovese has observed, “responded by showing just how much more civilized they were than their degraded slaves. . . .They lynched, burned alive, tortured, and dismembered suspected slaves, many of whom they later admitted had been innocent.” The reaction to slave rebellions reflected not paternalism, but dread. So too did state laws which governed the behavior of blacks, many of which were passed in the wake of rebellions. As free blacks were considered an anomalous and dangerous

⁹ Miss Mollie Merriweather to Crittenden Rangers, Little Rock *Arkansas True Democrat*, 23 May 1861; General James Longstreet to soldiers, 17 June 1862, *OR*, Ser. 1, Vol. 11, Pt. 3, 605; Charleston *Mercury*, 29 January 1864.

¹⁰ J.Q.A. Nadenbousch to “My Dear Wife,” 7 May 1861, Soldier Letter Collection, MOC; Howell Stevens Nelson to “Dear Wife,” 27 April 1862, Soldier Diary Collection, MOC.

element, legislatures prevented masters from manumitting their slaves. Other laws were specifically aimed at preventing rebellion, such as those that forbade slaves from learning to read or write, from “illegal assembly” (congregating in groups larger than two), from traveling without a written pass from an owner, or from possessing a firearm. The power of enforcement resided with the local slave patrol, a militia-like organization which was given absolute authority to dispense summary justice – including death.¹¹

Of greater national consequence was the linkage of slave unrest with abolitionist agitation, which was clearly evident during the several scares of the 1850s. Further proof of the Northern “fanaticism” came with John Brown’s raid on Harpers Ferry, Virginia in 1859. The homicidal Brown was indeed a fanatic, and apparently hoped to instigate a rebellion that would permanently destroy slavery. His “army,” no more than a handful of whites and free blacks, was quickly put down, however, and Brown was hanged a short time later. Though the raid itself had been a minor affair, its psychological impact on the slaveholding South was incalculable. When it came to light that a few prominent abolitionists had funded Brown’s misadventure, Southerners immediately assumed the involvement of all Republicans and the tacit approval of most Northerners. On the eve of the Civil War, the South suffered from nothing less than full-blown paranoia, a state of mind that both contributed to the coming conflict and was in turn exacerbated by it. For slaves, the consequences would be dire. As one planter noted following an insurrection

¹¹ In 1811, an uprising in southern Louisiana left three whites dead. In reprisal, a white militia indiscriminately killed sixty-six slaves, decapitated sixteen of the alleged ringleaders, and mounted their heads on pikes along the Mississippi River as a warning to other would-be insurrectionists. In the aftermath of Nat Turner’s 1831 revolt in Virginia, in which some sixty whites were killed, slaves were executed on the mere suspicion of participation. Again, many were decapitated and their heads mounted on pikes. In 1856, hysteria swept the entire South as whites learned of an alleged Christmas Day rebellion involving slaves from multiple states. No solid evidence of such a coordinated undertaking ever came to light, and confessions were exacted only after torture. Still, white fear resulted in the summary executions of scores of African-Americans. In Tennessee, vigilantes once more impaled heads on pikes. Rather than strategically placing them as a warning, however, they instead paraded them through the streets. See Eugene D. Genovese, *From Rebellion to Revolution: Afro-American Slave Revolts in the Making of the New World*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979), 42-43, 106-107 (Quote is from page 106); Charles B. Dew, “Black Iron Workers and the Slave Insurrection Panic of 1856,” *The Journal of Southern History*, Vol. 41, No. 3, (August 1975), 321-338; and James H. Dormon, “The Persistent Specter: Slave Rebellion in Territorial Louisiana,” *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association*, Vol. 18, No. 4, (Autumn 1977), 389-404. For an example of slave laws, see Philip J. Schwarz, *Twice Condemned: Slaves and the Criminal Laws of Virginia, 1705-1865*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988). On the evolution and function of slave patrols, see Sally E. Hadden, *Slave Patrols: Law and Violence in Virginia and the Carolinas*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001).

scare in North Carolina in October 1860, in the midst of panic “the negroes are in much more danger from the non slave holding whites than the whites are from the negroes.”¹²

4.4.2 Slavery and the Civil War

Given the militarized nature of the white South in relation to blacks, and that the maintenance of chattel slavery rested on the use of force and violence, the instability and uncertainty caused by war could only exacerbate its brutal nature. Convinced of the North’s determination to abolish slavery, white Southerners observed their property with a heightened sense of anxiety and suspicion. Many discouraged open discussion of the war – particularly the ostensible war aims of the North – in the presence of slaves, lest it encourage rebellion. Maintaining the secrecy of an event of such magnitude, however, proved impossible, though prudent bondsmen avoided expressions of excitement or joy, as it invited the wrath of masters. As the South mobilized for war, special precautions were taken to ensure order among the slave population and the safety of whites. It invariably required the commentary of an outside observer to expose the incongruity of the situation. “There is something suspicious in the constant never ending statement [of white Southerners] that ‘we are not afraid of our slaves,’” noted an English journalist who toured the South a month after the attack on Fort Sumter. “The curfew and the night patrol in the streets, the prisons and watch-houses, and the police regulations, prove that strict supervision, at all events, is needed and necessary.” In fall of 1861, masters uncovered a plot involving slaves from several plantations in Adams County, Mississippi which suggested that their greatest fears had been realized. Upon interrogation by a white “vigilance committee,” alleged conspirators divulged details which left the community horrified. Aware of the war and its implications for slavery, the conspirators had planned to rise and murder their masters. Perhaps more shocking, however, was that some had expressed interest in exacting revenge by raping their white mistresses. With little fanfare or publicity, they hanged at least forty slaves.¹³

¹² On the political impact of the Harpers Ferry raid, see Steven A. Channing, *Crisis of Fear: Secession in South Carolina*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1970); William S. Pettigrew to James C. Johnston, 25 October 1860, quoted in Stamp, *Peculiar Institution*, 139.

¹³ William Howard Russell, *Southern Life: Social, Political, and Military*, (New York: James G. Gregory, 1861), 27-28; On the Adams County conspiracy, see Winthrop D. Jordan, *Tumult and Silence at Second*

If talk of war could be disruptive, its actual demands were even more so. Though Confederates refused to allow slaves to enlist in the army until the closing months of the conflict, they frequently pressed them into service as laborers, where they were exposed to many of the same dangers as their white masters. To avoid confiscation by both Confederate and Union authorities, some owners took to “refugeeing” their slaves to western states. The trek could be an arduous one that spanned hundreds of miles, which inevitably took its toll on the young and the old and left slave families splintered. Further, as young planters answered the call to duty, they often left the management of slaves to women and inept overseers. In many instances, a power struggle developed on the home front which paralleled that of the armies in the field. Uncertain of their authority, overseers punished their slaves harshly. Slaves, resentful of the poor treatment and bolstered by thoughts of freedom, struck back. They refused to work, resorted to arson and sabotage, beat and killed the sources of their torment, and fled to Union lines.¹⁴

Lincoln’s decision to free the slaves led to further disruptions, though not every Southern soldier felt threatened by the edict, viewing it instead as little more than an empty threat made by a desperate enemy. Even late in the war, some Southerners continued to view their cause and that of their slaves as synonymous. “In deed we are one great family here,” wrote a rebel artillerist from northern Georgia in July 1864. “You never saw such unanimity – such zeal – such energy, which prevails all classes. The business of every man, woman, child or negro culminates to one purpose, one aim – that of achieving our liberty.” Still, uncertainty reigned, and many Southerners nervously expressed the concerns voiced by one soldier a month after the decree: “What effect has Lincoln’s proclamation had upon the servants[?]” It did, in fact, encourage rebelliousness, or at least flight, among slaves – but never to the extent that Southerners feared. For the North, to decree freedom was easy enough; for slaves, actually acquiring it during wartime proved a challenge. Despite a heavy Union presence throughout the South, many slaves never saw a Union soldier. On the other hand, they regularly came into contact with heavily armed Southerners, be they in the form of Confederate regulars,

Creek: An Inquiry into a Civil War Slave Conspiracy, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1993).

¹⁴ For the problems which developed between masters and slaves on the Confederate home front, see Ira Berlin, et. al., *Slaves No More: Three Essays on Emancipation and the Civil War*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), particularly chapter one, “The Destruction of Slavery, 1861-1865,” pp. 1-76.

guerillas, home-guard units, slave patrols, or just cautious masters. The South's mobilization for war made escape difficult. When a Federal force did liberate a particular plantation, they generally stayed just long to plunder the smokehouse before moving on, leaving the "freed" slaves precariously exposed to white retribution. Rebelling or absconding, therefore, remained a hazardous undertaking.¹⁵

Of more immediate impact was the Proclamation's effect on the mindset of slaveholders. For slaves, rebellion or flight always constituted a political act. Whether or not they thought of it as such, absconding constituted a powerful protest against the system. Slaveholders, however, could hardly view their actions as such without undermining their own theories as to the contentedness of slaves. This explains why so many expressed surprise upon discovery that a slave had fled and why, other than attributing their actions to "rascality," they rarely blamed slaves, themselves. An Alabama captain whose body servant deserted him was at a loss to explain his disappearance. "I sent him off to cook a chicken and some biscuits," he recorded in his diary, "and he failed to put in an appearance any more. My opinion is that he was enticed away or forcibly detained by some negro worshipper, as he had always been prompt and faithful, and seemed much attached to me." Following emancipation, however, Southerners increasingly viewed their actions not as the result of a mental defect as described by Dr. Cartwright, or the consequence of a pernicious abolitionist influence, but as a willful repudiation of the Confederate cause. They were not simply runaways, but traitors.¹⁶

The seriousness of such an offense, coupled with the violence-charged atmosphere of war, ensured brutal countermeasures. In the winter of 1864, for instance, one slave's master promised to whip him after he dallied too long in procuring grain for rebel cavalry that visited their homestead in western Tennessee. Determined to avoid the beating he made a dash for Federal lines the following morning, only to be caught and forcibly returned. The penalty for such treachery went far beyond whipping. "[He] took me down to the woods, and tied my hands, and pulled them over my knees and put a stick

¹⁵ Philip D. Stevenson to "My Dear Mother," 1 July 1864, Soldier Letter Collection, MOC; William Burnett to "Dear Ma," 25 February 1863, Civil War Letters Collection of George H. Sullivan, MOC.

¹⁶ Robert E. Park Diary, 10 July 1864, in *Southern Historical Society Papers*, 52 Vols., (Richmond, VA: Southern Historical Society, 1876-1959), 1:379.

through under my knees,” the former slave later reported in an affidavit to the Freedmen’s Bureau. “And then he took his knife and *castrated* me and then cut off the lop of my left ear” Though the punishment was unusual (castration as a means to control slaves had generally fallen out of favor by the mid-nineteenth century), the rage that informed it was not. Whereas in times of peace an absconding slave might “merely” have been whipped or sold, in wartime this form of “betrayal” assumed a new significance. Slaves who attempted to seek refuge among Union authorities were often beaten to death upon capture. Escaped slaves who returned in hopes of retrieving family members or, worse, were discovered to have assisted Union forces, could likewise expect little mercy from patrollers or masters. Rather than see their property captured or emancipated, some vindictive masters simply killed slaves outright, asserting their absolute authority until the very end. Such was the case in Rusk County, Texas in the summer of 1865, when slaves finally learned of the Confederacy’s defeat and their subsequent emancipation. “Lots of Negroes was killed after freedom,” remembered one. “Their owners had them ‘bushwhacked,’ shot down while trying to get away. You could see lots of Negroes hanging to trees”¹⁷

If slaves worried about being “bushwhacked” by their masters, they surely feared the appearance of actual guerrillas. As quasi-military/civilian patrollers, they harassed slaves and freed people as much as they did the Union military. Indeed, if Confederate guerrillas tended to spare white women, they were especially ruthless toward freed blacks regardless of age or sex. From Tennessee, an Indiana volunteer reported an attack in which guerrillas burned a forage train and executed the black drivers. “The negro teamsters [were] tied to their wagons and shot and then left to burn to death,” he wrote with outrage. “This is a sample of the doings of the chivalrous southerners that we are fighting.” When guerilla chieftain William Clarke Quantrill’s gang of bandits sacked Lawrence in the summer of 1863, they specifically targeted African-Americans. “He seemed particularly spiteful against black inhabitants,” observed an Ohio trooper, “they were hunted and shot like dogs.” During a foraging expedition in Virginia, a Vermont

¹⁷ Affidavit of a Tennessee Freedman, 13 September 1865, in Ira Berlin, *Freedom*, “The Destruction of Slavery,” 323; On the evolution and decline of castration as punishment see Diane Miller Sommerville, *Rape & Race in the Nineteenth Century South*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), particularly chapter three, 72-85; Quoted in Berlin, *Remembering Slavery*, 270.

soldier was nearly thrown from a wagon by the actions of a panicked teamster. A fair distance from camp, the two heard sporadic rifle fire and immediately assumed an attack. “Our driver,” he wrote, “a great strapping negro who had always a terrible horror of guerrillas, having been a slave once and knowing very well what would be his fate if taken, was almost beside himself with terror. ‘Where shall I go? Which way? Get up,’ and he tried to urge his mules along with all possible speed.” In a panic he drove the wagon off the road, a mule broke out of its harness, and they were suddenly stranded. The teamster, he noted, was paralyzed with fear and could not bring himself to re-harness the animal. Fortunately, “it was all a bad ‘scare.’ We found no guerrillas and no guerrillas found us”¹⁸

The anxiety-induced brutality of masters and roving guerrilla bands were not the only hazards faced by African-Americans, for they also contended with the demands of the Confederate military. In contrast to many Union commanders who would have been happy enough to ignore slaves altogether, Confederate military leaders understood they did not enjoy the same option. Slave labor, simply put, was integral to the success of the war effort. Though the Confederacy began to conscript white civilians into the army by 1862, blacks had been “drafted” for the war effort from the beginning. Many slaves accompanied their owners into the army as body servants who cooked, cleaned, carried messages, and tended to mounts. On rare occasions, they even followed their masters into battle, giving rise to the myth of black Confederate soldiers. Most slaves, however, were utilized in much less glamorous positions, and were sent to labor on fortifications or in various workshops, factories, mills, and mines.¹⁹

As with everything else, the Confederate armies experienced a shortage of slave labor. Initially depending on the patriotism of owners, military authorities hoped that slaves would be voluntarily relinquished for the greater good. Unsurprisingly, self-interest prevailed over sacrifice. Owners complained that the loss of slaves interfered with their own agricultural pursuits, resulting in a monetary loss they could hardly expect to recoup

¹⁸ Alva G. Griest Journal, 21 January 1863, Harrisburg Civil War Round Table Collection, USMHI; Hervey Johnson to “Folks at home,” 29 August 1863, in *Tending the Talking Wire: A Buck Soldier’s View of Indian Country, 1863-1866*, ed. William E. Unrau, (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1979), 40; Wilbur Fisk Diary, 6 September 1864, Wilbur Fisk Papers, LC.

¹⁹ Bruce C. Levine, *Confederate Emancipation: Southern Plans to Free and Arms Slaves During the Civil War*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 62-63.

through the pittance in compensation offered by the government. Further, the nature of the work in which slaves were employed was quite often dangerous. This, of course, was the purpose of slave labor – to engage in work that whites found repugnant or hazardous – but when slaves died from enemy fire, contracted smallpox during their duties at hospitals, or were maimed by industrial accidents, masters stood to lose a significant monetary investment. Consequently, they grew increasingly reluctant to sacrifice their property for the war effort, forcing authorities to simply press slaves as required.

To counter the problem of reluctant masters, many suggested that the country might make use of free Southern blacks. As early as July 1861, citizens wrote to complain that free blacks were nothing but a drain on society and a hindrance to the war effort. “There is a large number of Free Negroes in this City . . . which are now liveing on the honest industry of our Volunteers,” complained a resident of Lynchburg, Virginia. “I want to know if that degraded and worse than useless race could not do something in the way of defending the south such as throwing up Breast works Building tents or any thing els that would be of advantage to us.” General Roger Pryor of Virginia concurred with the idea that free blacks ought to be put to work. Such a policy, he announced in October 1862, promised to relieve thousands of white soldiers of burdensome duties, allowing them to return to their proper duty of fighting. Slaves, meanwhile, could be dedicated exclusively to agriculture. Most importantly, conscripting free blacks for manual labor would “relieve the community of a thriftless and vicious class and compel them to labor for the public advantage.” As an added incentive, should any of them escape to Union authorities, no property would be lost. The Confederate legislature agreed, finally passing a national conscription law in 1864 that subjected the hundred thousand or so free blacks in the South to forced labor. Unlike their enslaved counterparts, who enjoyed the benefits of an advocate in the form of their owners, free blacks had no where to turn for protection. As a result, their encounters with the Confederate army could be violent.²⁰

In compelling African-Americans to labor for the war effort, Confederates experienced many of the same problems experienced by slave owners, flight being

²⁰ John Lenahan to Hon. Jeff. Davis, 15 July 1861, in Berlin, *Freedom*, “The Destruction of Slavery,” 760; Roger A. Pryor to Hon. G.W. Randolph, 29 October 1862, *ibid.*, 761; *OR*, Ser. 4, Vol. 3, 207-209.

foremost among them. Slave or free, blacks tended to resist military service by dodging press gangs, escaping to their masters, or running to Union lines. Theoretically, slave labor was supposed to reduce the workload of white soldiers, allowing them to concentrate on strictly “military” duties. It is ironic then, that considerable effort was spent both in scouring the countryside for black laborers and in seeking the return of fugitives. Contraband camps were favorite targets of both guerilla and regular forces, as the mass of black refugees that clung to the fringes of Union encampments was generally an easy target. “Fugitive” was a relative term, of course, as the army seldom distinguished between actual slaves who used the cover of war to abscond and free blacks who happened to be in the vicinity. Free Southern blacks were always in danger of being kidnapped and sold into slavery, and the necessities of war only increased the risk that they might be serendipitously seized and put to work constructing fortifications.

Given the small number of free blacks in the South and the resentment of masters over the pressing of slaves, it is not surprising that Confederates took to seizing African-Americans from Union territory when the opportunity presented. General Jeb Stuart, for example, returned to Virginia with several free blacks following his October 1862 raid on Chambersburg, Pennsylvania. That raid, however, pales in comparison to the one undertaken by the entire Army of Northern Virginia the following summer. When Lee’s soldiers entered southern Pennsylvania in June 1863, thousands of African-Americans fearing enslavement fled northward, choking the state capital of Harrisburg with panicked refugees. “Contrabands are arriving here constantly,” reported the Harrisburg *Telegraph* on June 24, “and it really is a distressing sight to see women and children huddled in wagons, bringing all their worldly possessions with them.” Unfortunately, their panic proved justified. Cavalry units and mounted partisans, operating on the fringes of the army and often the first to enter towns, began to seize “runaways” from the streets of Greencastle, Mercersburg, and Chambersburg. Mosby’s Rangers, a partisan unit that followed Lee into Pennsylvania, retreated back to Virginia before the main army gave battle. They did not return empty-handed, having captured, as one trooper reported, “218 head of cattle, 15 horses, and 12 negroes.” In Chambersburg, a resident watched Confederates round up “droves” of women and children – many of whom had been born and raised in the city. “I sat on the front step as they were driven by just like we would

drive cattle,” she recorded. “One woman was pleading wonderfully with her driver for her children – but all the sympathy she received from him was a rough ‘March along’ – at which she would quicken her pace again.” Reporting on these expeditions, one rebel made clear that many of the captured were, in fact, free-born. “Genl [Albert] Jenkins and his cavalry are at chambersburg PA,” he noted on June 23. “he has sent over a large lot of fine horses & some negroes (not runaways though) he took all the negroes he could catch.”²¹

It would be easy enough to blame such activities on independent cavalry and partisan commanders, but reports from regular infantry units make clear that the main army itself was heavily involved in the capture of African-Americans. “We took a lot of negroes yesterday,” wrote the colonel of the 55th Virginia Infantry from Greenwood. “I was offered my choice, but as I could not get them back home I would not take them.” Indeed, the thought of taking the frightened civilians from their homes left him “revolted,” and he admitted that he let them all go. As every corps in Lee’s army had a hand in the “slave hunt,” however, it is apparent that most Confederates did not share his sympathies. There is, in fact, evidence to suggest that the capture of blacks, if not directly ordered by Lee, at least received tacit approval by his lieutenants. On July 1, as Confederate volunteers engaged Federal forces at Gettysburg, corps commander General James Longstreet concluded a message to division commander George Pickett with a reference to the prisoners: “The captured contrabands had better be brought along with you for further disposition.” As Confederate volunteers looted their way through southern Pennsylvania, no doubt many took special pleasure in undermining Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation.²²

The total number of blacks seized during the campaign will never be known. Estimates range from a few dozen to nearly one thousand. Thousands more had been forced from their homes. The 1,800 African-American residents of Chambersburg

²¹ Harrisburg *Telegraph*, 24 June 1863; James J. Williamson, *Mosby's Rangers: A Record of the Operations of the Forty-third Battalion Virginia Cavalry*, (New York: Ralph B. Kenyon, 1896), 80; James C. Mohr, ed., *The Cormany Diaries: A Northern Family in the Civil War*, (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1982), 329-330; William H. Routt to “My Dear Bettie,” 23 June 1863, Soldier Letter Collection, MOC.

²² William Steptoe Christian to “My own darling wife,” 28 June 1863, in Frank Moore, ed., *The Rebellion Record: A Diary of American Events*, Vol. 7, (New York: 1864), 197; G.M. Sorrel, AAG, First Army Corps to General George Pickett, 1 July 1863, *OR*, Ser. 1, Vol. 51, Pt. 2, 732-733.

vanished. Those not taken had fled to the hills. In analyzing the reports of abductions, several things become evident. Most apparent, as evidenced by the Chambersburg woman who observed the Confederate operations from her front porch, was that whatever the fears the white population had, enslavement was not one of them. It is also certain, despite official insistence to the contrary, that many of those taken were indeed free-born. Most important was the Confederate tendency to view African-Americans they seized as livestock, which they captured along with cattle and horses and “drove” in the same manner. Mistreatment and abuse inevitably occurred, especially toward those who resisted. A Greencastle resident reported that rebel troopers, after searching houses, moved into the outlying wheat fields in an attempt to flush blacks out of concealment. “Cavalrymen rode in search of them and many of them were caught after a desperate chase and being fired at,” he insisted. Shooting at unarmed civilians was dubious enough, but the cruelty enacted upon one young African-American stunned the Union soldiers who discovered him. “I saw a sight yesterday that beats all I ever saw,” wrote a Vermont volunteer of what he witnessed. “A Negro boy that the Rebels left in a barn, entirely naked. His breast cut & bowels were scratched or cut & the Dr. said that turpentine had been put on him & also his privates had been cut off.” It was pitiful sight. “He lay on his back, his legs bent, knees up, & grinding his teeth & foaming at the mouth & seemed to take no notice of anything,” reported the Vermonter. “I understand the reason of the act to be because he would not go over the river with them.”²³

On June 28, just days after Confederate troopers had cleared Chambersburg of “fugitive” blacks, a Virginia captain who passed through the town expressed concern as to the army’s conduct. “It seems to be fair that we should impress these animals,” he wrote, “yet when I see *women* in tears, I can but feel sorry that this war brings with it

²³ On the number of blacks taken as well and the nature of the soldier-civilian relationship during the campaign, see David G. Smith, “The Capture of African Americans during the Gettysburg Campaign,” in Peter Wallenstein and Bertram Wyatt-Brown, eds., *Virginia’s Civil War*, (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2005), 138, 142; Peter C. Vermilyea, “The Effect of the Confederate Invasion of Pennsylvania on Gettysburg’s African-American Community,” *Gettysburg Magazine*, No. 24, 112-128; Ted Alexander, “A Regular Slave Hunt: The Army of Northern Virginia and Black Civilians in the Gettysburg Campaign,” *North & South*, Vol. 4, No. 7 (September 2001), 87-88; and Margaret S. Creighton, *The Colors of Courage: Gettysburg’s Forgotten History, Immigrants, Women, and African-Americans in the Civil War’s Defining Battle*, (Basic Books, 2005), especially Chapter Five, “The Wide Eye of the Storm.” Charles Hartman Diary, quoted in Alexander, 86; Chester K. Leach to “Dear Wife,” 15 July 1863, quoted in Paul G. Zeller, ed., *The Second Vermont Volunteer Infantry Regiment, 1861-1865*, (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland, 2002), 151.

such harsh measures. Our own people have suffered more than tongue can tell. I hope for the *honor* [emphasis mine] of the Army of Northern Virginia that *excesses* may *not* be indulged in.” His apprehensions were occasioned not by the pleas of a black woman being forcibly separated from her children, but from the zealous confiscation of livestock from local farmers. He was not alone in his misgivings, and volunteers carefully noted their “magnanimous” and “restrained” behavior toward the “Dutch” citizens of Pennsylvania. Indeed, they delighted in contrasting their enlightened conduct with the “barbarous” activities of the dishonorable Yankee, and many were genuinely troubled by the extent of the destruction that actually occurred. As more than a few of them insisted, they had not marched north to wage war against women and children. In light of the army’s despicable treatment of blacks, it is tempting to dismiss such declarations as empty rhetoric and hypocrisy, but for Confederate volunteers no contradiction existed. The key to understanding the apparent inconsistency lies within Southern conceptions of “honor.”²⁴

Honor, with its associated values of chivalry and manliness, was an integral component of the Southern ethos, and served as the cornerstone of patriarchal authority and power. A code of conduct that defies easy definition, it can essentially be equated to one’s public reputation, encompassing not only personal claims of self-worth (such as independence, bravery, and valor) but also the evaluation and acceptance of those claims in the eyes of others. A man’s assertions to honorableness, in other words, hinged upon the respect or ridicule of his peers. Consequently, slights to honor (through direct insult or by an attack on family, community, or nation) demanded immediate rectification, often through violence. Failure to address the attack invited charges of cowardliness and effeminacy. Nor was honor limited to would-be cavaliers among the more genteel. As Bertram Wyatt-Brown, an authority on the concept of Southern honor explains, “common folk, though not given to gentlemanly manners . . . also believed in honor because they had access to the means for its assertions themselves – the possessing of slaves – and because all whites, nonslaveholders as well, held sway over all blacks. Southerners regardless of social position were united in the brotherhood of white-skinned honor.” Honor, in effect, had become inextricably entwined with racial identity. Further, while

²⁴ Charles E. Waddell Diary, 28 June 1863, Soldier Diary Collection, MOC.

slavery allowed for the democratization of honor among whites to the exclusion of blacks, it also left them with an exaggerated sense of honor's importance, as to be dishonored threatened to reduce them to a condition little better than that of the powerless slaves over which they lorded.²⁵

More importantly, although whiteness was a necessary condition for entry into the brotherhood of racial honor, it was not sufficient in itself. As a social construct that depended upon recognition by others, honor (unlike the supposedly immutable condition of race) might be taken away as easily as it was granted, and therefore required constant affirmation. African slaves, excluded from honor's ranks, played a significant role in that regard. While the *code duello* stands as one of the more dramatic honor-affirming rituals, the most common manner in which white men might validate their own sense of self-worth was through the consistent denigration of slaves. Indeed, blacks were not simply denied honor, but ritually *dishonored*, the humiliation of the slave enhancing the honor of the master. The public slave auction, for example, was heavily laden with the symbols of honor and dishonor, power and powerlessness, a potent reminder for African-Americans of their inability to protect themselves or family members from the whims of white masters. The punishment of slaves, too, often carried a significance that extended well beyond the enforcement of discipline. Castration, public whippings, forcing parents to witness the flogging of their children: all were acts that had less to do with compelling obedience than with promoting the honor of the master and reinforcing the subhuman status of the slave. Ultimately, whites denied slaves any standing as men or women, tore asunder familial bonds, and subjected them to all manner of abuses from which they had little recourse. The "social death" of slavery, as one historian has described it, was the greatest dishonor a society could impose. For volunteers, the connection between honor, race, and Southern identity was obvious. The Confederate flag, insisted one volunteer, represented nothing less than "an adored trinity [of] cotton, niggers and chivalry."²⁶

²⁵ For a general definition of honor, see Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Honor and Violence in the Old South*, (New York: Oxford, 1986). Quote is from Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Yankee Saints and Southern Sinners*, (Louisiana State University Press: Baton Rouge, 1985), 186-187.

²⁶ On honor and its relation to slavery, see Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study*, (Harvard University Press, 1982), 94-97; James Oakes, *Slavery and Freedom: An Interpretation of the Old South*, (New York: W.W. Norton, 1998), 14-24; Ariela Julie Gross, *Double Character: Slavery and Mastery in the Antebellum Southern Courtroom*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 48-51. Quote found in Frank Moore, ed., *The Rebellion Record*, Vol. 7, 87-88.

If one accepts not only the pervasiveness of the cult of honor, but also its inseparability from racial slavery, Confederate actions in Pennsylvania come to assume new meaning. They are better viewed not as a wartime aberration, but simply as the continuation of a peace-time social code. Certainly, the decision to seize blacks stemmed in part from the practical need of slave labor, but it also allowed volunteers to counter the festering insult to honor posed by emancipation. What better way to expose Union impotence than by the blatant kidnapping of *free* blacks from the North? What better way to humiliate Lincoln and his Black Republicans than by making an absolute mockery of their proclamation? While honor required that white civilians in Pennsylvania – particularly woman and children – be accorded a degree of protection, it also demanded the ruthless subjugation and dishonoring of blacks. Indeed, the herding, castrating, and shooting of blacks by the military mirrored closely the treatment they might receive from civilians, suggesting that their actions were less the product of war-induced frustration than of calculated measures to dishonor and shame. The castrated youth discovered by Union soldiers stands as a case in point. Though vengeance and spite surely played their part in the sad episode, as did a desire to compel obedience, there were clearly other factors at work. The decision to maim in such a manner, to literally emasculate, was highly symbolic. The intention was to humiliate, rather than annihilate, to physically deny any pretensions to equality and manhood. The presence of turpentine adds further weight to this interpretation. Commonly used as an anti-irritant and to prevent maggots from collecting in an open wound, its application indicates purpose, rationality, and forethought rather than blind rage. They desired that he live, a visual reinforcement of black shame which bolstered and enhanced white honor. The conclusions, though grim, are instructive. Volunteers committed atrocities against African-Americans not because the stress of combat pushed them over the edge, but because they represented a society which viewed their abuse as an essential component of its own identity. In reality, volunteers would not have considered their actions to be atrocities, at all. The mutilation of insubordinate blacks represented business as usual – honor slighted and redeemed.²⁷

²⁷ On honor and shame in the Antebellum South, see Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study*, (Harvard University Press, 1982), 94-97; James Oakes, *Slavery and Freedom: An Interpretation of the Old South*, (New York: W.W. Norton, 1998), 14-24; Ariela Julie Gross, *Double*

In dishonoring and shaming African-Americans, volunteers partook of the master's authority. In one area, at least, they may have respected the prerogatives of their social superiors. One of the more notorious aspects of slavery was the sexual abuse black women suffered at the hands of owners. In stark contrast to the available evidence against Union soldiers, however, there is surprisingly little to suggest that Confederate volunteers regularly indulged in similar behavior – in Pennsylvania or elsewhere – though that is not to say that it never occurred. There are several possibilities that might explain this phenomenon. Firstly, it is entirely possible that many incidents of rape went unreported. Antebellum laws made it quite clear that black women were “unrapeable,” as they were thought to be naturally lascivious. To even categorize the abuse as rape, then, was problematic. Furthermore, among young white males, particularly those of the upper class, premarital dalliances with “negro wenches” were considered a right of passage. Black women were commonly looked upon as fulfilling the role of prostitutes, allowing men to satisfy a carnal need without despoiling the purity of white women. Judging by the presence of black prostitutes that operated on the fringes of the armies, the practice continued into the war years. As a volunteer in the 9th Wisconsin attested, however, Confederates sometimes took liberties that showed they tended to view black women and prostitutes as one in the same. Working as a hospital attendant in the aftermath of the battle at Jenkins's Ferry, Arkansas, he was taken prisoner with the rest of the staff by Confederate forces. Determined to escape, he set out for Little Rock, but was soon recaptured by a rebel patrol and escorted to Camden. Along the route, he and his three mounted guards stopped at farmhouse for a meal, and while lounging on the front lawn after dinner, a “buxom” slave woman caught their attention. “My rebel captors eyed her with wanton lust and beckoned for her to come to them,” the Wisconsinite recalled. “She, being a slave, dared not disobey a command from a white person, so she reluctantly approached the trio.” He suspected what was about to happen, but it nonetheless left him stunned. “The scene that followed was more vicious, cruel and degrading than anyone could possibly believe. . . . Each one of the trio in turn raped the helpless negress and after they finished their lustful desires they turned to me, one of them saying, ‘Now, Yank, it's

Character: Slavery and Mastery in the Antebellum Southern Courtroom, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 48-51.

your turn.” He declined the invitation, and they released their victim, stating that “female slaves were good for only two things, to do work and to serve as concubines for their white masters.”²⁸

In assessing the prevalence of rape, other cultural factors must also be taken into account. Though it was acceptable for a master to indulge in *discreet* sexual relations with his slaves (flaunting the relationship could result in social ostracism), a stranger who partook invited trouble, as it was generally considered bad form to molest another’s property. Violators would not have been charged with rape, of course, but might have found themselves accused of “negro stealing.” At the very least, they risked a sound beating at the hands of an irate owner. “The main lesson was not ‘thou shalt not fornicate with black women,’” asserts Wyatt-Brown, “but rather ‘thou shalt take care to do so at no other’s expense.’” There also existed, within the army, an element of peer pressure against sexual relations. A soldier in the Army of Northern Virginia, for example, expressed outrage when he found a comrade “walking with a negro girl about the encampment in the presents of the whole regiment.” He made it clear that “if I had my way with him I would have whipped him well.” While both of these social norms may well have served as mitigating factors, it is also possible that they simply forced perpetrators to carry out their deeds in a less conspicuous manner.²⁹

There are simply too few studies to judge the frequency of rape with any certainty, but several conclusions might be drawn. African-American women certainly fell victim to rape more often than whites; free women were likely targeted far more than slaves; and the rapes that did occur are better viewed as a continuation of peacetime mores, rather than an outgrowth of the war, as they lack the radical social and political overtones that underscored the actions of their Union counterparts. While both sides committed rape out of sense of racial superiority, they did so to opposite ends. Rape committed by Federal soldiers was but an extension of the war they waged against the South. By exposing the powerlessness of masters to protect their property, they attacked the social order, itself. When carried out by Confederates, rape – especially against free

²⁸ Louis F. Kakuske, *A Civil War Drama: The Adventures of a Union Soldier in Southern Imprisonment*, ed. Herbert P. Kakuske, (New York: Carlton Press, 1970), 40-42.

²⁹ Wyatt-Brown, *Honor and Violence in the Old South*, 98; J.C. Penn to “Ma,” 11 August 1861, quoted in Glatthaar, *General Lee’s Army*, 230.

women or those slaves whose husbands had joined the Union army – clearly served to reinforce the social order.

Just as volunteers reflected the power of the master class, so too did they reflect the complicity of the non-slaveholder in perpetuating the slave system. In fact, Confederate volunteers eventually assumed many of the duties once discharged by the civilian slave patrols, and were no less brutal in their approach. An Arkansas cavalry regiment, for example, divided their time between fending off Union forays and spying on slaves. Disguised as Federal soldiers, they set out to test the loyalty of unsuspecting bondsmen. “They was properly deseived,” reported one trooper with satisfaction following an expedition into the countryside. Still, what they learned from the unwitting slaves left him disturbed. “I herd some of them talk with the Colonel,” he recounted. “They wanted their masters or mistresses robed. Some of them wanted them murdered. . . . I think the negro question here is about gone up the spout. If the negroes allover the South is like thay are here thay had about as well give them all up and let them go free.” General Joseph Wheeler’s cavalymen were decidedly more direct in their approach, not even bothering to change into Yankee uniform during interrogations, and much less resigned to black desires for freedom. “Dey come ‘roun’ checkin’,” remembered one former slave. “Dey ax de niggahs if dey wanted to be free. If dey say yes, den dey shot dem down Dey took three of my uncles out in de woods and shot dey faces off.”³⁰

Much as the slave patrols had enforced stipulations against “unlawful assembly” before the war, so too could the military be counted upon to perform similar functions by harassing slaves who continued to work plantations abandoned by their owners. Such was the case at a plantation on Hutchinson’s Island near the South Carolina coast, where over one hundred “masterless” slaves continued to support themselves. On June 13, 1862 the commander of the USS *Dale* received reports of a fire from the direction of the island and proceeded upriver to investigate. Along the way, he encountered several black men in a canoe who frantically informed him that a rebel patrol had struck the plantation and were busily engaged in “killing all the negroes.” As the commander neared the site, it

³⁰ Ira J. Smith to “Friends,” 22 April 1863, Civil War Times Illustrated Collection, USMHI; Sarah Debro, interviewed in North Carolina, 1937, Library of Congress, *Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers’ Project, 1936-1938*, Vol. 11, Pt. 1, 250. Located at: <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/snhtml/snhome.html>.

became evident that he was witnessing the aftermath of a massacre. He encountered more canoes filled with panic-stricken fugitives; other groups of slaves clustered around the river banks displaying white flags. The plantation itself was in flames, and the landing was crowded with frightened women and children screaming to be let aboard. Interviewing the refugees, he pieced together what had occurred. At dawn, rebel cavalry had approached the plantation and fired a volley through the main house, sending the occupants into a panic. As they fled, the troopers clubbed and shot them, all the while demanding to know the location of the “damned Yankees.” Fearing the arrival of Federal forces, and unable to transport most of the supplies they discovered, they put everything to flames before finally retreating.

The attack on Hutchinson’s Island left ten dead and at least fifteen wounded. In transporting the survivors, the commander described some of the injuries among them:

One man literally riddled with balls and buck shot; (since dead); another shot through the lungs and struck over the forehead with a clubbed musket laying the bone perfectly bare; one woman shot in the leg, shoulder, and thigh; one, far gone in pregnancy, with dislocation of the hip joint and injury to the womb cause by leaping from a second story window

“I am . . . at a loss to account for their extreme barbarity to negroes,” he concluded, “most of whom were living on the plantation where they had been born, peacefully tilling the ground for their support, which their masters by deserting had denied them, and who were not even remotely connected with the hated Yankee.” In reporting his attack on the plantation, however, the Confederate commander made very clear why he had targeted it. “The fine condition of the planted crops indicates conclusively, the direction of the negroes by some white person or persons.” As slaves could not possibly carry on the complex operations required to maintain a plantation without white direction, he thought it self-evident that they must be in collusion with Federal coastal forces.³¹

Though the Hutchinson’s Island slaves were not working under military supervision, events there demonstrated the antipathy Confederates felt for slaves who actually did. When panic-stricken plantation owners fled the Sea Islands along the South Carolina coast in late 1861, they left behind nearly 10,000 enslaved people to fend for

³¹ Lieut. W.T. Truxton to Flag Officer S.F. Du Pont, 13 June 1862, in Berlin, *Freedom*, “The Destruction of Slavery,” 125-127; Major R.J. Jeffords to Lt. E.H. Barnwell, 14 June 1862, in Berlin, *Freedom*, *Ibid.*, 128.

themselves. Assisted by Northern abolitionist organizations, missionaries, and the military, they eventually created a self-sufficient society on the lands abandoned by their former masters. Remaining at their homes, however, only exposed them to Confederate reprisals for cooperating with Union authorities. General Rufus Saxton, who supervised operations, warned his superiors of the risks. “The people suffer greatly from fear of attack by their rebel masters,” he reported “in the event of which they expect no mercy at their hands.” Should the military ever be forced to abandon the area, he insisted, thousands of laborers would also require evacuation. To leave them behind was tantamount to a death sentence. “A few rebels have already landed, with the intention, it has been reliably ascertained, of slaughtering every man, woman, and child on the island.”³²

Many raids were in fact attempts to recapture slaves, rather than exterminate them, but the raiders were not inclined to handle the wayward property with kid gloves. In late June 1863, a combined force of some 4,500 Texans and Louisianans struck plantations along the Mississippi River in an attempt to relieve the besieged city of Vicksburg and secure liberated slaves. They failed in the former endeavor, but managed to secure 1,200 slaves in addition to putting dozens of plantations to the torch. Union authorities later discovered the charred remains of several blacks who had failed to escape the conflagrations. “No doubt they were the sick negroes whom the unscrupulous enemy were too indifferent to move,” surmised an officer in the aftermath. “I witnessed five such spectacles myself in passing the remains of three plantations that lay in our line of march and do not doubt there were many others on the 20 or more plantations that I did not visit which were burned in like manner.”³³

Such scenes occurred throughout the South, demonstrating the resources the military was willing to expend not only in retrieving liberated or fugitive slaves, but in exacting retribution.

Perhaps inevitably, the military was called upon to act in a more official capacity. In April 1862, five Florida slaves stood trial before a military court in Pensacola for violation of the articles of war, charged with the military crime of

³² Rufus Saxton to Secretary of War Edwin Stanton, 14 August 1862, *OR*, Ser. 1, Vol. 14, 374-376. On the Sea Island operations see Willie Lee Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction: The Port Royal Experiment*, (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1964).

³³ Marine Brigadier-General Alfred W. Ellet to Admiral David Porter, 3 July 1863, *ORN*, Ser. 1, Vol. 25, 215-216.

“conveying information which would prove useful to the enemy,” Their only provable offense, however, seemed to be that they had attempted to flee to enemy lines. Tellingly, the mission of the court, as stated by the officer presiding, was not to determine guilt or innocence, but “whether these slaves could be held longer as property without danger to the public, or whether they should be destroyed.” With the humanity of the accused neatly set aside, the court sentenced two of them to be hanged while condemning the rest to fifty lashes each – the total amount permitted under the articles of war. The legality of the trial did not go unquestioned, however. The owner considered the verdict to be a usurpation of his authority as master, and scathingly denounced the court’s decision to act *in loco parentis*. “Who ever heard before of a negro slave being arregned before a court martial for a violation of the Articles of war?” he demanded. “The idea is absurd and the very consummation of folly.” Higher authorities apparently agreed, though the ultimate fate of the condemned remains unclear. In contrast to the Florida slaveholder, in August 1862 a group of Georgians begged a district commander to help them stem what seemed to be quickly turning into a flood of runaways. Under civil law, they complained, they could not legally execute captured slaves without first obtaining authorization from the courts. Unwilling to indulge in vigilantism, and wanting to make immediate examples of the offenders, they asked if the guilty parties might be treated as traitors and spies under military law. In effect, they argued that in time of war the act of flight constituted a public, rather than a private offense and therefore demanded government intervention. The commander, though sympathizing with their plight, declined to do their dirty work: “[T]he responsibility of life & death, so liable to be abused,” he cautioned, “is obviously too great to be entrusted to the hands of every officer, whose duties may bring him face to face with this question.”³⁴

Though top military authorities balked at executing absconding slaves, local commanders were quite willing to entrust themselves with the matter, issuing orders to shoot any black person, free or slave, who attempted to cross into enemy lines unless they immediately obeyed orders to halt. Southern volunteers were also willing to act on their

³⁴ For the proceedings of the court-martial, see Berlin, *Freedom*, “The Destruction of Slavery,” 785-794. Quotes are from pages 791, 794: Colonel Thomas M. Jones to General Samuel Cooper, 12 April 1862, and Jackson Morton to Hon. A.E. Maxwell, 17 April 1862; R.Q. Mallard, et. al. to General H.W. Mercer, enclosed in letter from H.W. Mercer to Secretary of War George W. Randolph, 5 August 1862, *OR*, Ser. 4, Vol. 2, 35-38.

own accord. "I was out after a runaway negro who had stolen a horse from the camp," wrote one Texan to his family. "We shot at him eight times but I do not know weather we hit him or not as it was in the knight. have got the horse, but the negro got away." Whether the runaway was first ordered to "halt" was left unstated, but given the sentiment of Confederate volunteers by mid-1863, one suspects the warning was seldom issued. "The rebels at this time were very rough," recalled a former Virginia slave who accompanied his master into the army, "swearing and cursing at every Negro they thought would be glad to leave them to go to the Yankees." He recounted an incident in which a rebel patrol, discovering several black laborers among a squad of captured Union soldiers, nearly executed them on the spot. They were spared only after convincing their captors that they had been taken against their will. So excused, their disappearance a short time later sent the Confederates into a fury with declarations that "they would never let another 'nigger' go who had once been with the Yankees."³⁵

Whether or not the opportunity to act on their promise ever materialized, there is no reason to doubt their sincerity. As the actions of other Confederates makes clear, their sentiments were widely shared. Though the exact fate of the refugees abandoned at Ebenezer Creek remains uncertain, there is no shortage of evidence concerning those captured at Marks's Mills, Arkansas in the spring of 1864. On April 25, a Confederate force attacked a Federal supply column consisting of 240 wagons and a military escort of approximately 1700 men. Also in the train were a number of black teamsters, plus some 300 runaway slaves who had joined en route. The Southern assault devastated the column, and 150 of the refugees were taken prisoner. Witnesses left little doubt as to what happened to the remainder. "There was not an armed negro with us," reported an Iowa volunteer captured during the battle, "[but] they shot down our Colored servents & teamsters & others what ware following to get from bondage as they would shoot sheep dogs. . . . I saw perhaps 30 [dead], & the Rebs pointed out to me a point of woods where they told me they had killed eighty odd negroes men women & children." A Confederate officer corroborated the report, stating that the refugees in the column, "impressed or

³⁵ See General Orders No. 4, issued by General Daniel Ruggles, 4 July 1862, *OR*, Ser. 1, Vol. 17, Pt. 2, 638; W.W. Bradley to "Dear Wife," 6 September 1862, <<http://truit.home.texas.net/WWBradley.htm>>; Willard B. Gatewood, ed., *Slave and Freeman, the Autobiography of George L. Knox*, (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1979), 51-52.

seduced” from nearby plantations, were shown little mercy. “No orders, threats or commands could restrain the men from vengeance on the negroes,” he recalled, “and they were piled up in great heaps about the wagons” Of those who escaped, many were later captured by local white civilians and resold into slavery in Texas.³⁶

It is a truism that armies tend to represent the societies from whence they originated. At the battle at Marks’s Mills, Confederates played the part of the slave patrol writ large. There, as with other actions taken against African-American noncombatants, Southern volunteers acted not as soldiers, but as white masters in a system of racial slavery. As one soldier rationalized of a massacre which occurred at Poison Springs, Arkansas, in killing blacks the army had simply taken the necessary action to deter further flight. “Our men is determine[d] not to take negro prisoners,” he explained, “and if all the Negroes could have seen what occurred that day, they would stay at home.” More importantly, the violence brought about by war chipped away at some of the major tenets of racial slavery. As Confederate volunteers increasingly found themselves involved in pursuing and punishing runaways, it became ever more difficult for them to sustain the image of the happy, contented slave. The image died hard, however, serving as it did as one of the major defenses of black enslavement. When slaves unexpectedly disappeared, it was easy enough to attribute their actions to pernicious outside influences, rather than to a genuine desire to be free. Many soldiers, in fact, fervently clung to the belief, which perhaps explained their periodic willingness to accept the explanation from captured slaves that they had been “forced” to go along with the enemy. It was easier than facing the reality that, as human beings capable of free thought, slaves possessed a natural inclination to escape from bondage. In far too many instances, however, the initial disbelief gave way to a sense of betrayal. That sentiment, and the rage that often accompanied it, was an ironic and convenient acknowledgment of the basic humanity of African-Americans. The same men who insisted on describing slaves as nothing more than animal “chattel” were prepared to grant them a uniquely

³⁶ “Benjamin Pearson’s War Diary,” Part 5, *Annals of Iowa*, Vol. 15 (October 1926), 441; John N. Edwards, *Shelby and His Men: The War in the West*, (Cincinnati: Miami Printing, 1867), 277-279. For a detailed discussion of the events at Marks’s Mills, see Gregory J.W. Urwin, “‘We Cannot Treat Negroes . . . as Prisoners of War’: Racial Atrocities and Reprisals in Civil War Arkansas,” in *Black Flag over Dixie: Racial Atrocities and Reprisals in the Civil War*, Gregory J.W. Urwin, ed., (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2004), 132-152.

human ability and to punish them accordingly. Their actions exposed the ugly reality of white “paternalism,” and marked the first stage of what was increasingly turning into a brutal race war.³⁷

³⁷ [Hearn] to “Sallie,” 20 April 1864, Quoted in Urwin, “We Cannot Treat Negroes . . . as Prisoners of War,” 143.

4.5 The African American as Soldier

4.5.1 Insurrectionists in Blue

If merely running away could warrant death, the sight of armed blacks in action against the South promised to escalate racial violence an extraordinary heights. If volunteers worried that the war might encourage rebelliousness among slaves, the brash decisions of a few Union generals to emancipate and arm African Americans confirmed what many had believed from the outset: the United States aimed not only to enforce “negro equality,” but planned to do so without regard for the consequences. When Union general David Hunter began to recruit the first black units in the spring of 1862 from the slave population of South Carolina, Southerners reacted immediately and predictably. “We learn that the Federal Gen. Hunter, has organized and armed the negroes . . . for the purpose of plundering our homes and butchering our wives and children,” raged a Texas editor in early August. “We say it shall be a war of extermination to every negro taken in arms against us. . . .No man whose soul is the home of one spark of humanity, would think for a moment of arming such a class against such a people, and he who would do so, should be tortured to death and afterwards confined to the leg of Tantalus through eternity. Let every slave taken in arms against us be shot, and every white officer for them share the same fate.”¹

Though Lincoln rebuked Hunter and nullified his unauthorized emancipation of slaves in South Carolina, Georgia and Florida, the experimental “contraband” regiment was allowed to remain. His independent decision to free and arm the slaves had been premature and impolitic, but it coincided with a growing sentiment within the Lincoln administration. In September, the President himself issued a preliminary emancipation proclamation. On January 1, 1863, the administration declared all slaves residing in areas still in rebellion to be forever free, while simultaneously adopting provisions to officially recruit black regiments. What had earlier been the pet projects of a few “renegade” commanders now became official policy. The Confederate reaction to this development was predictably harsh. “It is high time to proclaim the black flag,” wrote General P.G.T. Beauregard to the Confederate Congress in October 1862. “Let the execution be with the

¹ San Antonio *Semi-Weekly News*, 11 August 1862.

garrote.” President Jefferson Davis agreed. “African slaves,” he proclaimed in December, “have not only been incited to insurrection by every license and encouragement, but numbers of them have actually been armed, for a servile war – a war in its nature far exceeding the horrors and most merciless atrocities of savages.” In order to deter the commission of such “crimes,” he ordered retributive policies of “necessary severity.” Specifically, all “slaves” taken in arms against the Confederacy, as well as white officers who might be leading them in “insurrection,” would be turned over to the various states and punished according to local law. In May 1863, the Confederate Congress ratified the policy, confirming that white officers should be treated as criminals while captured black soldiers should be turned over to state authorities. Left unsaid was that the punishment in such instances was always death.²

Despite the reflexive reaction by the Confederate government, the troublesome issue of black soldiers could not be disposed of so easily. To openly execute white officers and black soldiers invited retaliation and international condemnation, the latter which the South could ill-afford. Furthermore, not all black soldiers were slaves taken from the fields. Many were born free in the North. What was to be done with them? Though there were many Southerners who advocated a policy of extermination regardless of the consequences (as the North appeared bent on waging such a war by arming blacks in the first place), cooler heads ultimately prevailed. Secretary of War James Seddon, initially an ardent supporter of execution, at first tempered and then reversed his position. Davis himself eventually backed away from his earlier promulgation, urging the state governments to avoid public trials and executions of black soldiers. After much vacillation, the government unofficially settled on a more “moderate” three part policy: white officers leading black soldiers would not be executed, but treated as regular prisoners of war; free black men taken in uniform, though never recognized as legitimate combatants, would ostensibly be treated the same as their white counterparts; and, lastly, black soldiers determined to be former slaves would be returned to their masters.³

² Proclamation of the President, 19 May 1862, *OR*, Ser. 3, Vol. 2, 42-42; G.T. Beauregard to Hon. W. Porcher Miles, 13 October 1862, *OR*, Ser. 2, Vol. 4, 916; *OR*, Ser. 1, Vol. 15, 906-908; *OR*, Ser. 2, Vol. 5, 940-941.

³ James A. Seddon to General P.G.T. Beauregard, 30 November 1862, *OR*, Ser. 2, Vol. 4, 954; James A. Seddon to General J.C. Pemberton, 8 April 1863, *OR*, Ser. 2, Vol. 5, 867; *OR*, Ser. 2, Vol. 6, 245-246;

Though fears of Federal retaliation curtailed official Confederate actions, a more crucial factor shaped their ultimate response. Not only did the capture of black soldiers result in a legal morass, but it was also tantamount to an admission of black equality. “We must sacrifice every thing rather than do it,” insisted South Carolina statesman James Henry Hammond. “That is *our point* and the cause of the War. If they hoist the Black Flag on it we must also . . . but I don’t think their men [will] stand the Black Flag as well as ours.” Despite his threat of “black flag” warfare, however, Hammond forwarded suggestions that might help to avoid it. Treating Africa-American soldiers as equals was not among them. “Any party capturing negroes should be at once court-martialed & made to prove that it could not be avoided,” he insisted. “If they cannot be killed in battle let them go clear from the fight rather than capture them.” Given the unpleasant option of either accepting African-Americans as prisoners of war and acknowledging equality or publicly executing them and inviting retaliation, Hammond suggested a way that they might skirt the issue entirely. He was not alone in his thinking. General E. Kirby Smith, commander of the Confederate Department of the Trans-Mississippi, had already laid out a similar policy. “I have been unofficially informed,” he lectured a subordinate in June 1863, “that some of your troops have captured negroes in arms. I hope this may not be so, and that your subordinates . . . may have recognized the propriety of giving no quarter to armed negroes and their officers. In this way we may be relieved from a disagreeable dilemma.” To be sure, Secretary Seddon was not of the same opinion, and “recommended” (as opposed to “ordered”) a more lenient course of action. As black soldiers were but the “deluded victims” of Yankee influence, he informed the general, “they should be received and treated with mercy and returned to their owners.” His suggestion, however, seemed more a matter of expediency than benevolent paternalism. “A few examples might perhaps be made, but to refuse them quarter would only make them, against their tendencies, fight desperately.”⁴

James A. Seddon to M.L. Bonham, Governor of South Carolina, 31 August 1864, *OR*, Ser. 2, Vol. 7, 703-704.

⁴ James Henry Hammond to Colonel A.P. Aldrich, 22 July 1863, James Henry Hammond Papers, Container 30, Reel 13, LC; Lieutenant-General E. Kirby Smith to Major-General R. Taylor, 13 June 1863, *OR*, Ser. 2, Vol. 6, 21-22; Asst. Adjutant-General H.H. Clay to E. Kirby Smith, 13 July 1863, *OR*, Ser. 2, Vol. 6, 115.

In the end, Confederate “policy” turned out to be no policy at all, and the absence of effective national leadership allowed for a wide range of latitude in how the military dealt with the issue. While political back-tracking on the issue of black soldiers allowed conscientious commanders to avoid the unpleasant prospect of playing the role of executioner, the existence of official laws to the contrary made it highly unlikely that anyone would be punished should they decide to embrace it. Commanders, and ultimately the volunteers in the field, would determine the fate of African-American soldiers.

But what did Southern soldiers, as opposed to general officers, politicians, and editors, actually think about blacks in uniform? Though they openly admitted murdering African-American soldiers, rarely did they expend much effort in explaining why they did so. For the answer, one must look not to the soldiers on the battlefield, but to the prisoners of war in the stockades. Numerous camps throughout the North relied on “second-tier” soldiers to guard the hundreds of thousands of Southern prisoners of war who passed through their gates during the conflict. These units included contingents of state guards, regiments of the Veteran Reserve Corps (comprised of disabled veterans and popularly known as the “IC” or “Invalid Corps”) and, increasingly, members of the United States Colored Troops. Much as Southerners relied on slave labor to free up white men for combat, so too did Union policy stipulate that black units be used mostly for labor and garrison troops, likewise allowing white men to tend to the actual duty of fighting. It is not at all surprising, then, that many Confederates first encountered uniformed blacks not as soldiers on the battlefield, but as guards at prison camps. The experience of Confederate prisoners under the supervision of black troops is important. Opposed to the fleeting encounter of combat, soldiers in prison had plenty of time to contemplate the nature of the guard and to brood over their situation. In their diaries, they made explicit their repugnance for both black soldiers and the fact that as prisoners they were completely at their mercy.

Constructed in the summer of 1863 to house the ballooning numbers of Confederate prisoners, the stockade at Point Lookout, Maryland, situated on the Chesapeake Bay, soon became the largest prison in the North. At war’s end, 20,000

prisoners called it home. In all, some 50,000 passed through its gates. The Confederates who resided there sometimes commented on the immensity of the camp and the enormous “tent city” that sprang up inside its walls. Their complaints were frequent and typical: skimpy rations, poor water, and inadequate shelter. The presence of black troops, however, was an especial humiliation. Their initial reaction to the discovery that the North was utilizing African-Americans as guards was generally one of surprise, disgust, and outrage. “We had a *negro guard* over us for two days, the first I ever saw,” reported one inmate in early 1864. “I was not a little amused by a bow-legged one who paraded on the beach in the rear of my quarters. He was a genuine African, and looked . . . as if he would have been more contented following the plough.” A Virginia infantryman en route to Point Lookout described one of his guards as an “odorous Congo” with a “Nubian nose” who “was as black as Mason’s ‘Challenge,’ [a period boot black] and as surly looking a dog as ever brake bread.” A Texan, too, was singularly unimpressed. “I will never forget the first day of negro guards,” he recalled. “The bulk of them were young, black, slick looking fellows, and were doubtless highly inflated with the idea that they were U.S. soldiers, had guns and were guarding white men.” A sergeant in the 59th Virginia likewise thought them “the blackest negroes I ever saw; they say we must call them ‘colored troops’ – not negroes. They resemble the *tar baby* of old that I was told about when I was a child”⁵

Southern soldiers were obviously familiar with the physical characteristics of African-Americans, and stories abound of prisoners recognizing their former slaves among the sentries. Their emphasis on the exceptional “blackness” of the guard, then, as if it were some exotic characteristic, is indeed interesting. Undoubtedly – as suggested by the referral to a guard as a “genuine African” – it was meant to underscore their uncivilized nature and, by implication, their incompetence as soldiers. Their belief in this fact is evident from descriptions of black soldiers as awkward and unwilling conscripts

⁵ For a detailed study of the camp, see James M. Bartek, “The Grand Bull Pen: Confederate Captives at Point Lookout, 1863-1865,” (MA Thesis: Youngstown State University, 2002); James Anderson to “Dear Mary,” February/March 1864, in George M. Anderson, “A Captured Confederate Officer: Nine Letters from Captain James Anderson to his Family,” *Maryland Historical Magazine*, Vo. 76, No. 1, (Spring 1981), 65; A.M. Keiley, *In Vinculis; or, The Prisoner of War*, (New York: Blelock & Co., 1866), 47; Jonathan W. Stevens, *Reminiscences of the Civil War*, (Hillsboro, TX: Hillsboro Mirror Print, 1902), 153; James T. Meade, *Journal of Prison Life*, (Torrington, CT: Rainbow Press, 1987), 13. The “tar baby” in question is a reference to the doll in the Br’er Rabbit stories.

who would have been more comfortable picking cotton than shouldering a rifle. What they saw before them was not a man fighting for his freedom, but the familiar clown-like “Sambo” attired in an ill-fitting blue uniform. “Their blue clothes,” thought one North Carolinian, “served to make them look very black and their feet were very large.” As some soldiers thought of their own slaves, the image could even generate a bit of sympathy. “One of them came up to the boys some days ago,” wrote a prisoner. “Being asked how he liked soldiering, he replied, ‘I’d rather make corn and wheat all de time dan do dis thing one time.’ They all say they have been forced into the service, and they seem very anxious to get home. I hope none of ours will ever be *forced to volunteer*.” The real culprits, according to others, were Yankees with an unnatural love for the black man who pressured him to take up arms against his master. Still, sympathy for the black guards went only so far, and more generally they viewed the sentries with a liberal dose of contempt. When a guard accidentally shot and killed a comrade, for instance, prisoners looked on with laughter as the panicked sentry accused his dead companion of “acting possum.”⁶

Though some attempted to dismiss black soldiers as nothing more than witless tools of the Federal government, it was difficult to escape the fact that when the guards were not shooting each other they were shooting prisoners. Prisoners, however, were careful to distinguish between these events. When guards shot each other they were simply incompetent ex-slaves. When they shot an inmate, it was more likely to be attributed to a malicious nature which Union authorities, if not encouraging, seemed unable to control. Here again was exposed the dual nature of the black stereotype: though “uncivilized” might refer to ineptitude, it could also refer to barbarism. In the latter case, what the prisoners faced was not an army of Sambos, but a legion of Nat Turners – still ignorant, but possessing a sadistic streak which they were now free to act

⁶ The 36th USCT, previously designated as the 2nd North Carolina Colored Regiment, drew recruits from North Carolina and Virginia, many of them former slaves. As Point Lookout held white soldiers from the same areas, a chance meeting between master and servant was not out of the question. The encounters described, however, are mostly located in post-war memoirs, and sound apocryphal. They tend to present slaves reacting in either an overly-subservient or overly-vengeful manner. James Huffman, *Ups and Downs of a Confederate Soldier*, Oscar Caperton Huffman, ed., (New York: William E. Rudge’s Sons, 1940), 92; Mark De Wolf Stevenson to son, 1907, Mark De Wolf Stevenson Letters, SHC-UNC; James Anderson to “Dear Mary,” February/March 1864, in Anderson, “A Captured Confederate Officer,” 65; Stevens, *Reminiscences*, 152-153; William Whatley Pierson, ed., *Whipt ‘em Everytime: The Diary of Bartlett Yancey Malone*, (Jackson, TN: McCowat-Mercer, 1960), 101.

upon with child-like glee. At the very least, they were guilty of the infamous crime of “insolence” against a white man. “To-day the negroes are again on guard,” commented a Virginia volunteer. “Like all the rest of these sable patriots, they seem to have exhausted the resources of darkness to form their complexions, and their conduct is as black as their skin.” He then proceeded to recount a litany of charges against the guard: “They curse and swear at the prisoners, level their guns at them, and threaten to fire, ‘jis to make de dam rebs scatter;’ will not allow a group of three to talk together, and at night bully and beat every prisoner they meet. A whisper in a tent loud enough to be heard by these patriots is a signal for their entrance, when they steal what they want, and drown remonstrance in a volley of oaths, if they are sober; and likely enough, balls, if they are drunk.” Convinced that white soldiers encouraged their audaciousness, he thought that “most of the Yankees did not disguise their delight at the insolence of these Congoes.” A North Carolinian was similarly perturbed by their behavior. “Last night will long be remembered by every poor prisoner in this Camp,” he wrote. “A prisoner dare scarcely peep out of his cabin. The negro sentries with rifles *and pistols* armed, walked the street, driving men, many sick, to their quarters at the point of the bayonet. All night long they could be heard, imperiously ordering men to halt, tell their business, &c” He, too, attributed their behavior to Northern treachery. “[W]e were at the mercy of a lawless band of U.S. negro troops, who evidently *had been taught* to talk glibly of avenging Fort Pillow.”⁷

Though these were common complaints, one suspects that prisoners protested too much. Many of the “unprovoked” shootings were, in fact, precipitated by Confederates. In their indignation at being subordinated to their “inferiors,” they often seemed to forget that armed guards demanded respect regardless of skin color. A North Carolinian, outraged at fellow prisoners who deigned to curry favor with the guard, demonstrated a mindset which all but precluded a cordial relationship. “[They] degrade themselves in conversation held daily with these negroes – some of them disgracing what little character they have left by efforts at intimacy,” he noted with disdain. “These fellows would violate the laws of North Carolina at home in every act of intercourse with

⁷ Keiley, *In Vinculis*, 70, 96; William H. Haigh to “My Dear Kate,” 27 May 1865, William H. Haigh Letters, UNC-SHC.

negroes. How can they expect the Sentry to respect them when they do not respect themselves?” Given their situation, such logic was tragically flawed. Given Southern notions as to honor and race, however, it made perfect sense: honor allowed for the surrender of arms, but not for the surrender of dignity. More importantly, cavorting with such familiarity implied equality – which bred contempt. Maintaining their comportment, then, not only preserved honor, but seemed imperative to their safety. If they defaulted on their duty, they did so at their own peril, for blacks were unlikely to respect white men who did not act like white men. “Some of our men, I am ashamed to say, joke and talk to [the guards] as equals,” complained another. The breach of etiquette, he observed, resulted in foreseeable consequences, with “the negroes cursing them when they choose.”⁸

As in civilian society, honor could best be maintained through the dishonoring of blacks. In a prison setting where African-Americans were granted a degree of legitimate power, however, the process was accompanied by a sense of urgency. Hence, while many prisoners contented themselves with rebuking and shaming comrades who dared to chat with the guards, others targeted the source, seldom missing an opportunity to humiliate and mock. A prisoner-turned-artist, in depicting the above mentioned accidental shooting of a sentry by a comrade, attributed words to the guard which, significantly, fit into an honor-shame schema. “Git up Abram and don’t make a fool of yourself,” the shooter purportedly pleaded of his dying friend, “don’t you see de white folk’s laughing at you[?]” Whether he ever actually uttered those words is unknowable, and though they may or may not speak to African-American notions of honor, they undoubtedly speak to those of white Southerners. The guard’s imputed remonstrance that the “white folks” were laughing affirmed for the prisoners that he understood the tenets of honor and shame. While they were certainly gratified by the display of “imbecility,” knowing that the hapless guard fully appreciated his humiliation would have made their sense of satisfaction that much sweeter. For the less artistic, physical denigration would have to suffice. On that front, prisoners quarreled with the sentries, disregarded their commands, spitefully defecated in the camp streets, stole their equipment and knapsacks

⁸ William H. Haigh to “My Dear Kate,” 29 May 1865, William H. Haigh Letters, UNC-SHC; Meade, *Journal of Prison Life*, 13.

when the opportunity presented itself, and otherwise sought to challenge or undermine their authority. They even engaged in outright assault, hurling rocks at guards under the cover of darkness.⁹

When the inevitable reprisals came, prisoners were quick to point to them as yet further examples of why placing blacks in uniform was a terrible mistake. Not only were they awkward and ignorant, they also lacked restraint. “The Negro brutes who guard us, wantonly insult our soldiers & beat & bayonet them without cause,” complained a Louisiana officer to the camp commandant. “The inhuman creatures whom you have armed . . . are unrestrained either by their own inclination or by your authority.” In all likelihood, he believed both charges to be true. In Southern society, black impudence – in this case, the wearing of the white man’s uniform – demanded a severe rebuke, which, quite simply, could rarely warrant an in-kind response. In the prisoners’ view, then, the guards really did abuse them “without cause.” Following that line of reasoning, the officer insisted that it was *they* who had been provoked, and threatened to lead a revolt should authorities fail to remedy the situation. The sentiment was clearly evidenced in the universal sense of relief that pervaded the camp whenever black sentries were removed from duty. “The regiment of negroes who had been on guard were shortly removed, to our great delight,” reported one inmate. “They were relieved by the [white] invalid corps, who having seen service knew better how to treat prisoners” Perhaps, but the drop in violent altercations also had much to do with prisoners “knowing” how to treat white guards. With “the belt of darkness” removed from duty, observed another, “we had the honor to be guarded by men of another and our own color.” So convinced of the inherent savagery of blacks, prisoners could easily view their alleged misconduct as a portent of what all Southerners might expect should they be loosed upon them.¹⁰

Whatever their thoughts on the incompetence or malice of black soldiers, it is important to see that reactions of Confederate prisoners depended much less on the actions of their guard than on their mere existence. They surely recognized the irony of

⁹ Aside from the written testimony of a number of prisoners on the accidental shooting, the incident was also captured in a watercolor painting by one of the inmates, John J. Omenhausser. See, “A Sentinel accidentally shot by his companion,” 1864, *Civil War Treasures of the New-York Historical Society*, <http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/D?cwnyhs:42:/temp/~ammem_rMzB::>; *OR*, Ser. 2, Vol. 7, 164; Stevens, *Reminiscences*, 152; Huffman, *Ups and Downs*, 91-92.

¹⁰ Leeland Hathaway Recollections, UNC-SHC; Thomas Pinckney Diary, 7 June 1864, Soldier Diary Collection, MOC; Meade, *Journal of Prison Life*, 13.

their predicament, which resided not in that African-American guards swore and cursed, threatened them with firearms, beat them for insubordination, entered their quarters at random, refused to allow them to assemble in large groups, and could end their lives on a whim, for white guards were “guilty” of the same activities. This was simply the nature of the prisoner-guard relationship. Rather, the irony resided in the fact that, historically, this was just the behavior slaves could expect from masters and the dreaded slave patrollers. In a surreal twist, the powerless now wielded power absolutely, and the master race found its world turned upside-down. Their quandary was neatly captured in yet another watercolor painting by the prisoner artist who depicted an episode between an African-American guard and an inmate. The sentry, standing from a position of authority on a walkway outside the stockade, bayoneted rifle at the ready, peers down at a Confederate who has wandered too close to the stockade wall. “Git away from dat dar fence white man,” he warns, “or I’ll make Old Abe’s Gun smoke at you. I can hardly hold de ball back now.” The prisoner standing below says nothing, but the words attributed to the guard speak for him and thousands of others: ignorant slaves, armed and provoked by the North, longed for (an irrational) vengeance against their Southern oppressors. The clincher, however, is the guard’s closing taunt: “de bottom rail’s on top now.”¹¹

Whether or not the scene actually occurred is unclear and, ultimately, irrelevant. In Confederate lore, the words were so often attributed to African-Americans that they obviously held significant symbolic meaning. For volunteers engaged in a war for white supremacy, it was the ultimate disgrace – the ultimate dishonor. Imprisonment alone tended to strip them of soldierly pride, but as a key component of their identity was superiority to blacks, subjection to African-American guards was an intolerable humiliation. “I suppose the Yankees thought they would treat us with greater indignity by putting a negro guard over us,” conjectured a Virginia trooper, “but out boys very wisely dissembled everything like mortification at it, and pretended to be delighted, saying they infinitely preferred negroes to Yankees.” Nonetheless, maintaining composure in the face of such an insult proved difficult. The words of a Louisiana

¹¹ Huffman, *Ups and Downs*, 92; John J. Omenhausser, “Guard challenging prisoner,” 1864, *Civil War Treasures of the New-York Historical Society*, <[273](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/D?cwnyhs:16:./temp/~ammem_hfXl::></p></div><div data-bbox=)

infantryman barely concealed a simmering rage. “Black Moke’s on guard,” he fumed. “Humiliating to have black Corn field mokes over us. Not content but must parade the streets, to tantalize our men, to insult them, having recd order to shoot us down like dogs if we spoke a word.” The abuse was bad enough; that African-Americans, in the eyes of Confederates, also insisted on “tantalizing” the men by asserting their equality was worse. Unable to physically counter this threat to manhood and honor (rock throwing excepted), it is hardly surprising that they indulged in violent fantasies of revenge. “We could and would freely endure it all,” insisted a Texan, “if we could just see [General John Bell] Hood’s Texas Brigade get hold of them one time.”¹²

It is doubtful that any of the prisoners who suffered the “outrage” of being placed under African-American guards at Point Lookout ever received the opportunity to seek retribution for the insult. In refusing to treat black soldiers as legitimate prisoners of war, the Confederate government ensured the collapse of the exchange cartel in 1863. As a result, most Southerners taken captive in late 1863 and 1864 remained incarcerated through the duration of the war. Nevertheless, the feelings of these prisoners undoubtedly reflected those of hundreds of thousands of men in the field. Further, it is apparent from the statements of the Point Lookout prisoners that the issue of race intermingled with issues of honor, power, and masculinity. This in turn explains the complex of emotions felt toward blacks, including pity, contempt, and fear. The overarching emotion, however, continued to be one of rage: rage that the unscrupulous Yankee dared to use the black man against them, rage that blacks themselves had “betrayed” their masters, and rage that blacks would pretend to be the white man’s equal (thereby denigrating him) by donning a uniform. Unhindered by stockade walls, they were free to set the matter straight. As one Southern volunteer made clear: “I hope I may never meet a negro soldier or I cannot be . . . a Christian soldier.”¹³

¹² James Anderson to “Dear Mary,” February/March 1864, in Anderson, “A Captured Confederate Officer,” 65; John F. Charlton Diary, 25 February 1864, Soldier Diary Collection, MOC; Stevens, *Reminiscences*, 153-154.

¹³ Jerome B. Yates to “Mother,” 10 August 1864, quoted in Burkhardt, *Confederate Rage, Yankee Wrath*, 40.

4.5.2 “Our Troops Understand What to Do”

“The Yankees are not going to send their negro troops in the field,” reported the Richmond *Enquirer* on the prospect of uniformed blacks fighting against the Confederacy. They might be used as depot or prison guards, speculated the paper, but surely Northerners could not be so obtuse as to miss the consequences of placing them in combat. “Should they be sent to the field, and be put in battle, none will be taken prisoners – our troops understand what to do in such cases.” Indeed, many of them did. “Report says there’s a considerable force of nigro soldiers on the opposite bank of the Chickahominy [River],” noted a South Carolina cavalryman in mid-1864. “Oh! if we could only get at them – no prisoners from those ranks.”¹⁴

Events proved these were not idle threats, but statements of unofficial policy. On March 9, 1864, a North Carolina volunteer reported on actions around Suffolk, Virginia in which his comrades encountered black soldiers for the first time. “[They] killed a bout thirty negroes but took no prisoners,” he wrote to his mother, “but that is something that our souldiers are apt not to do to take any negro souldiers.” A rebel sergeant who participated in the battle added a bit more detail: “We . . . got into a fight with a negro Regiment, several of them were killed, several taken prisoner & afterwards either bayoneted or burnt; the men were perfectly exasperated at the idea of negroes opposed to them and & rushed at them like so many devils.” Two months later, troopers in the 9th Virginia, while engaged in picking up stragglers from Grant’s army, captured a squad of black soldiers near Germanna Ford. It was a minor affair, and the surprised troops were taken without a fight. A soldier recounted their fate matter-of-factly: “They were taken out on the road side and shot, & their bodies left there.”¹⁵

And so it continued. As with their imprisoned comrades, volunteers in the field were at once surprised and infuriated by the sight of black soldiers in uniform, as it threatened everything for which the Confederacy stood. In countless small-scale engagements, Southern volunteers indicated their willingness to dispatch captured black

¹⁴ Richmond *Enquirer*, quoted in Frank Moore, ed., *The Rebellion Record: A Diary of American Events*, (New York: D. Van Nostrand, 1865), Vol. 8, 22; Elliot Stephen Welch to “Dear Mother,” 7 June 1864, Elliot Stephen Welch Papers, Duke U.

¹⁵ A. McDonald to “Dear Mother,” 9 March 1864, African American Collection, MOC; Quoted in Randall C. Jimerson, *The Private Civil War: Popular Thought during the Sectional Conflict*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1994), 114; Byrd C. Willis Diary, 7 May 1864, Soldier Diary Collection, MOC.

soldiers with little remorse. Convinced that the Northern decision to arm blacks signaled a repudiation of “civilized” warfare, they vowed to retaliate in kind. Lincoln, though prepared to emancipate, arm and set African-Americans against the South, was wholly unprepared to take the necessary steps to protect them from atrocity. To execute Confederate soldiers in retaliation for the massacre of black Federals, as official policy dictated, would surely result in a reciprocal action against white Federals. Union authorities, in response to the unlawful murder of white soldiers, were willing enough to level entire towns in retribution – one need only look to the violence in Missouri for evidence of that fact – but the country would hardly countenance the sacrifice of white soldiers to protect their black counterparts. For their part, Confederate soldiers, despite promises to execute white officers in charge of black soldiers, failed to follow through on the threats. Neither side, it seems, was willing to initiate a full-fledged war of extermination – at least not one that would engulf Anglo-Americans.

Left exposed by an administration that proved unwilling to hold the enemy accountable for their actions, black soldiers continued to suffer at the hands of Confederate volunteers. Picket line exchanges could devolve into brutish affairs. In contrast to the informal truces between Rebel and Yankee that afforded a respite from the daily grind of campaigning, Confederate troops were not inclined to extend the same courtesies to their African-American counterparts. Their very presence was enough to provoke an all-day shooting match. “Got my first view of ‘cuffee’ as a soldier on the Yankee picket line,” wrote a Virginia officer from the Petersburg trenches. “It may have been only fancy but they really seemed the blackest of all black animals I ever beheld. They were pretty impudent, flaunting their newspapers in our faces for exchange!” The cordial trade and banter that commonly occurred between white soldiers at the front vanished, replaced by an intense rage. “Strict orders were issued against firing else several of them would have gone to keep John Brown company” Such an insult, according to another, was not entirely without redress. “For a while after we came on these lines our pickets and the yankees were quite friendly,” he related. “They talked and traded with each other every day.” The mood soured, however, when black soldiers were moved to the front. “It so enraged our boys,” he continued, “that the officers could hardly keep them from firing on them as soon as they discovered negroes in their front.”

The Confederates, hoping to resolve the issue civilly, sent a dispatch to the commander of the black regiment requesting that the offending soldiers be removed – and threatened to fire upon them if they were not. Rebuffed, they carried out their threat the next morning. As scores of black troops, still believing a truce to be in effect, wandered in plain sight above the rifle pits just yards away, the rebels opened fire at a pre-arranged signal. “Hundreds of balls went whistling into the enemies ranks,” reported one, “& numbers of them were launched in eternity who but a moment before were cracking merry jokes & passing their bottles of whiskey freely one from another.” He was not entirely without remorse, for many men considered the informal trench truces sacrosanct, and while their action had not technically violated any laws, it nevertheless weighed on his conscience. “It made me feel very bad indeed,” he admitted. “It looks much like cold murder” What made the affair so unusual, however, were not this soldier’s moral qualms, but the warning that had been given. In most instances, Confederates dispensed with such civilities and simply opened fire. It was a notorious tactic, one which wary white Northern troops, valuing their lives, learned to take into consideration. Whenever they replaced a black regiment on the line, they made certain to inform the rebels opposite them that they again faced white men.¹⁶

As suggested by the above exchanges, a thin line separated legitimate combat actions from “murder” in violation of the laws of war. In many cases, Confederates took advantage of this ambiguity to dispatch troublesome black prisoners. In August 1863, for example, a Union commander at Port Hudson, Louisiana received word that Confederates had hanged two black soldiers after they had been captured, and threatened to retaliate against rebel captives. The rebel commander simply denied the charge, promising to retaliate in turn should any Confederates be harmed. Unwilling to act without conclusive evidence of wrong-doing, Union authorities let the matter drop. A similar incident occurred shortly thereafter near the town of Jackson. In a skirmish with Federal troops, Confederate cavalry captured several black soldiers and marched them toward their camp. They never arrived. “On the rout back,” reported the commanding officer, “four of the Negroes attempted to escape. I ordered the guard to shoot them down. In the

¹⁶ James Thomas Perry Diary, 28 November, 24 December 1864, James Thomas Perry Papers, VHS; Edmund Fitzgerald Stone to “Dear Uncle,” 7 December 1864, Edmund Fitzgerald Stone Papers, VHS.

confusion the other Negroes attempted to escape likewise. I then ordered every one shot, and with my six shooter I assisted in the execution of the order. I believe few escaped, most of them being killed instantly.” In relaying the incident to superiors, he was careful to note that there were no “Federal prisoners with the negroes.” Nevertheless, in reviewing the details of the “escape,” a suspicious officer concluded that the prisoners had in fact been summarily executed. Even so, higher authorities were not inclined to press the issue. General Stephen D. Lee, to whom the matter was ultimately referred, responded decisively: “Do not consider it to the interests of the service that this matter be further investigated at present”¹⁷

In the heat of battle, separating legitimate combat deaths from atrocity was nearly impossible – a fact that volunteers and commanders well understood. At the battles of Poison Springs (Arkansas), Saltville (Virginia), and Plymouth (North Carolina), rebel soldiers fought ferociously against black adversaries, refusing to grant quarter while the battles raged. During the battle of Olustee, Florida on February 20, 1864, one Georgia volunteer described with satisfaction the performance of his comrades. “We walked over many a woolly head as we drove them back,” he informed his mother. “They would beg and pray but it did no good.” Though he exhibited a distasteful pleasure in the killing of blacks, it was difficult to fault soldiers for refusing to take prisoners in the midst of a fight. The killing, however, continued well after Federal forces had been driven from the field. In surveying the aftermath, a Georgia trooper heard persistent firing from every direction, so much so that he believed the fight was being renewed. Alarmed, he asked a nearby officer what was occurring. “Shooting niggers Sir,” came the reply. “I have tried to make the boys desist but I can’t control them.” Union sources, too, reported that Confederates dispatched many wounded blacks with a shot to the head, while others roamed the field with wood knots and clubbed them to death. A slave-owning captain in the 2nd Florida Cavalry, in summing up the punishment his compatriots meted out to the

¹⁷ General George L. Andrews to General J.L Logan, 5 August 1863, *OR*, Ser. 2, Vol. 6, 177-178; J.L. Logan to George L. Andrews, 8 August 1863, *OR*, Ser. 2, Vol. 6, 189; George L. Andrews to Major G.N. Lieber, 14 September 1863, *OR*, Ser. 2, Vol. 6, 288-289; Colonel Frank Powers to J.L. Logan, 2 September 1863, *OR*, Ser. 2, Vol. 6, 259; J.L. Logan to B.S. Ewell, 3 September 1863, *OR*, Ser. 2, Vol. 6, 258; Major-General S.D. Lee, 17 September 1863, *Ibid*.

black soldiers, instructed his wife thusly: “Tell the negroes if they could see how the [Union] negroes were treated I think it would cure them of all desire to go.”¹⁸

Undoubtedly the most notorious example of Confederate brutality in relation to African-Americans occurred during the “battle” at Fort Pillow in April 1864. The fort, which overlooked the Mississippi River in western Tennessee, was garrisoned by elements of the 13th Tennessee Cavalry (US), as well as two black artillery regiments. All told, some 295 white and 262 black troops resided behind its earthen walls. On April 12, Confederate General Nathan Bedford Forrest surrounded it with a force of at least 1500 troopers, demanding its unconditional surrender. “Should my demand be refused,” he warned, “I cannot be responsible for the fate of your command.” After an initial delay, he received Major William F. Bradford’s succinct reply: “I will not surrender.” Rebuffed, Forest ordered his men to attack, and they overran the fort’s defenders in a matter of minutes.¹⁹

It became immediately apparent that they were not inclined to take prisoners. The 13th Tennessee, comprised of Southern Unionists and deserters from Forrest’s command, naturally won little mercy, but once again the African-American troops were the primary targets of Confederate bloodlust. Survivors maintained that his troopers had rushed forward with cries of “No quarter,” “Kill all the niggers,” and, tellingly, “Damn you, you are fighting against your master.” The black artillerists suffered accordingly. For at least half an hour after the first Union soldiers had attempted to surrender an unadulterated pogrom occurred within the confines of the fort. Forrest’s men shot down white and black alike, chased many into the river where they subsequently drowned, and executed the wounded who had been brought into the hospitals. There was then, and still remains,

¹⁸ Henry Shackelford to “My Dear Mother,” (20 February 1864), published in the Atlanta *Intelligencer*, 2 March 1864, <<http://www.battleofolustee.org/letters/hshackelford.html>>; William Penniman reminiscences, and Winston Stephens to Octavia Stephens, 21 February 1864, both located in David J. Coles’s excellent overview of the racial component of the battle, “Shooting Niggers Sir’: Confederate Mistreatment of Union Black Soldiers at the Battle of Olustee,” in *Black Flag Over Dixie*, 65-88. Quotes are from pages 74, 75.

¹⁹ N.B. Forrest to Major L.F. Booth, 12 April 1864, *OR*, Ser. 1, Vol. 32, Pt. 1, 596; Major L.F. Booth to N.B. Forrest, *Ibid.*, 597. Booth had actually been killed by one of Forrest’s snipers. Bradford, the second-in-command, not wishing to divulge this fact to his enemy, signed off with his deceased commander’s signature. On the massacre itself, see Albert Castel, “The Fort Pillow Massacre: A Fresh Examination of the Evidence,” *Civil War History*, Vol. 4 (March 1958), reprinted in *Black Flag Over Dixie*, 89-103; Burkhardt, *Confederate Rage, Yankee Wrath*, 105-117; and Andrew Ward, *River Run Red: The Fort Pillow Massacre in the American Civil War*, (New York: Viking, 2005).

some contention as to Forrest's role in the battle. Apologists insist that he never ordered a massacre, and that his men – if indeed they had committed such deeds – acted on their own accord. A sergeant in the 20th Tennessee Cavalry, however, implied that they acted with their commander's express approval. "I with several of the others tried to stop the butchery and at one time had partially succeeded," he wrote, "but Gen. Forrest ordered them shot down like dogs and the carnage continued." The issue was moot, of course, for Forrest's troopers hardly needed his approval to kill blacks.²⁰

The casualty reports from the battle were startling. Of the more than 550 Union soldiers involved, 231 had been reported killed, with another hundred or so seriously wounded. The rebels took 168 white prisoners, compared to only 58 blacks. All told at least 200 of the 262 black artillerists died. Southern losses were unsurprisingly light, amounting to only 14 killed and some 80 wounded. The incident garnered national attention, sparked a Congressional inquiry, and sealed the reputation of Southerners in the eyes of Northerners as fiendish brutes. For African-American soldiers, however, the massacre drove home a different message: their enemies were not liable to respect them, and their allies could not protect them.²¹

Accordingly, black soldiers increasingly demonstrated a willingness to match Confederate atrocities, solidifying a trend that had begun to take shape even before the outrage of Fort Pillow. In May 1863, an officer in the 8th Louisiana Infantry (African Descent), receiving reports of Confederate cavalry in the regiment's vicinity, doubted that the rebels would risk an attack. "If they do," he asserted, "us or them will suffer. If we whip them, I do not believe we can keep the negroes from murdering everything they

²⁰ For the various shouts of the attacking Confederates, see U.S. Congress, Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War, *Fort Pillow Massacre*, 38th Congress, 1st Session, 1864, House of Representatives, Report No. 65, testimony of Manuel Nichols, private, company B, 6th United States heavy artillery, 21; testimony of Major Williams, private, company B, 6th United States heavy artillery, 27; and testimony of Arthur Edwards, private, company C, 6th United States heavy artillery, 22; Sergeant Achilles V. Clark, quoted in Robert Selph Henry, *First with the Most*, (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1944), 264; Controversy surrounded the Fort Pillow incident from the start. Southerners largely denied (and many continue to do so) that a massacre had occurred. The Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War which carried out its own investigation, however, was clearly interested not just in establishing that a massacre had occurred, but that the Confederates had perpetrated crimes of an unprecedented barbarity. See Derek W. Frisby, "Remember Fort Pillow!": Politics, Atrocity Propaganda, and the Evolution of Hard War, in *Black Flag Over Dixie*, 104-131; John Cimprich, *Fort Pillow, a Civil War Massacre, and Public Memory*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005), especially chapter six, and Paul Ashdown and Edward Caudill, *The Myth of Nathan Bedford Forrest*, (Lanham MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006).

²¹ Casualty figures from Castel, "The Fort Pillow Massacre," 97; Burkhardt, *Confederate Rage*, 116-117.

come to . . .” On April 30, 1864, black soldiers from the 2nd Kansas, in retaliation for an earlier massacre at Poison Springs, executed wounded rebels at Jenkins’s Ferry, Arkansas, cutting their throats and braining them with muskets. It was the massacre at Fort Pillow, however, and the national attention it received, which served to galvanize black troops everywhere. As a symbol of Southern brutality, they adopted “Fort Pillow” as a rallying cry and declaration of no quarter warfare. In May 1864, a Pennsylvania trooper reported on the behavior of black soldiers who went into action during the Battle of the Wilderness in Virginia. “They pitched right in telling the rebs to remember fort pillow,” he maintained. “i believe they did not take any prisoners.” A volunteer in the 10th Vermont confirmed the report. “They had in Big letters on their flag remember Fort Pillow, no quarter” he wrote. “When they came on to A wounded reb they knocked his brains out with the butts of their Guns that is the way Johnnys are getting their pay.” A month later, across the Appalachian Mountains in Tennessee, an Illinois volunteer noted that in the wake of Fort Pillow, “the Colored troops in this Dept have taken a solemn oath never to take prisoners, but kill them as fast as they can get hold of them. I do not blame them much for they have been treated shamefully, the last few months.”²²

White commanders struggled to control the passions of their men. Because they shared the same risks, however, they naturally empathized with them. Consequently, though they ostensibly condemned such savage retaliation, they often seemed to excuse it – if not outright endorse it. “The cruelty of Fort Pillow is reacting on the rebels, for now they dread the darkies more than white troops,” wrote an officer in the 5th Massachusetts Cavalry. “They know that if they will fight the rebels cannot expect quarter.” Should they murder a few prisoners “it is to be lamented and stopped, but they can hardly be blamed.” One officer reported that his men, after cornering ten Confederates in battle, promptly shot five of them down. “Had it not been for Ft. Pillow, those 5 men might be alive now,” he remarked. “It looks hard but we cannot blame these men much.”²³

²² William Moore Parkinson to “My Wife,” 17 May 1863, William Moore Parkinson Letters, <<http://www.geocities.com/cindyparkinson/page90t.html>>; Urwin, “We Cannot Treat Negroes . . . as Prisoners of War,” 144-145; William H. Martin to wife, 14 May 1864, Harrisburg Civil War Round Table Collection, USMHI; Austin Fenn to wife, 14 May 1864, in John F. Schmutz, *The Battle of the Crater: A Complete History*, (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2009), 254; Adolphus P. Wolf to Parents, 25 June 1864, Civil War Times Illustrated Collection, USMHI.

²³ Charles Francis Adams, Jr. to father, 19 June 1864, in *A Cycle of Adams Letters, 1861-1865*, Vol. 2, 154; Charles Augustus Hill to wife, 6 May 1864, in Glatthaar, *Forged in Battle*, 157.

In April 1865, African-Americans soldiers perpetrated a Fort Pillow-like massacre of their own at Fort Blakely, Alabama. In the assault on the Confederate stronghold, which involved nine USCT regiments – some 6,000 men – they charged without orders, overrunning the Southern breastworks in short order. Panicked rebels fled for their lives: some toward the nearby Tensaw River, where many reportedly drowned or were picked off from shore; others toward the white Union regiments, where they hoped their surrender would be accepted. “As soon as our niggers caught sight of the retreating figures of the rebs, the very devil could not hold them,” reported an officer in the 51st USCT. “The niggers did not take a prisoner. They killed all they took to a man.” White officers who attempted to intervene were shot by their own men, and those Southerners who had managed to escape to the safety of the white regiments had to be closely guarded for their own protection. “They continued to shoot our men down, shooting between or over the heads of the guards,” insisted a Floridian who had been among the captives. One soldier seemed especially intent on killing him, forcing him to duck and dodge to keep the guard between himself and his would-be executioner. “At that time a white officer appeared and seeing on his hat [a Mason’s emblem], I gave him a sign which brought him to my side,” he wrote. “I pointed out the negro and asked him to please not let him kill me as I had fought like a man, surrendered like a man, and would like to be treated like a man.” The officer, taking mercy on a fellow Mason, cracked the perpetrator on the head with the butt of his pistol. The prisoner survived to write of his brush with death, likely never recognizing the irony of his plea “to be treated like a man.”²⁴

The murderous war between Confederates and African-Americans did not occur in a vacuum, and the violence and hatred inevitably spilled over into the Anglo world of “civilized” warfare. White officers, of course, were especial targets of Southern wrath because of their association with black troops, but so too were soldiers in white regiments who, through no choice of their own, happened to serve alongside them. The Tennessee Unionists at Fort Pillow surely suffered because they decided to wear a blue uniform, but

²⁴ Walter A. Chapman to parents, 11 April 1865, in Burkhardt, *Confederate Rage, Yankee Wrath*, 38, Ben H. Bounds Memoir, Civil War Miscellaneous Collection, USMHI; For overviews of the Mobile campaign and the assault on Fort Blakely, see Arthur W. Bergeron, *Confederate Mobile*, (Oxford: University Press of Mississippi, 1991), and Sean Michael O’Brien, *Mobile, 1865: Last Stand of the Confederacy*, (Westport, CT: Praeger Trade, 2001).

also because of their proximity to African-Americans. They were political traitors, true, but more egregiously they were race traitors. A civilian photographer from Minnesota, caught up in the Federal rout, made plain the source of Confederate outrage. Tumbling down the river bank, he and a trooper from the 13th Tennessee took shelter behind a log as Forrest's men went about their business of butchery. "One of them soon came to where I was laying with one of 'Co. C' boys," he wrote to his parents. "He pulled out his revolver and shot the soldier right in the head scattering the blood & brains in my face, & then putting his revolver right against my breast he said 'You'll fight with the niggers again will you? You d—d yankee,' and he snapped his revolver, but she wouldn't go off" An empty cylinder had granted him a moment's reprieve – long enough for the rebel trooper to realize he had captured a civilian. The photographer was handled roughly and stripped of his possessions, but his life was spared. Others, such as his unfortunate shelter-mate, did not fair as well. A soldier in the 6th Heavy Artillery (Colored), after being wounded in the battle, was shot a second time by Confederates as he lay prostrate in a makeshift hospital. Apparently feigning death, he listened as the rebels administered a racial litmus test to the white soldiers next to him. "They said, 'Do you fight with these God damned niggers?' they said, 'Yes.' Then they said, 'God damn you, then, we will shoot you,' and they shot one of them right down," he testified. "They said, 'I would not kill you, but, God damn you, you fight with these damned niggers, and we will kill you;' and they blew his brains out of his head."²⁵

The implications of Union soldiers being murdered not for serving *with* black soldiers, but merely because of their presence were, of course, far-reaching and grave. Carried to its logical conclusion, it would be easy to assume that all Northern troops, because their government countenanced the arming of blacks, might be punished likewise. President Davis had, in fact, implied just that thing when he denounced the decision to arm blacks as a "criminal" attempt to incite servile insurrection, impugning the United States for violating the laws of war. Some considered the formal adoption of such tactics a grand idea. "Repeat Fort Pillow. Repeat Plymouth a few times and we

²⁵ Charles Robinson to "Dear Folks at Home," 17 April 1864, in "Fort Pillow 'Massacre': Observations of a Minnesotan," ed. George Bodnia, *Minnesota History*, Vol. 43, No. 5 (Spring 1973), 188-189; Testimony of Eli Carlton, private, Company B, 6th United States Heavy Artillery, 22 April 1864, U.S. Congress, Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War, *Fort Pillow Massacre*, 38th Congress, 1st Session, 1864, House of Representatives, Report No. 65, 28-29.

shall bring the Yankees to their senses,” insisted a Virginia volunteer. Bringing Yankees to their “senses” was also the theme of a Southern war poet who interpreted Fort Pillow as punishment for a litany of Northern crimes – including the arming of African-Americans:

With deadly rifle, sharpened brand,
A week ago, upon my steed,
With Forrest and his warrior band,
I made the hell-hounds writhe and bleed.

My right arm bared for fiercer play,
The left one held the rein in slack,
In all the fury of the fray
I sought the white man, *not the black*.²⁶

The foreseeable upshot of a racial policy which all but guaranteed the deaths of white troops was that Union soldiers who served in close coordination with black units fought with a renewed if desperate determination. In late September 1864, a volunteer in the 34th New Jersey wrote of an “excitement” in their camp near Mayfield, Kentucky. Rumors located General Forrest within fifteen miles, and he lent them enough credence to make necessary “arrangements.” “if Enything Should Happen My Money is in Paducah,” he instructed his brother. “we have 1200 men hear at this Post & we will Give them a warm reseption before we leave Eny How. it is fight until Death with me as well as many others that is hear. [The men] have Enlisted under the Blk Flag they ask no Qrts & Give none.” The Confederate way of war, however, also redounded upon rebel troops in perhaps unforeseen ways, for African-American soldiers, they soon discovered, did not hold a monopoly on retaliation. If Confederates would murder whites for acting in conjunction with black soldiers, white Union troops – despite their own antipathies – sometimes exacted revenge for the mistreatment of blacks. Wisconsin volunteers, for example, after charging and capturing a trench at Resaca, Georgia in May 1864, refused to grant quarter to its occupants. “Twenty-three of the rebs surrendered,” reported one of the executioners, “but the boys asked them if they remembered Fort Pillow and killed all

²⁶ Basil Lanneau Gildersleeve, *Richmond Examiner* editorial, 18 April 1864, in *Soldier and Scholar: Basil Lanneau Gildersleeve and the Civil War*, ed. Ward W. Briggs, (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1998), 303; James R. Randall, “At Fort Pillow,” in *The Southern Poems of the War*, ed. Emily V. Mason, (Baltimore: John Murphy & Co., 1868), 230-232. Randall was the author of, among other things, the decidedly pro-Southern ballad, “My Maryland.”

of them. Where there is no officer with us, we take no prisoners. . . .We want revenge for our brother soldiers and will have it.”²⁷

In the shadow of Fort Pillow, seemingly unconnected to the grander issues of Union and secession, a race war raged. More than a freakish and brutal sideshow, it in fact pointed to an issue of central importance, at once the *sine qua non* of the war and the *raison d'être* of the Confederacy: the fanatical Southern desire to deny the humanity of African-Americans. Though initiated by Confederates, the conflict quickly took on a life of its own, defying all attempts to control it. Whites slaughtered blacks and blacks butchered whites resulting in a dynamic, expansive, self-perpetuating cycle of violence. Each side, fearing the worst and utterly contemptuous of their enemy, refused to be captured by or grant quarter to the other. Confederates, of course, used the Fort Pillow phenomenon as further justification for their own no quarter tendencies. On May 17, 1864 – a month after the massacre – an officer in the 29th Iowa wondered where it all might end. “The ‘rebs’ appear to be determined to show no quarter to Black troops or officers commanding them,” he observed. “It would not surprise me in the least if this war would ultimately be one of extermination. Its tendencies are in that direction now.” Two days later, on May 19, a Mississippi volunteer related a rumor concerning the fate of a comrade captured by white Union soldiers. “The Yanks turned him over to the Negro Regt to guard, [and] the fellow was rather unruly and said he would die rather than have Negris guard him, so the infernal wretches whipped him nearly to death and then shot him,” he reported. “This is an awful consideration. I should hate very much to get into such hands” Whether or not the event actually occurred, its plausibility was all that mattered. For white Southerners, the message was clear: those who surrendered to black soldiers did so at their own risk.²⁸

4.5.3 The Crater

Shortly before 5 AM on July 30, 1864, a massive explosion rocked the Confederate lines around Petersburg. Most of the 18th South Carolina simply

²⁷ Sergeant H.A. “Hardie” Revelle to brother, 23 September 1864, Norville Hardie Revelle Letters, Filson Historical Society; John Brobst to Mary Englesby, 20 May 1864, in *Well, Mary: Civil War Letters of a Wisconsin Volunteer*, ed. Margaret B. Roth, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1960), 57.

²⁸ William Blain to “Dear Wife,” 17 May 1864, in Urwin, “We Cannot Treat Negroes . . . as Prisoners of War,” 145; John A Cato to “My Dear Wife,” 19 May 1864, Civil War Miscellaneous Collection, USMHI.

disappeared, as did portions of the 17th, 22nd, and 23rd regiments. At least 278 men had been blown to smithereens and buried under an immense shower of Virginia soil. In place of the breastworks they had so recently manned there existed only a yawning hole, 170 feet long, 60 feet wide, and 30 feet deep. The Battle of the Crater had begun.²⁹

The triggering of the mine which sent the Confederates into momentary confusion had been planned for weeks, the brainchild of a Pennsylvania colonel who commanded a regiment of coal miners-turned-soldiers. As part of a well-conceived plan to break Confederate resistance once and for all, his men dug a shaft which stretched nearly 150 yards to the Confederate earthworks, packing its terminus with four tons of powder. In the wake of its detonation, a specially trained USCT division under General Ambrose Burnside was to spearhead an attack through the rented rebel lines, supported by white troops. The plan, however, went awry before it was even implemented. General George Meade, commander of the Army of the Potomac, expressed concern over black casualties if the operation should fail. Fearing a public relations disaster, he ordered Burnside to lead the assault with white troops – a move backed by General Grant. The honor fell to Brigadier-General James H. Ledlie’s division, and the foolishness of that last minute change would soon become apparent. Not only did Ledlie sit out the battle – he was rumored to have been drunk – but he had failed to properly brief his men on its operational intricacies. Consequently, instead of charging around the crater, they dawdled inside of it, gaping at the destruction, and eventually decided to use it as a rifle pit rather than exploiting the opening it had torn in the Confederate lines. The delay allowed the Confederates time to regroup. Seizing the initiative, they began to pick away at the exposed Union soldiers. The plan was off to rocky start, but rather than canceling the attack Burnside sent forward his USCT division, which soon became hopelessly entangled with the white troops.

For the Southern volunteers, the onrush of Union soldiers made an impressive sight. “they came pouring in by Brigades Divisions yes by Corps,” a still plainly excited Virginian wrote shortly after the battle. “they came in untill the place was so thick with

²⁹ The Battle of the Crater and the racial atrocities connected with it have received considerable attention as of late. See John F. Schmutz, *The Battle of the Crater: A Complete History*, (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2009); and Richard Slotkin, *No Quarter: The Battle of the Crater, 1864*, (New York: Random House, 2009).

them that they could not do anything for being in each others way.” Some managed to eventually move beyond the crater, driving the rebels before them, but their success was short-lived. Reinforcements from Confederate General William Mahone’s division surged to the front, and there they met many of their comrades streaming toward the rear. “The boys got after them,” wrote one of Mahone’s men, “and made fun of them for leaving. They told us we had to fight ‘niggers.’” General Mahone himself allegedly attempted to rally his men on this point. An Alabamian insisted that “[he] walked in front of the lines and told us that the negroes in the Crater had hollered ‘Remember Fort Pillow! No Quarter!’ He said it was a life and death struggle, and for us not to take any of them [as prisoners] and we tried to obey orders.” The volunteers who advanced toward the crater needed little prodding. “I never felt more like fighting in my life,” recalled one Virginia officer. “Our comrades had been slaughtered in a most inhuman and brutal manner, and *slaves* [my emphasis] were trampling over their mangled and bleeding corpses.”³⁰

Slamming into the Union advance, they commenced to slaughter wounded blacks and those they overran. “We hadn’t fought but a few minutes before they threw down their arms and said, ‘We will surrender. Where is the rear?’” wrote one volunteer. “Some of the boys hollered to them, ‘There is no such thing as a rear. Remember Beast Butler.’” As if to prove their earnest on that matter, some Confederates turned and fired on blacks who had managed to get behind them – oblivious to the fact that they might kill their own comrades. Those who did not manage to escape in either direction were shown little mercy. “I saw one negro wounded and he was trying to get up off his knees when [a soldier] hit him in the face with the breech of his gun,” recalled one rebel. “I told him to stop that as the negro was dying.” A soldier in the 16th Virginia encountered a wounded black color-bearer, begging for his life. “I took the flag,” he wrote, “and some one stuck a bayonet in the negro.” Another watched in amazement as two soldiers brutalized another. One beat the man with a steel ramrod, while the other attempted to get a shot at him with his rifle. “The man with the gun fired at the negro, but did not seem to

³⁰ William Russell Diary, 30 July 1864, William Russell Papers, Duke U; Antonio M. Cooke, Statement No. 19, “Crater Recollections,” compiled by William H. Stewart, MOC; B.F. Phillips, “Wilcox’s Alabamians in Virginia,” *Confederate Veteran*, 15 (November 1907), 490; Colonel W.H. Stewart, “The Charge of the Crater,” *Southern Historical Society Papers*, Vol. 25, 80.

seriously injure him . . . as he continued to beg for his life,” he noted. “The man with the ramrod continued to strike the negro therewith, whilst the fellow with the gun deliberately reloaded it, and, placing its muzzle close against the stomach of the poor negro, fired, at which the latter fell limp and lifeless”³¹

While blacks were being slaughtered, white soldiers were to a certain extent shielded from Confederate wrath. “As the rebels charged in upon us,” insisted an officer in the 17th Vermont, “I heard the order given ‘save the white men but kill the damn niggers.’” The colonel of the 56th Massachusetts, Stephen M. Weld, owed his life to this show of restraint. Discovered in a bombproof with a black enlisted man, both were forced out at bayonet point. “They yelled out, ‘Shoot the nigger, but don’t kill the white man,’” he recalled, “and the negro was promptly shot down by my side.” Weld was taken prisoner and decently treated, but others were not as fortunate, for whatever the propensities of Confederates to spare white over black, they were clearly undermined by a countervailing sentiment. As an officer in the 9th Alabama explained, “This was the first time we had met negro troops, and the men were enraged at them for being there and at the whites for having them there.” So-called “nigger officers” were a particular source of hatred. Weld, though colonel of a white regiment, had been caught in close confines with a black soldier. Confederates might easily have assumed him a black officer, and his survival consequently seems a matter of luck. The fate of a captain in the 30th USCT vividly demonstrated what Weld had narrowly escaped. As he blazed away with his revolver, a shot to the leg shattered a bone and brought him to his knees. He was promptly bayoneted through the shoulder and thigh, and finally knocked unconscious with a rifle butt. Rebel soldiers, likely assuming him dead, tossed him on top of their trenches to help shield them from Federal fire. When he awoke, they made no effort to remove him, instead telling him to “see how well he could stand the shell fire of [his] own guns.” His pleas for water were answered with a stream of tobacco juice spit into

³¹ Robert E. Norfleet, Statement No. 50, “Crater Recollections,” MOC; Amnon Peek, Statement No. 48, “Crater Recollections,” MOC; David Barnes, Statement No. 69, “Crater Recollections,” MOC; George S. Bernard, “The Battle of the Crater,” *War Talks of Confederate Veterans*, (Petersburg, VA: Fenn & Owen, 1892), 159.

his mouth. Two soldiers who attempted to carry him to the rear were stopped by an officer who tellingly declared that the “damned nigger-lover” deserved no attention.³²

The primary object of Confederate vengeance remained the black soldiers, and in the Crater itself their fury became most evident. As the rebel counterattack surged forward, white and black regiments alike were pushed back into the massive hole that had once constituted part of the Confederate line. Trapped within, it quickly became their tomb. Southerners lined the rim, firing down into the mass of soldiers who huddled along the sides. A Union officer vividly recalled how one Confederate soldier methodically went about the work. “[He] seemed to have a personal feeling in the matter,” he wrote with considerable understatement. “He would stop to load, and while doing so would grin diabolically, and shake his head. I thought that he thought he was on a ‘nigger hunt’” Bodies rolled down into the pit, in some places forming piles several deep. When their ammunition gave out, the Confederates hurled bayoneted rifles as spears. As the Union forces attempted to retreat, the rebels, sensing victory, charged into the pit, shooting, clubbing, and bayoneting. In the closing scenes of the sorry debacle, a few panic-stricken white Union troops actually turned on their black allies, shooting and bayoneting them, hoping thereby to win mercy from their enraged foes through a demonstration of Anglo fealty. They would risk their lives for the Union, it seems, but stopped short of sacrificing them for “niggers.” By 2 PM, the battle was over, and the inside of the crater was littered with the dead and dying. “The only sounds which now broke the stillness,” wrote a Virginia private, “was some poor wounded wretch begging for water and quieted by a bayonet thrust which said unmistakably ‘*Bois ton sang. Tu n’aurais plus de soif.*’ [Drink your blood. You will have no more thirst.]”³³

With the front secured, the men turned their attention to those blacks who were trapped behind the lines. Colonel William Pegram, Lee’s talented young artillery officer,

³² Frank Kenfield, “Captured by Rebels: A Vermonter at Petersburg, 1864,” *Vermont History*, 36 (Autumn 1968), 233; Stephen Minot Weld, *War Diary and Letters of Stephen Minot Weld, 1861-1865*, (Cambridge: Riverside Press, 1912), 356-357; John C. Featherston, “Description of an Eye Witness of the Bloody Battle of the Crater,” *Southern Historical Society Papers*, Vol. 36, 167; James Seagrave Diary, 19 August 1864, Civil War Times Illustrated Collection, USMHI; John Chester White Memoir, 30 July 1864, LC.

³³ H. Seymour Hall, “Mine Run to Petersburg,” *War Talks in Kansas: A Series of Papers Read Before the Kansas Commandery of the Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States [MOLLUS]*, (Kansas City: Franklin Hudson, 1906), 239; Slotkin, *No Quarter*, 289-290; Henry V.L. Bird to “My Own Darling,” 4 August 1864, Bird Family Papers, VHS.

estimated that perhaps 200 black soldiers had managed to slip past the Confederates during the confusion. "I don't believe that much over half of these ever reached the rear," he insisted. "You could see them lying dead all along the route to the rear." One soldier left little doubt as to their fate. "The order was given to kill them all and rapid firing told plainly how well and willingly it was obeyed," he reported. "Finally our Genl. [Mahone] sickened of the slaughter and ordered it to be stayed." General Mahone apparently did reverse his earlier decision, half-heartedly urging his men "not to kill quite all of them," though at what point he issued his new order is unknown. Regardless, it was a difficult order to enforce, as a North Carolinian who witnessed the aftermath attested. "When I got there, [the troops] had the ground covered with broken headed negroes, and were searching the bomb proofs for more, the officers were trying to stop them but they kept on until they were finished." Physical exhaustion, rather than orders, finally stayed the killing frenzy.³⁴

The battle had inflicted significant casualties on both sides, but USCT soldiers of the 4th Division suffered disproportionately. The nine regiments engaged were initially estimated to have lost 219 killed, 681 wounded, and 410 missing. Confederates, however, reported capturing only eighty-five, suggesting that a great number of the "missing" would never find their way back to their regiments. The post-battle scene around the crater, which was enough to make even hardened veterans give pause, bears out this assumption. "I went up while the flag of truce was up," wrote a Virginian. "I never saw so many dead Yankees and Negroes." Another described the sight as "the most awfull my eyes ever beheld. the inside of this mine . . . was literally covered with the white and black Yankee dead." One Georgia volunteer, detailed to police the battlefield and secure the myriad rifles which had been abandoned, was similarly impressed by the slaughter. "I saw a huge pile of negro soldiers, heaped up preparatory for burial," he noted. "Near the center there was quite a number of wounded negros, dragging about

³⁴ William Pegram to Virginia Johnson McIntosh, 1 August 1864, quoted in James I. Robertson, Jr., "The Boy Artillerist: Letters of Colonel William Pegram, C.S.A.," *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, Vol. 98, No. 2 (April 1990), 243; Henry V.L. Bird to "My Own Darling," 4 August 1864, Bird Family Papers, VHS; B.F. Phillips, "Wilcox's Alabamians in Virginia," 490; William Albertus Day, *A True History of Company I, 49th Regiment, North Carolina Troops*, (Newton, NC: Enterprise Job Office, 1893), 84.

with their broken legs like crippled dogs, some of them begging for water, and they received just about as much attention as if they had been dogs.”³⁵

Appalling though it may have been, the massacre wrought by Confederate volunteers was but the logical outcome of Southern racial ideology. “The slorter of Negroes was awful,” attested a rebel artilleryman in the aftermath. “It gows might against our boys to take Negro prisoners.” So flagrant a challenge to the social order could not go unanswered, and Southern volunteers instinctively understood the stakes. Though a Confederate major had allegedly ordered his men “to die, but never surrender to niggers,” they hardly needed such encouragement. “There was no volley and cheer to excite the men to the work of death,” recounted a private in the 12th Virginia. “The knowledge of dishonor to the loved ones behind us if we failed . . . carried everything before it resistlessly. The negro’s charging cry of ‘no quarter!’ was met with the stern cry of ‘amen’ and without firing a single shot we closed with them.” One Alabamian, in fact, feared that their response had not been severe enough. “I must say we took some of the negroes prisoners,” he sheepishly admitted. “But we will not be held culpable for this when it is considered the numbers we had already slain.” Colonel Pegram, who thought the killing of surrendering black soldiers “perfectly right, as a matter of policy,” understood the greater implications. “It seems cruel to murder them in cold blood, but I think the men who did it had very good cause for doing so.” That “good cause,” of course, was that blacks had dared to fight. “Gen. Mahone told me of one man who had a bayonet run through his cheek, which instead of making him throw down his musket & run to the rear, *as men usually do when they are wounded*, exasperated him so much that he killed the negro, although in that condition [emphasis mine]. I have always said that I wished the enemy would bring some negroes against this army. I am convinced . . . that it has a splendid effect on our men.”³⁶

³⁵ For an analysis of the casualty statistics, see Bryce A. Suderow, “The Battle of the Crater: The Civil War’s Worst Massacre,” in *Black Flag Over Dixie*, 206-209; Robert W. Hicks Diary, 31 July 1864, Soldier Diary Collection, MOC; William Russell Diary, 30 July 1864, William Russell Papers, Duke U; Joseph Asbury Edwards Memoirs, Duke U.

³⁶ Anthony Barksdale to “Dear Sister Omis,” 1 August 1864, Soldier Letter Collection, MOC; Freeman S. Bowley, “The Battle of the Mine,” *The Overland Monthly*, Vol. 4, No. 4 (April 1870), 324; Henry V.L. Bird to “My Own Darling,” 4 August 1864, Bird Family Papers, VHS; Captain John C. Featherstone, “Graphic Account of the Battle of the Crater,” *Southern Historical Society Papers*, Vol. 33, 373; William Pegram to Virginia Johnson McIntosh, 1 August 1864, quoted in James I. Robertson, Jr., “The Boy

Colonel Pegram clearly relished the prospect of further encounters. As a combat motivator, it trumped all. Neither abstract appeals to freedom or nation, nor the consistent vilification of Northern soldiers as “barbarians” and “vandals,” could drive Southerners to attack the enemy with such unfettered ferocity. It is too easy to forget that during four years of bitter struggle against Yankee “hordes,” the Crater had no Anglo equivalent. Despite the rhetoric, Civil War combatants largely agreed, often implicitly, that the conflict was a dispute among equals (hence the protests from both Union and Confederate soldiers to keep African-Americans out of the fighting), in which honor required only that the aggrieved parties fight the good fight. The conflict can aptly be compared to the duel, where killing one’s adversary was less important than participation in the ritual, itself. Whether or not the duelists survived the affair, both challenger and challenged satisfied the tenets of honor simply by making a stand. In a war that left over 600,000 dead, the metaphor may seem strained, but a certain “civilized” conduct persisted: pickets enjoyed informal truces, soldiers granted quarter to prisoners, commanders agreed to cease-fires to attend to the wounded, all which governed the conflict much as the *code duello* ensured that the duel was conducted in a “civilized manner.”

The duel as metaphor for the Civil War quickly breaks down when one factors in race. For Southerners, a black duelist was no duelist at all, but an armed insurrectionist. Outrage intermingled with their worst fears, and honor demanded nothing less than victory or death. “Their presence excited in the troops indignant malice such as had characterized no former conflict,” insisted a Virginian who participated in the fight. “Our men . . . disregarded the rules of warfare which restrained them in battle with their own race, and brained and butchered the blacks until the slaughter was sickening.” General Edward Porter Alexander, Lee’s artillery commander, struck upon a similar theme. “There were, comparatively, very few Negro prisoners taken that day,” he wrote in his private memoirs. “It was the first occasion on which any of the Army of Northern Virginia came in contact with Negro troops, & the general feeling of the men toward their employment was very bitter. The sympathy of the North for John Brown’s memory was

Artillerist: Letters of Colonel William Pegram, C.S.A.,” *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, Vol. 98, No. 2 (April 1990), 243-244.

taken for proof of a desire that our slaves should rise in a servile insurrection & massacre throughout the South, & the enlistment of Negro troops was regarded as advertisement of that desire & encouragement of the idea to the Negro.” For a North Carolinian, the black cries of “no quarter” had roused a very specific fear, one deeply rooted in the history of Southern slavery. “To be captured by the negro troops meant death not only to ourselves,” he insisted, “but, it appeared, to the helpless women and children in Petersburg.”³⁷

4.5.4 Prisoners of War

Considering what the typical Confederate volunteer considered to be a stake, it is not surprising that many chose to massacre blacks on the field. What is surprising is the regularity with which they continued to take black prisoners regardless of the implications and complications. The occurrence is at least partially attributable to the inconsistent position of the national government on the subject. The predisposition of individual leaders and soldiers must also be taken into account. At both Fort Pillow and the Crater, there is enough evidence to suggest that the massacre of blacks received tacit approval from commanders, if not outright encouragement, and it was certainly easier for troops to kill in cold blood when covered by the directives of superior officers.

There was another factor, however, which may have determined whether or not Confederate volunteers decided to kill or capture. According to Confederate testimony, black soldiers at the Battle of the Crater may have charged their works with cries of “Remember Fort Pillow” and “No Quarter,” but when wounded or pinned down by fire, their attitude changed dramatically. “In the recaptured works,” wrote a Virginia lieutenant, “we hear negroe troops begging for mercy (a new word has entered their mouths) they say *master* please do not kill us” Another reported hearing similar pleas from a soldier trapped between the lines. “I heard some one calling in a subdued tone: ‘Master, Master, I want to come over dar, I done exerted my company.’ On being told to come over he crawled over the breast-works, and told us he was tired of fighting.

³⁷ John S. Wise, *The End of an Era*, (New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1902), 366; Edward Porter Alexander, *Fighting for the Confederacy: The Personal Recollections of General Edward Porter Alexander*, Gary W. Gallagher, ed., (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 462; William A. Day, “Battle of the Crater,” *Confederate Veteran*, Vol. 11, No. 8, (August 1903), 355-356.

He told us he enlisted in Missouri.” Still, there was no guarantee that begging for one’s “master” would result in clemency, as many Confederates attested. Furthermore, momentary clemency might be revoked if they failed to exhibit due deference in their post-capture behavior. A Georgian, for example, recalled the death of black soldier captured on the field at Olustee. “One ugly big black buck was interrogated as to how it happened that he had come back to fight his old master,” he wrote, “and upon giving some very insolent reply, his interrogator drew back his musket, and with the butt, gave him a blow that killed him instantly.” More appropriate was the reaction of black prisoners captured in a skirmish along the Petersburg lines a month after the incident at the Crater. “They were very much frightened, and gave all sorts of excuses for being in the army, when we asked them.”³⁸

As a record of history, most Confederate testimony on this score – much of it postwar – falls somewhere between exceedingly suspect and offensively self-serving (Confederates were much too insistent in their descriptions of groveling blacks). However, just as some captured USCT officers lied about their association with black regiments to save their own lives, there were undoubtedly slaves-turned-soldiers who, cognizant of their precarious situation, understandably reassumed the Sambo façade that served them so well in times of peace. One Virginia infantryman recalled his encounter with a black soldier during the Confederate counterattack at the Crater. The soldier fired at him and missed, then charged with his bayonet. With remarkable (indeed, unbelievable) restraint, the Virginian grabbed his attacker by the collar and dragged him to the safety of a tree – where he commenced to lecture him. “How came you to be in the Yankee army, anyhow?” he demanded. “Lor, master,” came the obsequious reply, “I couldn’t help it. They came in the field and put a pistol at my head and said ‘If you don’t come with us, we will kill you.’ I had to go and leave the master’s mule in the field.”³⁹

Still, there were those who doubted the sincerity of such displays. One Virginian who dived into what he believed was an unoccupied trench was startled by a “cringing” black soldier begging for his life. “As soon as I assured him I did not propose to molest

³⁸ W.F. Daugh, Statement No. 72, “Crater Recollections,” MOC; R.W. Jones, Statement No. 67, “Crater Recollections,” MOC; William Penniman Reminiscences, quoted in Coles, “Shooting Niggers Sir,” 74; John Kennedy Coleman Diary, 30 August 1864, Civil War Times Illustrated Collection, USMHI.

³⁹ Josiah Joyner, Statement No. 52, “Crater Recollections,” MOC.

him, he began to vigorously fan a poor wounded Confederate soldier,” he reported. “Manifestly, the old negro’s idea was that this attention to the helpless Confederate would serve to protect him against other in-coming Confederates.” A rebel lieutenant, serving as a courier, watched in amazement as scores of blacks soldiers, trapped in the cross fire, made a dash for the Confederate rear. “They came running in to our lines,” he insisted, “falling on their knees, their eyes rolling in terror, exclaiming, ‘Fur God sake, Marster, doan’ kill me. Spar’ me, Marster, and I’ll wuk fur you as long as I lib.’ ‘Marster’ never fell from their poor lips so glibly or so often in all their lives According to the story of every mother’s son of them, he was not a volunteer, but had been forced into the Union service against his will. Of course we knew just how much of these tales to believe.”⁴⁰

The traits discerned by Confederates are easily recognizable as classic components of the iconic “Sambo” – cowardly, duplicitous, and childish – and affirmed for them the inferiority of the black man as soldier. The image also afforded the opportunity of redemption through the ritualistic acknowledgment of white power and black helplessness. Consider the following exchanges reported by Confederate veterans of the Crater, both of whom had the opportunity to kill black soldiers, but chose to spare them:

I said, ‘I have great mind to kill you.’ He said, ‘Massa, please don’t kill me. Give me some water.’ I said I have a great mind to kill you anyhow.’ He begged for his life; so I didn’t kill him, and brought him a drink of water.”⁴¹

Just as I got into [the trench] I discovered near me, at my feet, a negro soldier, who immediately began to most earnestly beg me not to kill him. ‘Master, don’t kill me! Master don’t kill me! I’ll be your slave as long as I live. Don’t kill me!’ he most piteously cried, whilst I was rapidly loading my gun, and he doubtless supposed that its next shot was intended for himself. ‘Old man, I do not intend to kill you, but you deserve to be killed,’ was my reply.⁴²

The ritual began with a soldier begging for mercy, much as an unruly child who suddenly realizes the error of his ways begs to be forgiven by the parent. This act of

⁴⁰ Bernard, “The Battle of the Crater,” 157; Wise, *The End of an Era*, 369.

⁴¹ Josiah Joyner, Statement No. 52, “Crater Recollections, MOC.

⁴² Bernard, “The Battle of the Crater,” 157.

submission would obviously grant white soldiers an immense amount of satisfaction, but it could also complicate the situation. As killing was simply a means to enforce the social order, was it still necessary to kill a prostrate black who admitted his wrongs? Whether surrendering black soldiers truly internalized the Sambo role, adopted it out of self-preservation, or had it involuntarily assigned in later years, the end result was the same: for those Southern soldiers inclined to take prisoners (or for those embarrassed that they had), it justified their doing so, and even allowed them to appear magnanimous. Submissive black soldiers were no longer recalcitrant insurrectionists who defied the social order, but remorseful children who had learned their “lesson.” One rebel volunteer, who doubted black claims as to having been forced into the army, ultimately determined that the veracity of their stories was immaterial. “It is safe to say that every master who reclaimed a slave from the Federal prisoners . . . felt reasonably certain his man would never again volunteer upon either side in any war.” The sparing of black lives, therefore, was viewed as an act of white benevolence and paternalistic mercy – not an admission of equality.⁴³

Indeed, Confederate volunteers subjected African-American prisoners to a form of ritual emasculation immediately upon capture, a process which could at times be quite subtle. One Virginian, for instance, in describing those prisoners taken at the Crater, could not bring himself to refer to them as “soldiers.” Instead, he saw only “negroes” that had been captured while “dressed in yankee uniform.” The difference was obviously one of critical importance, and though his omission may not have been conscious, it offers a wonderful example of the inner workings of the Confederate mind in regards to race: psychologically, they could *not* accept blacks as soldiers. The mental devaluation of the African-American, however, was accompanied by far more blatant and physical measures. As a matter of course, they could expect to be stripped of their blouses, if not their entire uniforms. Confederate shortages of clothing and other materiel made such actions practical, of course, but as a symbol of black equality and manhood, the removal of the uniform simultaneously denigrated prisoners while giving them an appearance more befitting of slaves. They could also expect to be beaten, denied proper medical treatment, and given substandard rations. Of the black prisoners taken at Olustee, a

⁴³ Wise, *The End of an Era*, 369.

Florida reservist made plain that they were not treated as regular soldiers. When a group of captives – white and black – attempted to flee the confines of Camp Lay, Florida, they tellingly suffered different punishments upon recapture. “The whites was put in the guard house as a punishment while the Negroes, got the old ‘thirty nine’ with a wide leather strap,” observed the Floridian. “This I supposed, was a novelty to them, because they were free borned, and the castigation seemed to be extremely disagreeable to them. They was allso made to do all manner of work in an around the stockade, and usualy policed the white prisoners quarters, and was not allowed the bathing privileges of the whites. Their rations was inferior to the whites who drew the same as the soldiers did.”⁴⁴

As suggested by the Florida volunteer, the surest method of denying black equality was to reduce them to a position of servitude. At times, they might be explicitly enslaved. A Tennessee officer, recounting the capture of white and black Federal soldiers at Dalton, Georgia in late 1864, showed how easily this might be accomplished. “We took the white men as prisoners,” he reported, “but the Negroes were taken as livestock or property.” Soldiers of the 59th Colored Infantry, captured by General Wheeler’s cavalymen in early 1865, met a similar fate. Sold to a mill owner in Vicksburg, there they labored until July, finally set free by a Union patrol three months after the Confederacy collapsed. Most captured Africa-American soldiers, however, were never “officially” enslaved. Instead, they were compelled to labor for the army, in violation of the laws of war, where they answered to a military rather than a civilian master. Members of the 110th Colored Infantry, captured in Alabama in 1864, attested that Confederates used them to relieve impressed slaves who had been laboring on fortifications. “We were kept at hard labor and inhumanly treated,” reported one. “If we lagged, or faltered, or misunderstood an order, we were whipped and abused – some of our own men being detailed to whip the others.”⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Diary of Peter Guerrant, 31 July 1864, Guerrant Family Papers, VHS; Joshua H. Frier Memoirs, Civil War Miscellaneous Collection, USMHI.

⁴⁵ Spenser Bowen Talley Memoirs, Harrisburg Civil War Round Table Collection, USMHI; Elias Shull to G.G. Adams, 14 August 1865, in Ira Berlin, et al., *Freedom: “The Black Military Experience,”* 592-593; Affidavit of Joseph Howard, 30 January 1865, *OR*, Ser. 2, Vol. 8, 153.

4.6 Conclusion:

“I Do Not Think I Love My Country Well Enough to Fight with Black Soldiers”

In late August 1862, as the debate over emancipation began to take shape in the North, a rebel trooper in the 9th Texas Cavalry related to his sweetheart rumors of dissension within the ranks of the Union army. “There is great prospect of a reaction of the North Western unionist on the question of the Abolitionist placing negroes in Ranks,” he cheerfully and smugly confided. “Although they are fighting for the Union they are unwilling for Negroes to be placed in the Ranks with them and consequently made their equals, from which circumstances they can but plainly See that the Abolitionist are fighting for nothing else but Negro freedom.” Six months later, with emancipation the law of the land, some still clung to the hope that the Union would simply implode over the “negro question.” From Pine Bluff, Arkansas a rebel volunteer reported in February 1863 that Union deserters were coming in by the hundreds. “[They] say that they will not fight any longer under Lincoln’s proclamation,” he claimed. “They also say that there is considerable trouble in the North, all the western states are preparing to withdraw from the Union and if Lincoln does not call back his negro emancipation bill they will withdraw their troops & set up a government of their own.”¹

From their perspective, of course, a Northern revolt over black equality seemed perfectly logical, for the South had seceded over that very issue. Confederates, who clearly understood the intricacies of the American racial hierarchy, could legitimately empathize with the rage felt by their Union counterparts. Indeed, neither cared much for African-Americans who, even if not enslaved, possessed few rights a white man was bound to respect. But that was not the entire story, for race – as naïve Union volunteers belatedly discovered and Southerners ultimately failed to grasp – was an illusory and capricious thing, a conceptual framework wholly inadequate for gauging the character of human beings. In the end, Confederates who hoped for a Northern rebellion over issues of racial equality not only underestimated volunteers’ attachment to the Union, but

¹ John C. Fite to “Dear Lizzie,” 22 August 1862, Fite-Henderson Letters (Box 2), MOC; Thomas J. Rounsaville to “My dear Niece,” 8 February 1863, Civil War Miscellaneous Collection, USMHI.

overestimated their investment in the idea of black inferiority. As a projection of their own attachment to Anglo superiority, however, their speculations were all too accurate.

To be sure, on the record of race relations there is no denying the often shameful treatment which African-Americans endured at the hands of Union soldiers. Convinced of black inferiority, soldiers at best viewed them as expendable nuisances. That they might make common cause with them against Southern traitors was incidental, and the notion that they might meaningfully contribute to the Republic as citizens and soldiers seemed unfathomable. Dehumanized by those who freed them, they paradoxically were treated worse than those who would make war to keep them enslaved. It would be easy to conclude – and perhaps not unfairly – that Union conduct toward blacks was no better than that of Southerners. For Northerners, however, the situation proved significantly more complex. Though they were hampered by racialist suppositions, such views were, in great part, moored to the institution of slavery – an institution which presupposed black inferiority. In the South, however, Union volunteers encountered and interacted with African-Americans not in the context of a master-slave relationship, but as liberators (however reluctant) and freed people. It was certainly not a relationship based on equality but, significantly, because of the absence of slavery, the possibility of equality was not precluded. It was the breaking of the legal bonds which slavery imposed on blacks that set the groundwork for the removal of the ideological barrier of race.

Other factors also influenced their relationship, allowing it to evolve beyond simple racial stereotypes. Though volunteers may have been dimly aware of the brutality of slavery, for the provincial Midwesterner or New Englander its true horrors could have been but little more than vague abstractions. First hand observations of the harsh realities of slavery were a revelation, provoking shock, disgust, and anger in all but the most obtuse and Negrophobic. While many volunteers failed (or refused) to hear anything but “childish nonsense” in the songs of freed people, the more perceptive grasped a deeper significance. “The negroes may not know much,” conceded a Wisconsin volunteer, “but they sing the most sorrowful songs in the sweetest voices I ever heard.” After listening to a few “plantation songs” performed by a group of deckhands, he approached one of the men in conversation. “I asked him where he learned the songs he had been singing. He answered ‘I dont know massa, cept da jes growed up wid me. Seems like I always

knowed um. Maybe I learned um from my old Mammy who used to sing um wid me for she was sold down in Alabama.’ As the poor black wretch shuffled along past me (he had no clothes above his waist) I noticed scars across his back as if made by a whip.”²

Soldiers could not help but to be moved by freed people’s harrowing stories of escape, by the sometimes unruly scenes in camp when slave-catchers attempted to retrieve them, or enraged by the clear evidence of abuse ranging from scarred backs to cropped ears to castration. The implements of discipline – of torture – found on plantations left them sobered. “At Huntsville [Alabama] we saw the first whipping post to which negroes were tied while being whipped,” reported an Indiana volunteer, “At Tuscumbia we saw the first trained blood hounds. They were kept in a little pen, and looked as if they would, as a little darkey said, ‘Eat a niggah up in a minute, shore.’” Another, who strolled about a few Louisiana plantations, described nightmarish scenes:

Visited during the day several plantations; and saw enough of the horrors of slavery to make me an Abolitionist forever. On each plantation . . . is a large building called a hospital, with only two rooms. In one may be seen the stocks, gnout, thumb screw, ball and chain, rings and chain, by which victims are fastened flat to the floor; and others, by which they are bound to perpendicular posts; iron yokes of different patterns, hand cuffs, whips, and other instruments of torture, for the benefit of those who had been guilty of loving liberty more than life, but had failed in their efforts to obtain the coveted boon.

“Verily,” he concluded, “this picture presents positive proof that the slave is happy and contented with his lot.” Nor were appalled soldiers necessarily sympathetic to abolitionism, as an Ohio soldier who cursed abolitionists for bringing on the war made clear. “Now, don’t think that I am in favor of slavery because I say this,” he qualified, “for I think I am more *anti-slavery* now than when I came into the Army, for I have seen the *effects* of the ‘*Infernal Institution*’ in 3 states and worse than I ever imagined too.”³

² To deny the cruelty of slavery required a good deal of willful ignorance. Southern slaveholders were quite capable of the feat, as were some Union volunteers. “We have no politics here, but too much Abolitionism,” reported a member of the 72nd Indiana from Louisville. “But I have seen slavery in fact, and it is not so Bad as you might suppose.” See William A. Clark to “Father,” 5 October 1862, in Margaret Black Tatum, ed., “Please Send Stamps”: The Civil War Letters of William Allen Clark, Part I,” *Indiana Magazine of History*, Vol. 91, No. 1 (March 1995), 93-94. Chauncey Herbert Cooke to “Dear sister,” 3 May 1863, *Soldier Boy’s Letters*, 33.

³ George H. Puntney, *History of the Thirty-Seventh Regiment of Indiana Volunteers*, (Rushville, Indiana: Jacksonian Book and Job Department, 1896), 21; Diary of Rufus Kinsley, 17 June 1862, in *Diary of a Christian Soldier: Rufus Kinsley and the Civil War*, David C. Rankin, ed., (New York: Cambridge

Freedom allowed volunteers to see African-Americans as something other than slaves, but pity moved them decidedly closer to accepting them as human beings. Still, even together they might not have been enough to fundamentally alter their notions of black inferiority, for both could be viewed as a form of charity passively received by a weaker race. It was the actions of African-Americans, themselves, which truly altered the soldier-freed person dynamic. While some volunteers considered them clownish nuisances whose emancipation would terribly burden the country, others came to genuinely appreciate their labors in and out of camp, and looked on approvingly, if condescendingly, at their efforts of self-improvement. An Indiana volunteer watched with amusement as freedmen in his camp attempted to sound out words from letter books. “The darkies being old men it sounded funny to me,” he admitted. “But I have noticed that nearly every darky with the Army has some kind of Book and put in their leisure hours trying to read. They was not allowed to have books when in Slavery and they enjoy the oppertunity” A soldier in the 33rd Iowa, recalling a family of escaped slaves who lived in camp over the winter of 1864, wrote of how the two daughters and their mother busied themselves with laundry, while the husband constructed a hut and took what employment was available. “They were quiet, sensible, industrious folks,” he insisted. “They would talk of us as though we were their brothers. . . .Knowing and understanding the differences of color and tastes, they attended unobtrusively to their own business, and were treated as civilly as white folks” With just a tinge of paternal condescension, he concluded that, “If all negroes were like them the social problem need never present a difficulty.”⁴

The appearance of “industriousness,” in their official capacities as laborers and in the perceived willingness to raise themselves above their enslaved status, belied the Anglo assumption of black indolence and was an important step in white acceptance. Just as meaningful, at least in the eyes of volunteers, was the “unofficial” assistance they provided. Though freed people were employed as laborers, in the myriad of diaries and regimental histories one is struck by the frequency in which slaves, at great personal risk,

University Press, 2004), 98; William G. Bentley to “My dear Bro,” 9 August 1864, in *Burning Rails as We Pleased*, 108.

⁴ Diary of William Bluffton Miller, 21 January 1865, in *Fighting for Liberty and Right*, 302-303; Andrew F. Sperry, *History of the 33rd Iowa Infantry Volunteer Regiment*, 1863-1866, (Des Moines: Mills & Company, 1866), 58.

acted as guides, cared for the wounded, pointed out the locations of enemy troops or the whereabouts of caches of food and valuables, and often retrieved and presented those supplies to soldiers on their own accord. In the annals of escaped prisoners of war, they played an especially prominent role. Soldiers who escaped from the vile stockades of Andersonville, Salisbury, or any of the dozens of camps throughout the South were quick to note the assistance they received from sympathetic African-Americans who provided them with shelter and sustenance while shielding them from their pursuers through misdirection. “It is an established fact,” insisted a New Yorker who had escaped from Columbia, South Carolina, “that it would have been impossible for our men, held as prisoners of war in the South, to make an escape without the aid of negroes” They were, as more than a few soldiers pointed out, the “best friends” of the Union volunteer.⁵

Their actions on the battlefield, too, drew converts to their cause. Though some soldiers never reconciled themselves to black soldiers, many others did – especially when they arrived in a clutch. In early March 1864, during the course of the Kilpatrick-Dahlgren raid against Richmond, Union troopers, traveling under the cover of night, stumbled upon a camp of unknown loyalty. Pursued closely by Confederate cavalry, they approached warily, uncertain if the fires in the distance represented friend or foe. “The camp fires proved to be some troops from [General Benjamin] Butler’s command coming to our support,” reported a trooper in the 9th New York with relief. “Here I saw the colored troops for the 1st time I never [saw] niggers look so good to me before.” During the brutal campaigning in Virginia in the summer of 1864, a Pennsylvania volunteer noted the arrival of black troops near his regiment, as well as the reaction – or lack thereof – which their presence generated. “[General Ambrose] Burnside’s negroes are a fortifying them selves a short distance from us,” he informed his wife. “i hear but little objections any more to their helping us fight in this war.” A surgeon in the 92nd Ohio was quite enthusiastic about the performance of black troops attached to his brigade during the 1864 Nashville campaign, and related the exploits of a reconnaissance patrol which returned with fourteen rebel prisoners. “They came very near capturing [corps commander] Gen’l [Benjamin] Cheatham himself. It must be rather mortifying to the

⁵ Michael H. Fitch, *Echoes of the Civil War as I Hear Them*, (New York: R.F. Fenno & Company, 1905), 269; Willard W. Glazier, *The Capture, the Prison Pen, and the Escape*, (New York: H.R. Ferguson, 1870), 213.

chivalry of the south to be captured by the darkies,” he mused. “We have three colored regiments in our brigade and they are very good soldiers.”⁶

In light of their contributions, African-Americans received a grudging respect from many volunteers, who subsequently took a special interest in their welfare. They acknowledged injustices against them, and did not hesitate to denounce more blatant examples of abuse. At Ebenezer Creek, for instance, not all soldiers were content to brush off the episode as a case of military necessity. “Much indignation is felt against General Jefferson C. Davis,” recorded an Ohio sergeant, “for allowing a host of black women and children to follow us several days, and then abandoning them on the north bank . . . where many were afterwards killed by inhuman guerrillas.” A disgusted Minnesota volunteer drew a stinging comparison: “Where can you find in all the annals of plantation cruelty anything more completely inhuman and fiendish than this?” Many also noted disapprovingly of the shoddy treatment accorded to black soldiers, who were often provided with substandard equipment and clothing, issued fewer rations, and paid less per month than whites. “Now I am far from being what is termed a nigger worshiper,” admitted a New York volunteer in the fall of 1863, “but still I cannot help but notice that that they are an ill used race.” He was particularly troubled that *Northern* black troops should be so abused. “I cannot see why they should not receive the same pay as the white soldier,” he wrote. “They certainly do more fatigue duty, and I believe there is no longer any question about their being good fighters. They are put at the hardest as well as the meanest kinds of work. I have seen them policing (cleaning up filth and rubbish) white regiments camps. If a spirited white soldier were to do this except as punishment for some offence I think he would die first.” Lest his harangue be mistaken for a budding abolitionist sentiment, he assured his family otherwise. “That is not the case but my love of the rights of man, whether black or white has induced me to extend my sermon to this perhaps inexcusable length. Justice should be done though the heavens should fall.”⁷

⁶ William G. Hills Diary, 3 March 1864, LC [See also, Newel Cheney, *History of the Ninth Regiment, New York Volunteer Cavalry*, (Jamestown, New York: Martin Mere & Son, 1901), 145-150]; William H. Martin to wife, 8 June 1864, William H. Martin Papers, Harrisburg Civil War Round Table Collection, USMHI; Josiah Dexter Cotton to wife, 6 December 1864, Josiah Dexter Cotton Papers, LC.

⁷ Journal of Commissary Sergeant William J. Gibson, 10 December 1864, in Albion W. Tourgée, *The Story of a Thousand: Being a History of the Service of the 105th Ohio Volunteer Infantry*, (Buffalo, NY: S.

As a corollary to the concern for the well-being of African-Americans, volunteers also began to consider, in light of the sacrifices on behalf of their own freedom and for the Union, the necessity of guaranteeing them a future within the Republic. Though the extent of the sentiment is difficult to assess, recent studies have shown that many soldiers thought it only fair to grant freedmen basic citizenship rights. “The slaves have been our only friends,” reflected a Wisconsin officer at the conclusion of Sherman’s march through North Carolina. “What they have done for the army entitles them to their freedom, or whatever they may desire.” Some even began to “prepare” freed people with this end in mind. A New York engineer, who referred to his young servant only as “the contraband,” expressed exasperation at his continual thieving of his sugar supply, but also noted the boy’s potential. In a typically paternalistic air, he took it upon himself to instruct his charge in reading and writing, but not without a nod to the future. “He learns easy but has many sly tricks,” he wrote. “I hope by perseverance to make him useful not only as a servant to me now but to his poor ignorant race, by and by, and may God speed the time when they all will be free to learn, if they choose, and elevate themselves from the low degraded state of the ‘slave.’”⁸

Acceptance of absolute racial equality was a leap that few were prepared to make. Even so, at no point in the century between the end of the Civil War and the beginning of the Civil Rights Movement was the possibility so tantalizing close to being realized than it was among Union volunteers in the wake of emancipation. A few soldiers, for the briefest of moments, appeared ready to consider African-Americans as something other than members of a permanent underclass. One volunteer, after being instructed in the basics of French by a Creole freedman, experienced an epiphany. “Mother do you know I asked myself this question,” he wrote of the encounter, “what right have I simply because I am white to be the master race, while this man knowing more than I should be a slave because he is black.” For all but the die-hard abolitionists (and they were few),

McGerald & Son, 1895), 342; Quoted in Glatthaar, *The March to the Sea and Beyond*, 64; John W. Westervelt Letter/Journal, 29 September 1863, in *Diary of a Yankee Engineer: The Civil War Story of John W. Westervelt, Engineer, 1st New York Volunteer Engineer Corps*, (New York: Fordham University Press, 1997), 43-45.

⁸ Fitch, *Echoes of the Civil War*, 268; Thomas J. Owen to “Dear Father and Friends at Home,” 27 November 1864, in Dale E. Floyd, ed., “*Dear Friends at Home*”: *The Letters and Diary of Thomas James Owen, Fiftieth New York Volunteer Engineer Regiment, during the Civil War*, (Washington, DC: Historical Division, Office of Administrative Services, Office of the Chief of Engineers, 1985), 64.

mentally arriving at a point where such questions could legitimately be asked was no mean feat. For those who accomplished it, the process entailed a difficult reexamination of fundamental values and world-views. In considering the fate of freed people, one Illinois volunteer had drawn a hard line echoed by others. “I advocate the entire abolition of slavery and I believe in equalizing the negro with the white man so far as life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness is concerned, and no further,” he declared to his wife. “I do not believe that with all the education that might be bestowed upon the African race that they could be brought on equal terms with the Anglo-Saxon race in regard to intellect.” For many, perhaps most volunteers, his opinion expressed the outer limits of acceptance. Man might rescue the oppressed; he could not hope to elevate them beyond the limitations which nature had imposed. As the same soldier later demonstrated, however, even this last barrier might be exploded. “You no doubt are thinking ‘Charley’ is getting to be quite a fellow for negroes but I can’t help if I am,” he wrote from Baton Rouge in 1864. “I asked myself this, ‘What is going to be done with these ebony people’? They have souls and many of them, even at these early days, are beginning to manifest signs of intellectual life.” It was a momentous issue, one he felt ill-equipped to solve. “Let us all get down before God and ask him what he will have us to do in reference to the many vexed questions that are now thrown upon us.”⁹

Though the issue of social equality for African-Americans quickly faded into the background with the conclusion of the war, it should not minimize the fact that some Union volunteers, however briefly, contemplated its possibility and genuinely struggled with the issue. At the very least, they had generally come to accept that African-Americans deserved something more than a life of servitude, which was a decided improvement over glib suggestions of solving the “negro question” by shooting them. Confederates never experienced a similar revelation, nor expressed the same moral qualms, for they were saddled not only with a racial world-view, but an institution that perpetuated it. Unlike in the North, Southern identity was heavily invested not simply in

⁹ Chandra Manning, in *What This Cruel War Was Over: Soldiers, Slaves, and the Civil War*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2007), connects wavering support for black rights to Union military reversals. By 1865, with victory assured, support for African-American rights was once again on the rise. See Manning, 213-221. Chauncey Herbert Cooke to “My dear mother,” 30 May 1863, in *Soldier Boy’s Letters*, 37; Charles Calvin Enslow to wife (Martha Ann), n.d. [1862?], 6 June 1864, “Letter[s] in regard to Slavery,” Charles Calvin Enslow Letterbook, LC.

the idea of black inferiority, but in black enslavement. Though Northerners – through legal and extralegal measures – had proved otherwise, Southerners assumed the abolition of slavery would necessarily lead to white degradation. Slavery, more importantly, had resulted in a Southern image of African-Americans which, if not more complex than that generated by Northerners, was certainly more terrifying. While doubts as to the ability of blacks to survive outside of slavery caused some uneasiness among Union volunteers, the Sambo image which informed these worries was hardly capable of generating mass panic. Confederate Southerners who came of age under the specter of slave uprising, on the other hand, feared not a drain on their society by indolent clowns, but its destruction at the hands of African savages. Consequently, they could not envision a nation in which free blacks enjoyed any meaningful rights, viewed any suggestion of black equality as heretical, clung to an institution which was inherently violent, and fought desperately to preserve it as a “necessary” social control – even to the point of injuring their own cause.

The intransigence of Southerners on the race issue was vividly displayed throughout the war: in their willingness to secede to preserve slavery, in their losing battles to maintain it, and in their eagerness to punish and murder slaves who assisted their enemies or dared to fight against them. Nowhere was its persistence – and fundamental irrationality – more keenly exposed, however, than in the half-hearted attempt to recruit slaves into the ranks in the final months of the war. Desperate for manpower, in late 1864 and early 1865 various political and military figures began to seriously entertain the idea of offering freedom to slaves in exchange for their service as bona fide Confederate soldiers. Among white volunteers, the proposal was met with predictable outrage and skepticism. “I never want to see one with a gun in his hands,” wrote one Virginian in a typical response. “I am perfectly willing that they should be put into the army as wagon drivers, cooks, engineers, etc., but I never want to fight side by side with one. The army would not submit to it and half if not more would lay down their guns if forced to fight with negroes.” Others expressed ambivalence on the matter, as did a Georgia infantryman who remained torn between accepting defeat and acknowledging that the Confederacy could not survive without elevating blacks to the status of soldiers. “The conscription of negroes in the South is freely discussed now,” he wrote to his wife in November 1864. “It is a serious and momentous question. I am not competent to

decide which is best for us. I had much rather gain our independence without it, but if necessary I say put them in and make them fight. But I hope it will not be necessary. I have long been in favor of making them wagoners and putting them in shops to do government work.”¹⁰

Some Confederate volunteers rejected the idea on the grounds that blacks lacked the necessary mettle for soldiering, a position that had been forwarded by Union soldiers two years earlier, and one which Southerners likewise espoused. A veteran of the Crater, for instance, who noted that black Union soldiers had performed admirably under fire, nevertheless maintained that they “did not show the stubborn power of endurance for which the Anglo-Saxon is preeminent, nor do I believe they ever will on any field.” The crux of the issue, however, was well-summarized by General Howell Cobb of Georgia. “I think that the proposition to make soldiers of our slaves is the most pernicious idea that has been suggested since the war began,” he wrote to Secretary of War James A. Seddon. “The day you make soldiers of them is the beginning of the end of the revolution. If slaves will make good soldiers our whole theory of slavery is wrong”¹¹

Despite serious misgivings from civilians, soldiers, and politicians, both Davis and Lee urged that slaves be allowed to enlist with the understanding that they would be granted freedom in exchange for their service. For many volunteers, any directive from Lee came as the word of God, and in the wake of his endorsement their opposition apparently slackened, but did not completely dissipate. Those who supported the proposal, moreover, rarely did so with enthusiasm, and generally added a caveat. “We are in favour of putting every man in the country between the ages of 17 and 45 in the army,” wrote a captain in the 3rd Virginia Cavalry, “and as many negroes, without changing their social status.” Volunteers, in other words, might support the idea of black soldiers, but only if they remained enslaved. The bill which Congress eventually passed by the slimmest of margins in March 1865 reflected this popular ambivalence, mandating neither conscription nor emancipation. Instead, it authorized masters to “volunteer” their slaves for service, with the understanding that they would remain under their control.

¹⁰ For the details of the plan to recruit black soldiers see Levine, *Confederate Emancipation*, particularly chapters four and five. Charles Baughman to “Dear Pa,” 14 October 1864, Soldier Letter Collection, MOC; M. Hill Fitzpatrick to “Dear Amanda,” 3 November 1864, in *Letters to Amanda*, 182.

¹¹ Wise, *End of an Era*, 366; Howell Cobb to James A. Seddon, 8 January 1865, *OR*, Ser. 4, Vol. 3, 1009-1010.

Subsequent directives modified the law in such a manner as to grant freedom in exchange for service, but important restrictions remained: though soldiers would be freed, their families presumably would have remained in bondage; no provision was made to award draftees with land; and no promises of civil or political rights were forthcoming. As cannon fodder for the Southern cause, they could expect very little in return for their sacrifices. Unsurprisingly, the effort to recruit black soldiers, lacking both carrot and stick, failed miserably. Virginia managed to raise but two companies for the defense of Richmond; none of the “soldiers” saw combat, and all were freed when Union forces, spearheaded by black cavalymen, occupied the city in April 1865. No other Confederate state cared to emulate the Virginia experiment, even in the face of certain defeat. “I did not volunteer my services to fight for A Free negroes free country but to fight for A free white mans free country,” explained a North Carolina volunteer of his resistance to the plan, “& I do not think I love my country well enough to fight with black soldiers.”¹²

To the end, Southerners remained trapped by their own racist ideology, one which prevented them from accepting African-Americans as anything other than slaves or savages who, if they could not be forcibly restrained and marginalized, had to be destroyed. A cherished belief in Anglo supremacy and black slavery trumped any notion of Confederate nationalism, and proved more important than independence, itself. Rather than mulling the counterfactuals of the Confederacy’s self-inflicted wounds, it would be more appropriate to reflect upon the true victims of that unwavering belief and the suffering which resulted because of it. For the enslaved people who endured in spite of tenacious Southern racialism, there was perhaps a bit of consoling irony in Howell Cobb’s earlier warning: as blue-coated African-American troopers entered the charred remnants of Richmond, it was evident that the arming of slaves – of freedmen – had indeed signaled the end of the Confederate revolution. Another was just beginning.

¹² For discussions of the political aspects of emancipation as well as the opinion of soldiers on the subject, see McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 831-837; J. Tracy Power, *Lee’s Miserables: Life in the Army of Northern Virginia from the Wilderness to Appomattox*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 250-255, 267-268, 310-311; Levine, *Confederate Emancipation*, especially chapter five; Glatthaar, *General Lee’s Army*, 452-455. Levine makes clear that, despite some sporadic support, most volunteers vehemently opposed the recruitment of black soldiers. He also notes, tellingly, that those few blacks actually recruited were treated little differently than slaves, replete with white overseers. Quotations: Richmond *Examiner*, 25 February 1865, and J.F. Maides to mother, 18 February 1865, Maides Papers, Duke U, both found in Power, *Lee’s Miserables*, 252, 311.

Section 5: War on the Frontier: The Indian Conflicts, 1861-1865

5.1 Introduction

On the eve of the Civil War, Indian-white relations appeared to have entered a phase of tenuous peace. During the previous decade, brutal wars in the Northwest, Southwest, and California resulted in the subjugation of many tribes and the beginnings of a new reservation system. In these frontier conflicts between Anglo and Native Americans, the regular army had acted as a check on the passions of territorial officials, miners and settlers who often harbored fanatical hatred and exterminationist tendencies towards the Indians in their midst. Officers of the United States army, by no means “friends” of Native Americans, nonetheless retained a sense of responsibility and morality in their dealings with the tribes. West Point trained and educated, relatively objective, and imbued with a sense of duty these officers and the professional soldiers under their command frequently found themselves in untenable positions. Sent to protect westward migrants and subdue “hostile” tribes, they often instead found themselves defending those Indians from vengeful civilians and territorial militias.¹

The outbreak of civil war changed frontier dynamics. The relative peace of 1860 did not last long after the attack on Fort Sumter. Gone were the regulars who since 1848 had occupied western posts and lent a semblance of stability to the region – ordered east to deal with a more immediate threat. Hostilities in the East and the absence of a professional military on the frontier, however, did little to deter westward migration. If anything, the flow of civilians to the West increased during the war; miners flooded various regions in search of precious metals while others took advantage of new lands for

¹ I have elected to use the terms “Indian,” “American Indian” and “Native American” interchangeably in this essay. The preferences of Native Americans are fairly well divided on the issue. When the sources allow for clear identification of a tribe or band, they will be identified as such. Most soldiers, however, spoke generically of “Indians” or grouped distinct bands together under a single tribe. Yankton and Yanktonai, for instance, were simply called “Sioux.” I will also refrain from referring to the “frontier” as a “cultural contact zone,” as the latter implies an almost benevolent mutuality that was largely absent between 1861 and 1865. On this point, see Gregory H. Nobles, *American Frontiers: Cultural Encounters and Continental Conquest*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1997), 3-16. Though Frederick Jackson Turner defined the frontier as “the meeting point between savagery and civilization,” such a definition is now essentially meaningless, asserts Nobles, since both Indians and Anglos would have considered themselves “civilized.” For this essay, I will adopt as my own Nobles’ not quite tongue-in-cheek contention that the frontier might as well be defined as “the meeting point where otherwise civilized people often exhibited savage behavior.” That definition describes as accurately as any the Western frontiers of the 1860s.

agricultural purposes. In regard to the military situation, the most important change was the enormous influx of volunteer soldiers that filled the vacuum left by the regulars. Whereas both professional and volunteer soldiers were thoroughly immersed in the racialist philosophies of the mid-nineteenth century, many of the latter were prepared to carry these ideas to their logical conclusion. The frontier wars of the 1860s were the closest that Anglo-Americans ever came to waging a true “people’s war:” a conflict not just of combatants, but of culture, race, and the ultimate nature of “civilization.”² In such a conflict Lieber’s Code of American military conduct could have but little power of restraint.³

² Though the Indian-Anglo conflict of the 1860s edges closer to the definition of “total war,” I prefer to characterize it as a “people’s war.” It is less ambiguous and more accurately depicts the total involvement of the population. On the various definitions and characteristics assigned to both people’s war and total war see Stig Forster and Jorg Nagler, eds., *On the Road to Total War: The American Civil War and the German Wars of Unification, 1861-1871*, (German Historical Institute, Washington, DC: Cambridge, 1997), 1-25; and especially Roger Chickering’s essay, “Total War: The Use and Abuse of a Concept,” in *Anticipating Total War: The German and American Experiences, 1871-1914*, (Cambridge, 1999), 13-28.

³ Nearly all American wars have resulted in the national mobilization of large numbers of volunteers or draftees – with the notable exception of the nineteenth century Indian Wars. Though western states and territories regularly mustered militias for temporary service, and private citizens enacted their own vigilante justice, the United States primarily relied upon a small professional military to fight these perennial conflicts. The activities and character of the regulars before and after the Civil War have been widely written upon. Robert Utley has provided an excellent overview of the military policies toward Indians in his twin volumes, *Frontiersmen in Blue: The United State Army and the Indian, 1848-1865*, (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1967) and *Frontier Regulars: The United States Army and the Indian, 1866-1891*. Other important works include Francis Paul Prucha’s, *Broadax and Bayonet: The Role of the United States Army in the Development of the Northwest, 1815-1816*, (Madison: The State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1953), and Edward M. Coffman’s, *The Old Army: A Portrait of the American Army in Peacetime, 1784-1898*, (New York: Oxford, 1986). Perhaps the earliest significant study of the rank and file of the regular army in the West is Don Rickey’s, *Forty Miles a Day on Beans and Hay: The Enlisted Soldier Fighting the Indian Wars*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1963). Sherry L. Smith’s, *The View From Officers’ Row: Army Perceptions of Western Indians*, (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1990), offers an excellent account of officers in the pre- and postwar periods. Studies of the Army’s conflict with the Indians during the Civil War years, when the volunteers temporarily reigned, are too numerous to mention. The Great Sioux Uprising, the Apache Wars, the Navajo Long Walk and the tribe’s subsequent internment at the Bosque Redondo, and the massacres at Bear River and Sand Creek have all received a significant amount of attention. Many of these monographs have been ably synthesized by Alvin M. Josephy’s exceptional work, *The Civil War in the American West*, (New York: Knopf, 1991), to which I often refer. I do not intend to simply repeat these stories. Rather, I wish to present them from a different perspective – that of the volunteer in the ranks. Their actions put into perspective not only the behavior of regulars on the frontier, but also the actions of volunteers simultaneously engaged in the Civil War.

5.2 Civil War Soldiers on the Frontier

5.2.1 A Detestable Service: The Volunteer Goes West

The volunteer soldiers who replaced the regulars on the frontier differed little from the volunteers who remained in the east. Most came from western states and territories. California, New Mexico, Colorado, Nevada, Nebraska, Oregon, and Dakota all raised regiments for the war effort. Western volunteers by no means monopolized frontier service, as many eastern states also provided regiments to combat Native Americans and defend settlements against attack. In the Confederacy, the withdrawal of Federal garrisons from Texas forced the government to establish its own defense. Unsurprisingly, the burden of frontier protection fell almost exclusively upon Texas regiments. Though Confederates briefly and sporadically battled Apaches in New Mexico, their defeat at the battle of Glorietta effectively dashed hopes of a Southern manifest destiny. After 1862, the Apache of the Southwest once again fell under the responsibility of the United States government, but violent attacks by Kiowas and Comanches against Texas settlements continued throughout the war and diverted thousands of volunteers to the defense of the state's western borders. As a result of an unlikely scenario, Texans were not the only Confederates preoccupied with Indians. In 1863 the Federal government organized the 1st U.S. Volunteers, a regiment comprised entirely of Southern prisoners of war and assigned exclusively to frontier duty. In all, enough prisoners chose to fight Indians rather than languish in stockades that a total of six regiments were eventually organized.¹ North and South, the men sent to protect "civilization" from the depredation of the red man were remarkably similar to each other and to those in the eastern theatre of war. Most were from rural communities, young, intensely patriotic, and embarrassingly naïve about the dangers they would soon face. Nearly all expressed disappointment at missing the opportunity to "cover themselves in glory" by fighting with Lee or Grant. In short, the volunteer soldier of the 1860s who enlisted to defend honor or subdue treason, but instead found himself battling "savages" was a quintessential nineteenth century American.

¹ There are several studies of the U.S. Volunteers. See D. Alexander Brown, *The Galvanized Yankees*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1963) and Michele Tucker Butts, *Galvanized Yankees on the Upper Missouri: The Face of Loyalty*, (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2003).

The onset of war in 1861 forced the Federal government to recall many of the regular army units from their isolated frontier posts where most had spent years engaged in decidedly unmilitary activity. Though these troops occasionally engaged Indians in battle, more often they could be found constructing forts and roads. Seldom had an entire regiment been united, and companies were spread out over thousands of miles. Precious little time was devoted to drill, as the basic necessities of survival frequently trumped what should have been the main undertaking. How the regulars would actually perform in battle was yet to be seen but after the debacle at Bull Run, where an orderly retreat by green volunteers had turned into a panic-stricken rout, the Lincoln administration no doubt felt that the discipline of these soldiers was badly needed. The various Indian tribes did not simply disappear while the “Great Father” in Washington sorted out the squabble between his white children, nor did emigration to the west come to a halt. Volunteer soldiers would be needed to take over for the regulars and to continue the important services they formerly provided.

Virtually none of the volunteers, however, had frontier service in mind when they joined their regiments. Though soldiers from California and other areas in the west might have predicted their eventual assignments, men from farther east were appalled when they learned their destination. An Ohio cavalryman had been fighting guerrillas in Missouri when he received the news in May 1862. “to day we have got orders to go back to Fort Scott and from there to Indian Territory,” he wrote his family. “now for my part I did not enlist to fight Indians The Officers in the Reg will most all resign if we go there for my part I will not go if I can help it.”² An enlisted man in the 6th Iowa Cavalry acknowledged that the prospect of fighting Sioux Indians in Minnesota did not appeal to his comrades. “Disappointment was manifested among the boys at the time,” he recalled, “many preferring to seek glory on other fields in the south”³ Another Iowan insisted that his regiment had been recruited under “false pretences.” Assured they would be sent south to fight rebels, they instead found themselves patrolling the frontier.⁴ Chauncey Herbert Cooke, not quite eighteen when he enlisted in the 25th Wisconsin Infantry,

² James W. Earl to “Cousins and all,” 11 May 1862, James W. Earl Letters, Filson.

³ Frank Myers. *Soldiering in Dakota: Among the Indians in 1863-4-5*. (Freeport, New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1971 (1888), 4.

⁴ Joseph H. Drips. *Three Years Among the Indians in Dakota*. John M. Carroll, ed. (New York: Sol Lewis, 1974), 2.

reported disgruntled murmurings among the men of the regiment when notified of their imminent departure to Minnesota to help quell the Sioux uprising that began in the summer of 1862. “Some of the boys are mad and some are glad,” he explained to his parents. “Some say they did not enlist to fight Indians but to fight rebels, but military orders must be obeyed.” Cooke himself was ambivalent about the possibility of engaging the Sioux in battle, not because he felt the Indian to be an unworthy foe, but because he had befriended several of them in his youth. “If I thought the young Sioux chief who has been to our place so many times . . . who was so good to us, letting us have elk meat and venison for a little of nothing, I should not like to think of shooting at them.”⁵ The sentiments expressed by this young idealist were not common. Most soldiers did not want to be in what they considered a God forsaken country fighting an inhuman and merciless enemy. Some went to great lengths to avoid what they thought a detestable assignment. The members of one California regiment pooled their money and vainly offered to pay for their own transportation if the government would agree to send them to the Virginia battlefields.⁶ Most men resigned themselves to the inevitable, but certainly not without their share of grumbling. The W.P. Lane Rangers, state cavalrymen from Texas, were absorbed into Confederate service in May 1861 and assigned to the protection of the frontier. “This the boys are not willing to do,” wrote one trooper, “but as we are already out here we may as well do as requested, for the Frontier must be protected, and if our Company does not remain then other Troops must be raised to fill our place.”⁷

Perhaps most disgusted with the turn of events were members of regiments from the east who had enlisted in 1862 or reenlisted in 1864. According to the standard contract, men enlisted for three years or the duration of the conflict. Lee’s surrender at Appomattox in April 1865 sent most of these volunteers home, and the massive armies were quickly demobilized. In the west, the battle with the Plains Indians – which had been underway for several years – heated to fever pitch. Accordingly, cavalry regiments

⁵ Chauncey Herbert Cooke. *Soldier Boy’s Letters to His Father and Mother, 1861-1865*. (Independence, WI: News-Office, 1915), 4.

⁶ Brigham D. Madsen. *Glory Hunter: A Biography of Patrick Edward Conner*. (Salt Lake: University of Utah Press, 1990), 56.

⁷ Bell Irvin Wiley, ed. *Fourteen Hundred and 91 Days in the Confederate Army: A Journal Kept by W.W. Heartsill*. (Jackson, TN: McCowat-Mercer Press 1954, 1876), 14.

from Ohio, Michigan, Kansas and even some from as far away as New York and Massachusetts, their enlistments not technically expired, were sent to the frontier instead of home to family. In many instances, these men had very recently been locked in mortal combat with Confederate troops. They had, they insisted, answered their country's call, served their time honorably, and helped preserve the Union. After surviving countless forays against treasonous white men, the government now expected them to serve the remainder of their enlistments against hostile Indians. Most considered it a breach of contract at best, insulting at worst. In March 1865, while Sherman's army made its way through North Carolina and Grant tightened his hold around Petersburg, members of the 11th Kansas Cavalry were camped at Julesburg in Colorado Territory. The food was poor, flimsy tents served as their only protection from the driving snow, and buffalo chips were the main source of heat. The regiment had not come into contact with any Indians, but had seen their share of jack rabbits and prairie dogs. The seeming futility of the situation quite often led to demoralization, as one trooper's diary entry for March 24 suggests. "I have just eat a snack of unwholesome eatables. The wind still blows hard and snow flies thick The mail came but, I received no letter. . . .The boys are all in their tents to shun the miserable dust that fills the air. Now 600 miles from home, out on the wild and windey plains, deprived the privelage of associating with a kind and loving wife and one of the sweetest little boys in Kansas."⁸

Veterans desperately wanted to avoid such circumstances. The men ordered west after the close of the Civil War were understandably upset at their predicament, and did not look upon the situation lightly. Cavalrymen in the 3rd Massachusetts, fresh from participating in the Grand Review that signaled the impending disbandment of the great armies, were shocked to discover the new orders which awaited them – frontier duty. "The men of the Third had been some time at the front," wrote the regimental historian. "They had seen much hard fighting. They had tried to do their duty. They had during many days and months, struck for their country[.]" They were now inclined to strike for home. The order simply made no sense to the tired troopers. Even as they made their way to Fort Leavenworth the disbandment of the armies, and their regiment, continued.

⁸ Lloyd A. Nichols, ed. *Elijah Nelson Doughty's Civil War Diary of Travels*. (Kansas Collection Articles), [http:// www.kancoll.org/articles/nichols/index.html](http://www.kancoll.org/articles/nichols/index.html). 27 March 1865. Hereafter referred to as "Doughty Diary."

Many of their veteran officers were mustered out en route. Their horses were taken and transferred to a Michigan cavalry unit, also stationed in the west, leaving them on foot. No doubt many wondered why they had even been deployed. After several petitions demanding their discharge, the horseless Massachusetts cavalymen were finally sent home.⁹

The democratic soldier, always sensitive to slights and perfectly willing to rectify injustice when perceived, sometimes flouted military protocol in expressing dismay. In May 1865 veteran troopers from the 6th Michigan Cavalry openly threatened to mutiny should they be sent west. They eventually became so unruly it was thought advisable to muster many of them out of service before crossing the Missouri River.¹⁰ The 16th Kansas Cavalry took even more drastic action in July 1865. Slated to take part in General Patrick Connor's ill-fated Powder River Expedition despite the looming expiration of their enlistments, the regiment mutinied and refused to march. According to one witness, they declared they had not enlisted to fight Indians, "had not lost any red devils, and were not disposed to hunt for any." Only Connor's threat to blow them to pieces with artillery made the men reconsider the wisdom of their decision.¹¹ A similar mutiny occurred among the men of the 6th West Virginia Cavalry that same month. Stationed at Fort Leavenworth, the men seethed at the notion of frontier duty after having served in Virginia. Prior to the incident, an enlisted man had written an angry missive to the *Wheeling Intelligencer*, published August 26, outlining their plight. "We all enlisted with the full expectation of being mustered out of service at the close of the war, and as the dawn of peace approached, every heart rejoiced at the thought of being welcomed home by a noble wife, mother, or loving sister. . . .The enlisted men of the regiment are very much dissatisfied with their condition [on the frontier], but feel confident that our State authorities will do all they can to alleviate our wrongs" Had officers read this letter, they would have realized they had just been put on notice; the men had reached the limits of patience. When ordered to march 900 miles overland from Fort Leavenworth to

⁹ Rev. James K. Ewer. *The Third Massachusetts Cavalry in the War for the Union*. (Historical Committee of the Regimental Association, 1903), 251-253, 267-273.

¹⁰ Patricia Wight Geyer, ed. *Sheldon L. Wight: His Story*. (Charlotte, MI: Charlotte Lithograph Inc., 1998), 90-91.

¹¹ Capt. H.E. Palmer's Account of the Connor Expedition, *Powder River Campaigns and Sawyers Expedition of 1865*, Leroy R. Hafen and Ann W. Hafen, eds. (Glendale, California: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1961), 107.

Salt Lake City, they refused. Ordered to fall in, according to the *Intelligencer*, they responded plainly: “We do not intend to cross the plains.” Incensed, the brigade commander ordered the 21st New York Cavalry to surround the mutineers and to open fire with howitzers if they refused to move. In this instance, the renegades refused to be bullied. They stood their ground and called the officer’s bluff. They were not fired upon, but all were placed under guard and eventually sent west anyway.¹² Mutiny, always a favorite fantasy among volunteers, was nevertheless localized. Most instances occurred among these veteran units, transferred from the east.

5.2.2 The Role of Vengeance

Though the majority of troops did not relish the idea of frontier duty or battling Indians, there were some exceptions. Some entered the ranks out of vengeance, with specific intentions of killing as many Native Americans as possible. Often they did not discriminate between hostile and friendly tribes. Gripped by panic in late 1864 as the result of overblown and sensationalist newspaper coverage, the citizens of Denver believed they would soon be slaughtered by the largest combination of Indian tribes ever assembled on the continent. In defense they organized the 3rd Colorado Cavalry, a hundred day volunteer regiment. Recruited for the sole purpose of killing Indians, the inexperienced troopers performed better than expected, attacking and defeating an unsuspecting and peaceful band of Cheyenne in November 1864 at Sand Creek. After the bloodbath – in which several hundred men, women and children had been murdered – the “Bloody Thirdsters” returned to Denver as conquering heroes amidst parades and patriotic speeches.

Perhaps a more “legitimate” example of the desire for revenge can be found among regiments involved in the Sioux wars of Minnesota and the Northwest. The terror and destruction caused by the Sioux uprising in August 1862 prompted the creation of several new units, and instilled in men already under arms in the South a yearning to return home and clean out the “red devils” who dared to attack their families. “I suppose that you have heard long before this of the Indian trouble,” wrote one Minnesotan to his family back in Maine in September 1862. “I enlisted soon after the outbreak The

¹² Wheeling *Intelligencer*, 26 August 1865.

Indians have made awfull work out there killing people and destroying property.”¹³ As Brigadier General Henry H. Sibley assembled forces in Minnesota for punitive campaigns in 1862 and 1863, the men under his command champed at the bit. Recalled a Minnesotan in the 6th regiment, “the anxiety and determination of the volunteers to reach the savages and revenge the outrages was at fever heat.”¹⁴ A captain in the 1st Mounted Rangers concurred. “The privates were citizens of Minnesota,” he stated, “and many enlisted with hearts aching for wives and children and other relatives who had been slaughtered by the barbarous knife and tomahawk. It may well be supposed that they felt more than ordinary interest in the campaign, and had no tender feeling for the Indian.”¹⁵ Nor were the feelings limited to Minnesotans who more immediately felt the horror of the violence. An infantryman in the 27th Iowa stationed at Fort Snelling declared that “every souldier feels like butchering every Indian they can get their eyes on.”¹⁶ An officer in the 41st Iowa, caring for civilian captives released by the Santee Sioux under Little Crow, spelled out the intentions of his command in a letter to the *Iowa City Press*. “The Sauntee camp where [the prisoners] have been held for some time is 250 miles above Fort Randall, and we *hope* to find it Be assured of one thing, *we will take no prisoners.*”¹⁷

The impetus for retaliation was clear and immediate in Minnesota, and some soldiers retained their fanatical hatred of Indians during the subsequent campaigns against the Sioux in 1863 and 1864. As the memories of the 1862 atrocities receded, however, passions cooled. Some began to question the legitimacy of further action against the Sioux, so thorough was the diaspora.¹⁸ By 1863 the Sioux and Winnebago

¹³ James M. Woodbury to “Dear Friends,” 22 September 1862, James M. Woodbury Papers, Duke U.

¹⁴ *Minnesota in the Civil and Indian Wars*, vol. 1. (Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2005), Narrative of Charles W. Johnson, 6th Regiment, 305.

¹⁵ *Minnesota in the Civil and Indian Wars*, vol. 1. (Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2005), Narrative of Captain Eugene M. Wilson, First Regiment of Mounted Rangers, 520.

¹⁶ Charles Oscar Torrey to wife, 16 October 1862, Charles Oscar Torrey Papers, LC.

¹⁷ *Iowa City Press*, 20 December 1862 quoted in Mildred Throne, ed., “Iowa Troops in Dakota Territory, 1861-1865,” *Iowa Journal of History*, Vol. 57, No. 2, (April 1959), 130.

¹⁸ There was a persistent belief among many soldiers and officers that the 1864 Dakota campaign was completely unnecessary, and was only undertaken because of the manipulation of certain individuals – traders or state officials – who chanced to profit from the undertaking. “All the people in this territory and western Iowa, great and small, are doing their best to get another expedition sent up the river (object, to make money),” wrote one suspicious Iowa trooper in February, “and iff lying can effect anything they will gain their point.” See Carol G. Goodwin, ed. “The Letters of Private Milton Spencer, 1862-1865: A

Indians (who had not participated in the uprising) were expelled from the state. Some sought refuge in Canada, while the rest fled into Dakota Territory. Unlike the Minnesotans, few soldiers carried into battle the immediate need for retaliation. Even California troops, from a state where volunteer militias had waged an exterminationist war against Native Americans in the 1850s, could not initially match the hatred of Minnesota volunteers.¹⁹ The explanation for this phenomenon is plain. By the 1860s, the Indian “problem” in California had mostly been eradicated. Soldiers from that state were usually sent to other areas, including Oregon and Arizona. Any direct threat to their homes and families was not apparent, in contrast to the situation in Minnesota and the surrounding states. Most soldiers destined to fight Native Americans initially possessed no personal grudges. Troops from Missouri, Michigan and Ohio likely had little experience with Indians and therefore had no basis on which to form negative opinions other than from the prevailing racial sentiments of the day. As the incessant skirmishing and guerrilla warfare continued, however, and soldiers endured forced marches in pursuit of an elusive enemy that never seemed to stand and confront them like “white men,” as they starved and suffered from intense heat and subzero temperatures, these men would eventually learn to hate them as the Minnesotans did.

5.2.3 The Volunteer Character

The majority of soldiers stationed in the west came from the frontier states and territories. The regiments from the east, which caused so many headaches for officers, rarely stayed long enough to engage Indians in battle. One notable exception was the 11th Ohio Cavalry, formed specifically for frontier duty and assigned to protect the Overland Trail and telegraph wires. Other units, mustered to counter Confederate threats to New Mexico, had accomplished their stated purpose by 1862. With the rebels successfully beaten back and contained within Texas, these Union regiments also reverted to

Soldier’s View of Military Life on the Northern Plains,” *North Dakota History*, Vol. 37, No. 4 (Fall 1970), 255.

¹⁹ Robert M. Utley. *Frontiersmen in Blue: The United States Army and the Indian, 1848-1865*. (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1967), 100-102. California miners, unlike regular soldiers and officers, were not bashful about waging wars of extermination against Indian tribes that disrupted their operations. Indeed, these ad-hoc militias frequently demanded that their expeditions be reimbursed by the Federal government. They had, they believed, shown the Army how wars against Indians were supposed to be carried out.

protecting frontier trails and settlements from Native Americans. Most western soldiers who fought Indians, then, stayed in the theater of operation for extended periods, sometimes years. In some instances, they spent their entire military careers in the west, enlisting early in the war and retained as long as 1866. They came to know their enemy, and themselves, intimately.

Examining the letters and diaries of frontier volunteers one is struck, first, by the overwhelming consensus among them that their military careers could be better spent somewhere else. A second salient characteristic of the men is a naivety of and disdain for military discipline. In these traits, the soldiers were unremarkable. Volunteers from every quarter of the divided country experienced military growing pains and chafed under the unfamiliar restrictions the army enforced on their democratic nature. Officers and enlisted men alike fumbled through the confusing maze of military protocol. Some never achieved proficiency or accepted their temporary lot. When Union and Confederate forces squared off, however, they had the relative advantage of maturing simultaneously. As Lincoln told hesitant General Irvin McDowell on the eve of Bull Run, “you are all green alike.” These soldiers also possessed the additional safety net of being engaged in a conventional war. In essence, they already “knew” their enemy. They understood, dimly, what a battle might look like. Though they might be taken by surprise, they usually knew when another army was in proximity and when a fight might occur. If an officer bungled an order and ordered an advance instead of a retreat, soldiers could confidently assume they would be taken prisoner, alive and without being tortured. While soldiers in a conventional war relied on drill to prepare them for the marching and maneuvering needed in battle, such training was particularly irrelevant for those engaged in fighting Indians. Nothing but experience would prepare soldiers for Native American guerrilla warfare. Inexperience in an unconventional war, however, especially when the enemy was well-versed in the tactics, quite often led to tragedy and atrocity.

A captain in the 7th Iowa Cavalry tried to explain the nature of the volunteer in the Indian campaigns. They were intelligent, he thought, and most could read and write tolerably well. They possessed courage and were willing to face danger. Though suitable as fighters, he believed that, “being volunteers and being taken out of the great body of people along with their officers, they felt that they were about as good as their

officers were, and that they had a right to a will of their own.” They were strong-headed, willful and obstinate. Young and energetic, the men frequently organized bare-knuckle boxing matches which the officers tended to overlook. After all, he concluded, “they had to fight somebody at some time, and little private fisticuffs were only an outlet for the energy and vigor of the men individually.” Add whiskey to the mix, however, and the situation became explosive.²⁰ Another Iowa officer likewise observed a streak of unruliness among the soldiers in the Sioux campaign of 1863. “The men . . . were as good as any that could be found,” he noted, “but were not yet disciplined and they were simply let loose among three or four thousand Indians and overrun the whole country for miles around” Before long, he added with dismay, through carelessness or vandalism soldiers had set fire to the prairie burning thirty or forty square miles of grassland.²¹

Most men obeyed orders conditionally. Few officers inspired unquestioned obedience, and the majority were simply tolerated. The patience of volunteers, never great, was stretched to its limits when orders made little sense or were contrary to what the men saw as in the best interest of the campaign or themselves (often these were contradictory). “There is no preliminary explanation to soldiers,” remarked a member of the 2nd Nebraska Cavalry, “as to what they are going to do, or where they are going, or why the orders to march today, when almost positive assurance was given yesterday to remain a few days, but perhaps this is military discipline, military rules according to the articles [of] war, -- if so, I don’t like it”²² If the officer did not inspire greatness, the situation could deteriorate quickly. Officers, most of whom were also volunteers, were sometimes wholly unfit to command and served as poor examples for the soldiers. Enlisted men did not waste time in expressing their displeasure. An Iowa trooper thought his officers “more familiar with a deck of cards than they are with Cavalry tactics and army regulations”²³ A trooper in 11th Ohio Cavalry was less than inspired by the colonel of his regiment. Upset at what he perceived as reluctance to fight Indians, he

²⁰ Eugene F. Ware. *The Indian War of 1864*. Clyde C. Walton, ed. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1960, 1911), 25-26.

²¹ John Pattee. *Dakota Campaigns*. South Dakota Historical Collections, Vol. 5 (1910), 294.

²² Richard D. Rowen, ed. “The Second Nebraska’s Campaign against the Sioux.” *Diary of Henry W. Pierce*. Nebraska History, Vol. 44, No. 1 (March 1963), 30.

²³ Goodwin, “The Letters of Private Milton Spencer, 252.

vented his anger in a letter home. “The Col might make a good farmer but he ain’t fit to command a regiment,” he wrote. “He might make a good private if awkwardness was any help. The boys have to laugh at him often at ‘dress parade’ he draws his saber so gracefully . . . then returns his sword to the scabbard, the wrong side foremost and works half an hour to get it out to put it in right. I don’t want any more Col. Collins in mine if I can help it.”²⁴

At times the accusations of the soldiers were without merit and the product of spite. On other occasions the actions of officers were genuinely unacceptable. Some of the latter cases involved drunkenness. A Californian disgustedly witnessed one of his officers, in a state of “beastly intoxication,” fall headfirst into a ditch and then placed under arrest.²⁵ The officers in the 1st Minnesota Mounted Rangers left some of their men perplexed, as well. “Left camp this Morning and don’t any body know where we are going,” wrote one in his diary. “the Colonel and Major are both half drunk all the time we have got 9 days rations on hand and cant reach any place to get any rations for 14 days.”²⁶ His sense of abandonment on the wild northern Plains was supreme. A commander in 7th Iowa Cavalry believed the shortcomings of officers stemmed from their civilian professions, rather than their addictions. “[A]mong the 55,000 soldiers furnished by the state of Iowa there were a goodly number of lawyers,” he asserted, “and I will risk my reputation as a soldier by saying right here that a lawyer is no good in the army.” He claimed to have personally witnessed the transgressions of some of these lawyer-officers while in the field. They constantly questioned orders, argued with superiors, and generally lacked discipline themselves and were therefore unable to instill it in their men.²⁷

Soldiers did not have to think officers incompetent or alcoholics to resent them. The power their superiors wielded over them was enough to offend their sensibilities, and they sometimes took personally the limitations and restrictions placed on their freedom. Campaigning against the Sioux, General Sibley at one point issued orders prohibiting

²⁴ William E. Unrau, ed. *Tending the Talking Wire: A Buck Soldier’s View of Indian Country, 1863-1866*. (Salt Lake: University of Utah Press, 1974), 136.

²⁵ Diary of William Addison Bushnell, 24 February 1865, <http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.com/~steelquist/WmBushnell.html>. Hereafter referred to as “Bushnell Diary.”

²⁶ Oscar Garrett Wall Diary, 20 August 1863, Dakota Conflict of 1862 Manuscripts Collection, MHS.

²⁷ John Pattee, *Dakota Campaigns*, 293.

camp fires at night, lest the Indians be notified of the army's position. The order necessarily precluded the making of hot coffee, that staple of the soldier's diet. The men of the 6th Iowa were unimpressed. Queried one trooper, "What was the soldier worth if he did [not] have his coffee, and that hot and strong?" Some of the men had fires crackling in short time, only to have them hastily snuffed out by corporals of the guard. Next morning, someone juvenily started the cry of "Cold Coffee!" which quickly reverberated throughout the ranks. Sibley had to threaten his men with arrest in order to silence them.²⁸ At other times, resentment ran high because of the tone of the orders issued. A volunteer in the 1st Oregon Infantry, stationed near the coast at Fort Hoskins, commented on an altercation caused by a private's violation of the mandatory lights-out rule after taps. "[He] was sent to the guard house because he did not obey the insulting command of 'God damn you blow that light out, or I'll blow you out,'" he recorded.²⁹ A corporal in the 4th California Infantry, also deployed in Oregon, grew progressively irritated at the lack of available food and the seeming indifference of officers. Men habitually left the boundaries of camp to procure some semblance of a meal, but when loaves of bread from the nearby Indian agency bake house mysteriously disappeared, orders rolled down the line prohibiting future excursions. "God help us," he confided in his diary, "for Uncle Sam's Subordinates seem bent on making 'Volunteering' a Dead letter for the future. Our pork is spoiled, our flour damaged, wormy, makes miserable bread. Complaints long and bitter." When a fellow soldier was arrested on suspicion of saving some of his rice from dinner to give to "some Squaw" at the agency (most likely in exchange for sexual favors), the corporal again expressed his dissatisfaction. "Here's justice again, a man disgraced on suspicion. Thus is man's nobler feelings blunted, his pride humbled, and the last tie of selfrespect severed by injustice." The final outrage came several days later, as men reported being stopped by an Indian as they tried to leave camp. The man claimed he had orders from their Lieutenant to throw every soldier in the river who could not present a written pass. "This sounds every [bit] like Lieut Garden

²⁸ J.H. Drips. *Three Years Among the Indians in Dakota*. John M. Carroll, ed. (New York: Sol Lewis, 1974), 6.

²⁹ Herbert B. Nelson and Preston E. Onstad, eds. *A Webfoot Volunteer: The Diary of William M. Hilleary, 1864-1866*. (Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 1965), 45

who considers an Indian better than a Soldier,” the Californian wrote contemptuously. “Such Orders, if persisted in, will result in a row.”³⁰

As an Iowa officer explained, “The government of the army is necessarily simple tyranny. Orders must be obeyed. That is the essence of the whole matter.”³¹ This hard reality rankled volunteers. Though they had ostensibly enlisted as defenders of freedom and civilization, they often described themselves as “slaves” and not much better off than the Indians they pursued. A California cavalryman, camped in New Mexico, railed against orders to clean the officers’ quarters and cook houses. “They want to make slaves & dogs of us, not soldiers. They want to send us out to bite then call us back to lick their feet,” he complained.³² An Oregon infantryman looked on enviously at the discharge of several of his comrades in 1864. “They were fortunate in choosing to enlist for one year only, since soldiers on this coast are only slaves to the Officers appointed over them, not for their superior intellect or abilities but through electioneering intrigue and through the influence of friends who know as little of military affairs as a hog does of Sunday.”³³ One of the more articulate tirades against the pettiness of officers came from a corporal in the 2nd Nebraska Cavalry during the 1863 Sioux Campaign. Actively pursuing the Indians across the Dakota plains and short on rations, he could not fathom the orders from his captain to continue to drill or face arrest. “This aristocratic treatment might do with Russian Serfs that had never lived in any other, but the military world,” he began, “but with men that were born & educated among the free institutions of the east but left their homes of plenty, to endure the privations of frontier life, & at their country’s hour of need, to offer their lives for the protection of their homes, wives & little ones against the ravages of the red man, to be treated thus ungentlemanly & like slaves was more than the human heart could bear & it needed but one stroke more of the hammer to burst the cap

³⁰ Gunter Barth, ed. *All Quiet on the Yamhill: The Civil War in Oregon, the Journal of Corporal Royal A. Bensell*. (Eugene, OR: University of Oregon Books, 1959), 8-11.

³¹ John Pattee, *Dakota Campaigns*, 293; Later generations would have sympathized. The GIs of World War II referred to these incomprehensible rules as “chickenshit.” Chickenshit, as Paul Fussell has ably defined the term, is “behavior that makes military life worse than it need be: petty harassment of the weak by the strong; open scrimmage for power and authority and prestige; sadism thinly disguised as necessary discipline Chickenshit can be recognized instantly because it never has anything to do with winning the war.” See Paul Fussell’s, *Wartime: Understanding and Behavior in the Second World War*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 80.

³² Henry P. Walker, ed. “Soldier in the California Column: The Diary of John W. Teal,” *Arizona and the West*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (Spring, 1971), 56.

³³ Nelson and Onstad, *A Webfoot Volunteer*, 155-156.

that covered those volcanic fires of hatred, which would break forth in open rebellion, let the consequences be what they would.”³⁴

As intense as the hatred for officers could sometimes be, few men openly rebelled through mutiny or physical violence. There was in actuality little soldiers could do to remedy the situation, though that did not prevent them from making the attempt. When pressed they tended to react in a subtle, passive-aggressive manner. An Oregon trooper, for example, was content to allow his cantankerous lieutenant, obviously lost, wander for several miles in the wilderness rather than point out the fact that he had strayed from the intended route. “I was not willing to put in my gab even to set him on the right road,” he recorded afterwards. “I had sense enough not to tell him he was on the wrong road.”³⁵ At other times soldiers, individually or in groups, refused to obey orders they found demeaning. Their actions were not exactly “mutiny,” as they generally were aimed at a particular officer, but the “shoulder-straps” were not about to argue semantics in such situations. One Oregonian found himself in the guardhouse after refusing to cut wood for his superior.³⁶ Another freely argued with an overbearing lieutenant over a similar issue. “I said something about *hauling our own wood* and letting Officers do the same,” he recorded, “whereupon [the lieutenant] turned loose his wrath and threatened to report me to headquarters. I told him to report. I was ready.”³⁷ Seventeen men from the 4th California Infantry finally reached their breaking point on November 18, 1862. Fed up with the boredom of Oregon and the persistence of their officers in mandating daily drills of the most rudimentary nature, they refused to muster. They desired a court-martial, according to one witness, for the purpose of lodging a grievance against their superiors.³⁸ Such techniques were not restricted to troops in Oregon or to seemingly trivial situations. Ten men from the 11th Kansas Cavalry, ordered to repair a telegraph line torn down by Indians some fifty miles from their camp, twice refused their officers. The order was, according to one of the soldiers, “equivalent to an order to march that number of men out to shoot them down, scalp them, cut out their hearts, livers, sinews, and cut off their

³⁴ Rowen, *Diary of Henry W. Pierce*, 35.

³⁵ D.H. Taylor *Diary*, 18 May 1862, Taylor Family Papers, University of Oregon.

³⁶ *Ibid*, 1 February 1862.

³⁷ Nelson and Onstad, *A Webfoot Volunteer*, 129.

³⁸ Barth, *All Quiet on the Yamhill*, 65.

hands and feet and send them to the savages. The boys refused to go unless 30 men were sent.” The frontier volunteer may have been brave, but he had his limits.³⁹

Under the cover of anonymity, soldiers might be more daring or proactive. One Iowan reported a hit and run assault on an unpopular officer at Fort Randall: “This evening at 8 ½ Oclock some one threw a snowball through the window of the Majors house and struck him on the back & then run through the alley back of our qrts. . . .”⁴⁰ Though corrosive to military discipline, the affair was physically harmless. In rare circumstances events could turn deadly. A captain in the 7th Iowa Cavalry believed men under his command murdered one of their lieutenants. The enlisted men found the hard-drinking officer particularly onerous. Insulting in his demeanor, he also had an unfortunate habit of cheating the soldiers at cards and placing them under arrest when they complained. While returning from a scout one evening in March 1864, the lieutenant was shot from behind by an “accidental” discharge of a carbine which blew off part of his head and killed him instantly. The captain suspected foul play, but the matter was soon dropped. “Everybody seemed to be pleased with the circumstance; nobody seemed to find any fault with it, and there being no evidence to the contrary . . . nothing was done except to bury the Lieutenant,” he recounted.⁴¹

When unable or unwilling to lash out against officers, soldiers found other outlets for their frustration. They regularly set prairies fires, for no apparent reason other than to show that it could be done. They drank to excess, fought among themselves, and sometimes killed each other. One night in August 1865, the discharge of several firearms prompted men camped near Fort Connor to rush from their tents and form into line. They expected an assault, but soon learned the real cause of the disturbance. “Two of the 2nd California boys who had joined us . . . had been playing cards and had some disagreement which they settled with the ever ready revolver,” explained a trooper. “One was shot through the body, the other through both arms.”⁴² Troopers from the 11th Ohio Cavalry, assigned to protect a passing emigrant train, instead fired on it after a dispute with some its members. Subsequently, according to one witness, “the emigrants asked

³⁹ Isaac B. Pennick Diary, 7 July 1865, Hay Star-Brown University Library.

⁴⁰ Mildred Throne, ed. “Iowa Troops in Dakota Territory: Based on the Diaries and Letters of Henry J. Wieneke,” *Iowa Journal of History*, Vol. 57, No. 2 (April 1959), 115.

⁴¹ Ware, *The Indian War of 1864*, 96-97.

⁴² Charles W. Adams. *Civil War Reminiscences Interestingly Told*. (Greenfield? Ohio, 1918), 14-15.

protection from [the 11th Kansas] against the Ohio troops, saying they were more fearful of them than of Indians.”⁴³ Some members of the 21st New York Cavalry, in an outrageous maneuver, attempted to sack the outpost at Julesburg, Colorado and make away with the sutler’s supplies. They were thwarted only by the timely arrival of the 6th West Virginia Cavalry. In the ensuing firefight between the troopers, several were wounded.⁴⁴ One incident is notable not so much for its bloodiness but for the commentary it evoked. A Lieutenant in the 13th Missouri Cavalry tried to break up a scuffle between his men, only to receive a bullet through his throat. He survived, but lost the ability to speak. At least one officer, recently arrived from the east, pointed to the previous military experience of the Missouri troopers as the source of the difficulties. “Though strong Union men they had been accustomed to fighting of the guerrilla stamp rather than fighting disciplined troops,” he observed. “They had but little . . . army discipline among [them] and their experience in the service had made them show more of the bully than men softened and knit together by common dangers and sufferings.”⁴⁵ In other words, uncivilized and savage guerilla warfare was destructive not only of the being but of the soul. Savage warfare resulted in savage men. Though this eastern officer obviously sniffed at the poorly disciplined Missouri cavalry his observations, if correct, did not bode well for “civilized” men about to be thrust into an “uncivilized” war.

It is sometimes difficult to discern the motivations behind the actions of soldiers, and whether such events were signs of purposeful insubordination, frustration or just plain vandalism is not always clear. What they do clearly demonstrate is a group of men unhappy with their situation and completely capable of acting against orders. The readiness to disobey was a powerful tool, and carried great implications in the Indian campaigns. If ordered to undertake a dubious task – such as attacking a village filled with women and children or murdering Indian prisoners – the men had already made it perfectly clear that they were able to defy such orders if they so chose. The depressing reality is that many complied willingly, and sometimes enthusiastically, with orders that led to atrocity and at other times disobeyed orders that could have prevented it. Soldiers

⁴³ Isaac B. Pennick Diary, 12 July 1865, Hay Star-Brown University Library.

⁴⁴ George H. Holliday. *On the Plains in '65*. ([n.p.], 1883), 42-43.

⁴⁵ Mary D. Musgrove, ed. *Autobiography of Capt. Richard W. Musgrove*. (Published by Mary D. Musgrove, 1921), 196-197,

applied to the Indian campaigns the same outlook they applied to the military in general. They obeyed orders when it suited them, and were quick to deal out their own brand of justice. Most men simply had no qualms about killing Indians and, indeed, neither did officers. It was not too far of a leap for the men to displace their frustration with officers, emigrants, and politicians who kept them in the field onto the Native Americans they encountered. Were they not, after all, the sole obstacle that prevented them from returning home? That officers generally shared the same mindset, as least in relation to Indians, only affirmed their beliefs and encouraged the behavior. Frustration caused by the military, however, was only one of a number of factors, and not the most important, that molded the soldier-Indian relationship. Volunteers everywhere lacked discipline and did not hesitate to transfer aggression onto the noncombatants before them. There is a far cry, however, between Sherman in South Carolina and Chivington at Sand Creek. Something else was at work here.

5.2.4 The Wild Frontier

The conditions of military life on the frontiers could be extreme. The landscape itself seemed treacherous, and every cliff, ravine and natural obstacle capable of concealing a potential Indian ambush created anxiety among the soldiers. Encountering the Dakota Badlands, one general described the area as “Hell with the fires burned out.” The mountains of Oregon seemed no less daunting, nor did the deserts of the southwest. Even the northern Plains with its “changeable” weather, as the soldiers dubbed the phenomenon, could be dangerous. Freak storms alternately bringing snow, flash floods, and enormous hailstones caused considerable dismay in the ranks. Drought, grasshoppers, and prairie fires also had to be contended with in the summer months. To many the frontier seemed forlorn, perilous, and most tellingly, “uncivilized.” There seemed to be no consensus among soldiers as to where civilization stopped and the frontier began, but all were aware when they had crossed the line. “We are not within fifty miles of Fort Riley [Kansas],” wrote an officer in the 11th Missouri Cavalry to his wife. “We’ll reach there in three days. We will soon cross the border of civilization.”⁴⁶ William Addison Bushnell of the 2nd California Infantry, marching toward Arizona in

⁴⁶ Peter F. Clark to wife, 25 September 1863, Peter F. Clark Papers, Missouri Historical Society.

1865, believed it stopped somewhere east of El Monte, California. “Judging from appearances, we are on the outskirts of civilization,” he penned in his diary.⁴⁷ Likewise, a member of the 1st Dakota Cavalry, campaigning in the Sioux war of 1864, marveled at entering a land “never before trod by white men”⁴⁸

Impressions of the land naturally depended on the area and the soldier making the observations. Opinions varied widely, but all were awed by the vastness and “emptiness” of the frontier. From the deserts of the southwest to the plains of the northwest, soldiers sometimes found it difficult to sufficiently describe what they saw to the folks back home. “A person of observation must be struck with the vastness of these plains,” wrote an Ohio trooper from western Dakota. “[A]mong all the sketches and descriptions of them . . . I have never yet found the author who has told the half. I acknowledge my own utter incapability of doing the subject justice. I had often heard of the American Desert, but I never expected to see such a desert as does really exist between the Missouri [River] and Great Salt Lake.”⁴⁹ Others were more concise. “The most romantic place I ever saw,” wrote a Minnesotan on viewing the Dakota Plains for the first time.⁵⁰ The wildness and beauty of the Plains tugged at a private in 6th Iowa Cavalry. As he drifted further from civilization, he embraced the illusion of freedom. “Well, this is a great country, wild and free, and will be so for a long time to come,” he wrote to his friends. “To the south, north, and west the great untamed wilderness stretches away many long days journey. And iff it was not for the controll of the shoulder straps, I fancy I should go wild to”⁵¹

As troops scoured the west in pursuit of Indians that they rarely found, they stood in awe of natural land formations like Courthouse Rock, Chimney Rock, and the Dakota Badlands. The curious or educated collected specimens of petrified wood, speculated on the remnants of ancient villages, and commented on contemporary Indian drawings etched on rocks. Others, less interested in the sciences and anthropological undertakings, noted the presence of coal, iron, or gold and the likelihood of establishing successful farms. They were conscious of blazing new routes and of their position as the vanguard

⁴⁷ Bushnell Diary, 13 September 1865.

⁴⁸ English., 274.

⁴⁹ Enrau, *Tending the Talking Wire*, 141-142.

⁵⁰ John Nelson Pettibone Diary, 26 June 1863, Dakota Conflict of 1862 Manuscripts Collection, MHS.

⁵¹ Goodwin, “The Letters of Private Milton Spencer,” 244-245.

of civilization. Once the obstacles – natural and Indian – had been cleared, they expected others to follow. “Hard Coal has been discovered . . . in considerable quantities also iron ore,” recorded a member of the 8th Minnesota Infantry while in Dakota. He was confident of the prospects for future settlement. “our discovery of coal settle the question of fuel for a Rail Road through this Country to Idaho and thence to the Pacific Ocean. it will probably build up a large city at this place.”⁵² The area near Yankton, the territorial capital of Dakota, held great agricultural promise according to a Nebraska cavalryman: “A rich district of land surrounds this point & facilities for raising stock . . . & in time, if the Indians are quiet, Yancton will become one of the heaviest stock markets in the northwest.”⁵³ In Arizona, gold fever struck California troops in 1862. Rumors of gold in the area had abounded for years, but Apaches consistently prevented thorough mining. Soldiers, armed with revolvers, felt confident enough to try their luck. “Our whole party turned out prospecting with tin pans, buckets, etc – the fever running pretty high for two or three hours . . . and all come to the conclusion that rich diggings could be found,” wrote one to the San Francisco *Alta*.⁵⁴ Many soldiers filed such optimistic reports – before they met any serious Indian resistance or discovered that conquering the land would not be easily accomplished. When rumors of gold turned out to be false or severe droughts dampened agricultural hopes while parching the ground, men reevaluated their previous appraisals. The hardships encountered sometimes soured the most enthusiastic boosters of the West.

The landscape, impressive as it could be, was often a hindrance. The open prairie could be visually deceptive – a distinct disadvantage during military operations. One Iowan, part of a larger scouting mission from Fort Randall in Dakota, reported to his captain that he had spotted a group of Indians several miles distant that appeared to be observing them. “they seemed to Come up on top of the hill and then dodge back after looking at us,” he noted in his diary. “[T]hen some of them would get down on their hands and knees and crawl along and then suddenly disappear.” Officers deployed the men in a show of force, and as they approached the hill top believed they could see

⁵² John Henry Strong Diary, 14 July 1864, Dakota Conflict of 1862 Manuscripts Collection, MHS.

⁵³ Rowen, Diary of Henry W. Pierce, 26.

⁵⁴ San Francisco *Alta*, 10 July 1862, published in Andrew E. Masich, *The Civil War in Arizona: The Story of the California Volunteers, 1861-1865*. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2006), 204.

Indian ponies. After advancing a mile, the men discovered that their “Indians” were nothing more than prairie dogs. Concluded the would-be Indian spotter, “this is the most deceiving ground that I ever looked at”⁵⁵ A captain in the 9th Minnesota reported similar frustrations during the 1863 Sioux expeditions. Elation gave way to annoyance when his command discovered that a nearby Indian “supply train” they prepared to fire on was actually a stunted tree at least two miles distant. “The air out there is so deceptive that objects a long distance away seem to be very near,” he later recalled. “The prairie between us and the object was hilly with deep depressions in between, but to our eyes it appeared smooth and flat as a pancake.”⁵⁶

If the innocuous Plains irritated the soldiers, the Badlands of Dakota instilled those who encountered them in 1864 with wonder and fear. “Beggars all description,” wrote one. “It is only such a scene as can be realized in some wild distorted nightmare”⁵⁷ An Iowan, fruitlessly attempting to describe the Badlands in a letter home, abandoned the idea. “Suffice to say,” he concluded, “they are a succession of hills and deep ravines which at first sight one would think no sane man would attempt to pass [through].”⁵⁸ The twisting rock formations and deep valleys, intimidating in themselves, reduced the effectiveness of traditional military tactics; they were perfectly suited for the guerrilla warfare of their enemy. “It was like looking into another, and a terribly desolate world,” exclaimed a Dakota cavalryman. “It surpassed anything I had ever seen, read or heard of, this veritable fortress of the red man, where they had made their boast that they would wipe out the soldiers.”⁵⁹ For several days in August 1864 the soldiers under General Alfred Sully’s command wound through this lunar landscape in their relentless pursuit of the Sioux. Warriors constantly sniped at them from the cliff tops. The column was slowed for hours at a time while men chipped away at valley walls too narrow to permit passage of their wagon train. Soldiers and draft animals suffered from dehydration, both forced to drink from stagnant pools of muddy water.

⁵⁵ Throne, Henry Wieneke Diary, 119.

⁵⁶ Ole Paulson Reminiscence, Dakota Conflict of 1862 Manuscripts Collection, MHS.

⁵⁷ John E. Robinson to “Dear Libbie,” 11 October 1864, Dakota Conflict of 1862 Manuscripts Collection, MHS.

⁵⁸ Kim Allen Scott and Ken Kempcke, eds. “A Journey to the Heart of Darkness: John W. Wright and the War against the Sioux, 1863-1865,” *Montana: The Magazine of Western History*, Vol. 50, No. 4 (Winter 2000), 13.

⁵⁹ English, “Dakota’s First Soldiers,” 284.

No less an obstacle were the deserts of the southwest or the rocky terrain of Oregon. “At least a portion of the territory comprises what is known as the ‘Gadsden Purchase,’” wrote a Californian while in Arizona. “We do not know the amount paid but are of the opinion from a pecuniary point of view, Uncle Sam Was the loser.” On the march he managed to compose this bit of unhappy doggerel:

Oh such is the desert that burns like a furnace
A treeless waste of immeasurable sand
That conspires with the sun to torture and burn us
Through the width and breadth of this waterless land⁶⁰

A Texas cavalryman, patrolling the western part of the state in 1861, could not help feeling uneasy. The scarcity of potable water and the threat of Indian ambush weighed on his mind. “This is a rather desolate looking country,” he remarked. “[W]e are not all-together as safe out here as in our hilly Eastern homes.”⁶¹ As soldiers discovered while traveling through the Badlands, the more difficult the terrain, the more it played to the advantage of Native American tactics. A captain in the 1st Oregon Cavalry, futilely chasing Snake Indians to the foothills of the Blue Mountains, understood this fact. “The surrounding country is rugged in the extreme,” he recorded in his diary, “a few stunted junipers alone relieving the prospect of utter barrenness and desolation. It is the rockiest country I ever saw, a first rate Snake country.”⁶²

Combined with the “desolation” of the land, weather and other natural occurrences could make the soldiers’ western experience an absolute nightmare. The immensity of the West seemed to result in commensurate storm systems. Whether or not this was actually the case, soldiers frequently noted with disbelief the peculiarity or intensity of storms and the misery they caused. The freakishness of the weather reinforced the soldiers’ notion that the frontier was a violent, unpredictable and unforgiving environment that threatened to swallow them whole. “[A] thunder storm burst upon us with a violence that I never before had any conception of,” recorded a California infantryman camped near Tucson in July 1862. “[T]he rain came down so fast

⁶⁰ Bushnell Diary, 10 November, 1865; 25 September, 1865.

⁶¹ Wiley, *Diary of William Williston Heartsill*, 17.

⁶² Priscilla Knuth, ed. “Cavalry in the Indian Country, 1864,” *Oregon Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 65, No. 1 (March 1964), 52-53.

that the plains were covered to the depth of 3 or 4 inches within 3 or 4 minutes of time.”⁶³ A Nebraska trooper was equally impressed with a storm that rolled over his camp in August 1863. “Had a strange storm one night,” he scribbled in his diary, “hot wind blew furiously, atmosphere so heavily charged with electricity that every thing that moved would sparkle the wind blowing upon the horses would cause a stream of sparks to roll off them” He awoke the next morning to find tents leveled and men covered with dirt searching for lost hats and clothing.⁶⁴ After a particularly fierce storm, the slumbering men of the 6th West Virginia awoke to an unpleasant discovery. Roused by a screaming comrade, they found their tents infested with hundreds of prairie snakes seeking shelter from the rain.⁶⁵ In some cases, conditions turned deadly. Before the 1863 battle of Big Mound in Dakota Territory, for instance, a massive storm enveloped the combatants. As Sioux and soldier commenced firing, lightning struck a company of unfortunate cavalymen, killing at least one of them.⁶⁶ Reflective soldiers might have searched for a deeper meaning behind the otherwise random incident, but most were too caught up in the ensuing events to give it much thought.

Hail storms, too, tormented the men. One such storm battered several troopers of the 11th Ohio Cavalry while they trailed a group of Indians through Dakota Territory. “[T]he most of us had nothing on our heads but forage caps,” wrote one to his sister, “and you’d better beleive our ears and noses suffered I never saw such a hailstorm before our horses thought somebody was pelting them with stones and they wanted to run to get out of the way.” Besides the bruising it gave the troopers, the storm also crushed out the trail they followed.⁶⁷ During the colder months, the favored time to attack Indian villages, men contended with freezing temperatures and snow storms. The scarcity of wood forced soldiers to resort to burning buffalo chips, collected on the ramrods of their muskets. Men unlucky enough to lose their way in blinding Rocky Mountain squalls usually froze to death before help could arrive. On patrols, leather accoutrements – boots and belts – could freeze solid. Fingers became so numb with cold that percussion caps

⁶³ Walker, “Soldier in the California Column,” 40.

⁶⁴ Rowen, *Diary of Henry W. Pierce*, 38.

⁶⁵ George H. Holliday. *On the Plains in '65*. [n.p], 1883, 25-26.

⁶⁶ Several soldiers mentioned this episode. See John K. Glanville and Carrol G. Glanville, eds. *I Saw the Ravages of an Indian War: A Diary Written by Amos E. Glanville, Sr.* (Privately published, 1988), 144.

⁶⁷ Unrau, 143-144.

could not be placed on weapons. The threat of frost bite was constant. Recalled one California trooper who participated in General Patrick Connor's slaughter of the Shoshone in January 1863, the harsh weather encountered on the march led to intense suffering among the men. "oh! the groans of the frozen," he exclaimed. "it seems to ring in my ears yet the poor fellows some lost their toes some a portion of their feet I worked nearly all night bringing water from the river to wett clothes to draw frost from their frozen limbs[.]"⁶⁸

The temperature could be cause for concern even in summer months. The plains of the Northwest, which suffered from extreme drought and a heat wave in the mid-1860s, could send the thermometer soaring during the day and tumbling at night. "Left camp this morning and as cold as billy be damed," quipped a Minnesota Ranger in his diary on August 24, 1863.⁶⁹ On a hot, sultry afternoon in June 1863 soldiers from the 7th Minnesota, expecting to rout a force of Sioux, disposed of their coats and vests in anticipation of the chase. As night set in, they regretted the decision. Some managed to keep warm by wrapping themselves in buffalo robes pilfered from the village they destroyed earlier in the day. Those with blankets, reported one soldier, "were reminded by their less fortunate comrades that everything about an Indian camp is quite alive with at least two kinds of vermin, either of which make life a burden and new clothing a necessity."⁷⁰

Beyond the southwestern deserts, the drought-stricken northern Plains presented one of the most physically punishing environments troops encountered. During the Sioux campaigns of 1863 and 1864 summer temperatures regularly climbed to 110 degrees. Wind kicked up the powdery topsoil and created unexpected "sandstorms." "Blew a perfect hurricane all night," reported an Ohio trooper from Fort Kearney in Nebraska. "Went after bread; lost my hat; brought in the bread and went back for my hat but came back minus. Almost impossible to face the wind. Sand and gravel cut the face."⁷¹ The debris tossed about by these storms could be debilitating. "Sore eyes" resulted in a least

⁶⁸ Hiram Tuttle Reminiscence, found in Newell Hart, *The Bear River Massacre*, (Preston, ID: Cache Valley Newsletter Publishing Company, 1982), 129.

⁶⁹ Oscar Garrett Wall Diary, 24 August 1863, Dakota Conflict of 1862 Manuscripts Collection, MHS.

⁷⁰ Capt. L.W. Collins. *The Expedition against the Sioux Indians*. (St. Cloud: Journal-Press Print, 1895), 14.

⁷¹ Myra E. Hull, ed. "Soldiering on the High Plains: The Diary of Lewis Byram Hull, 1864-1866," *Kansas Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (1938), 8.

twelve men of the 7th Iowa Cavalry being confined to quarters in May 1864. Desperate soldiers even purchased oversized spectacles from ranchers, supposedly custom made for dust storms, and wore them for protection.⁷²

The drought reduced the availability of potable water, already limited by high alkali concentrations. A campaign could turn on the presence or absence of water, as did Connor's 1865 Powder River expedition. Designed to permanently wipe out the Sioux menace, it failed spectacularly. Connor's scattered columns, wandering over poorly mapped territory in what is now northeastern Wyoming, suffered from severe dehydration and lost hundreds of draft animals before he finally called off the expedition. Participants in other campaigns, though ultimately more successful, experienced similar hardships. "Nothing but prairie slough water to drink," wrote a Minnesota cavalryman, "and it was so filthy that I had to strain it between my teeth and spit the young frogs out or swallow them just as I chose."⁷³ The drought forced soldiers of the 1863 Sioux campaign in Dakota to dig wells whenever they camped. Draft animals, too weak to be of use, were abandoned on the prairie to die or be captured by Indians. Ambulances picked up men who collapsed in the scorching heat. "One day was much like another," recalled an infantryman. "We saw nothing but the sky overhead and the prairie underfoot; the sun burned mercilessly. . . . Only a single time did we get a few drops of rain."⁷⁴

Insects compounded their difficulties. Every army in history has had to contend with its share of the pests, and Plains war veterans were no exception. In the 1860s, swarms of grasshoppers descended on the northern prairie. They nibbled on the fringes of uniforms and saddles, and generally annoyed the men in their path. More significantly, the grasshoppers devoured what grass survived the drought, leaving precious little forage for animals. Soldiers from Colorado to Dakota remarked on the creatures. "Left [camp] this Morning and things look more discouraging," commented a soldier trudging his way over the Dakota plains in 1863. "the grasshoppers are eating every thing in the country."⁷⁵

⁷² Ware, 130-131.

⁷³ Oscar Garrett Wall Diary, 23 June 1863, Dakota Conflict of 1862 Manuscripts Collection, MHS.

⁷⁴ Ole Paulson Reminiscence, Dakota Conflict of 1862 Manuscript Collection, MHS.

⁷⁵ Oscar Garrett Wall Diary, 2 July 1863, Dakota Conflict of 1862 Manuscripts Collection, MHS.

Should soldiers escape disillusionment and still be swayed by the “romance” of the West, the occasional grim discovery along the trail offered a stark reminder of the perpetual and unseen danger they faced. Common was the sight of an Indian funeral scaffold perched in a tree or supported on poles some distance from the ground, the corpse wrapped with its earthly possessions. Signs of previous encounters between white and red abounded. Many soldiers, in passing through Arizona, looked on glumly when they reached the site of the 1851 Oatman Family massacre. “Here it was that the ill fated emigrants perished at the hands of the blood-thirsty Apaches,” commented a California soldier after seeing the graves of the victims.⁷⁶ Another Californian reported a similarly disturbing scene while marching through southern New Mexico in 1862. “For two or three miles,” he remarked, “the road is lined with the graves & bones of white people that have been killed by the indians.”⁷⁷ Human remains in varying stages of decay were a common sight. Bleached bones and skulls certainly drew their share of commentary, but it was not always possible to determine if they belonged to Indian or emigrant, or how long ago death had occurred. Frequently, soldiers greeted their presence not with alarm but reflection: Who were these people? What had happened here? Contrarily, nothing caused greater consternation than stumbling upon obviously fresh remains. A captain in the 6th Michigan Cavalry, deployed in western Nebraska, was nonplussed by the discovery of a decomposing hand and forearm in the middle of the road.⁷⁸ Others recorded more grizzly scenes. “a party of our company were out yesterday and found the body of [a] little girl with several arrows sticking in it,” noted an Ohio trooper. “A large gray wolf was eating the child when they found it”⁷⁹

Formidable terrain, drought, sweltering heat, freezing temperatures, snowstorms, hailstorms, sandstorms, deluges, insects and the pervasive presence of death: many must have considered the possibility that the Biblical plagues had been unleashed upon the American frontier. At the very least, the conditions contributed to the notion of the

⁷⁶ Bushnell Diary, 17 October 1865; William M. Osborn, *The Wild Frontier: Atrocities during the American-Indian War from Jamestown Colony to Wounded Knee*, (New York: Random House, 2000), 195. In 1851 Apaches attacked the Oatman family near the Gila River, killing all but two girls who they sold as slaves to the Mohaves. Mary Oatman eventually starved to death but her sister, Olive, later gained her freedom and lectured widely on her experience.

⁷⁷ Walker, “Soldier in the California Column,” 44.

⁷⁸ Diary of Capt. B.F. Rockafellow in Hafen, 166

⁷⁹ Unrau, 147.

frontier as a savage land fit only for savages. “the Last four days travel has been over a country desolated by Grasshoppers,” observed a soldier in Dakota. “the White race have no bussiness settleing [here]. the Country taken as a whole is only fit for the Indian . . . there is but few places where the Water is fit for use and the land is a mixture of quicksand and Clay and not Timber enough on the whole route sufficient for one farm . . .”⁸⁰ A Dakota cavalryman, observing the area around Fort Randall, affirmed these sentiments: “[W]e discussed the possibility of the locality ever being settled and arrived at the conclusion that a white population could never be sustained there.”⁸¹ A Missouri artillery officer, fresh from the Powder River debacle that ended so miserably for the men involved, more candidly expressed his impressions of present-day eastern Wyoming and Montana. “I had marched my command a distance of largely over 1,000 miles, through a country almost unknown and unexplored, encountering storms as fierce in their fury as the merciless savage who is alone fit to inhabit this almost sterile waste,” he concluded.⁸² Colorado volunteers equally disparaged New Mexico. Mountainous, dry and lacking water, they saw little prospect for its future development. “Even were it not infested with wild Indians,” insisted one, “it can never become the theater of a rich and teeming population – never become endurable to our race, while there is still room in hell.”⁸³ The rugged terrain of western Texas seemed little better to exhausted Confederates who spent their days and nights chasing Comanche raiding parties. A cavalry lieutenant, having traveled though an imposing range of mountains and ravines, resolved that “[such] places . . . were never designated by the Creator for the habitation of civilized Man, but for the haunts of wild beasts, and the still more savage Indian.”⁸⁴ The allure of the frontier, had it existed, was extinguished.

5.2.5 Cowards, Shirkers and Traitors: Emigrants on the Frontier

Whether pursuing Sioux in Dakota Territory, Snakes in Oregon, or Apaches and Navajos in New Mexico and Arizona, the experiences of the volunteers in “Indian

⁸⁰ John Henry Strong Diary, 12 August 1865, Dakota Conflict of 1862 Manuscripts Collections, MHS.

⁸¹ English, “Dakota’s First Soldiers,” 267.

⁸² Colonel Nelson Cole’s Expedition Report in Hafen, 87.

⁸³ Ovando J. Hollister. *Colorado Volunteers in New Mexico, 1862*. Richard Harwell, ed. (Chicago: R.R. Donnelley & Sons Company, 1962, 1863), 244.

⁸⁴ Wily, *Fourteen Hundred and 91 Days in the Confederate Army*, 32.

country” were remarkably similar. As did the regulars before them, they spent most of their time constructing forts, building roads, guarding Indian agencies, and protecting mail routes and telegraph lines rather than battling hostile tribes. Of all duties that did not include fighting Indians, however, volunteers often looked upon the one that mandated their presence on the frontier as the most onerous: the protection of settlers and emigrants. This task sometimes ranked below even the physical drudgeries of fort construction and telegraph repair. Should the volunteers come from the West, such sentiments did not, of course, extend to their own families or homes. Overwhelmingly provincial in their outlook, they tended to judge all others with a degree of detachment and disdain. The greater the distance from their home community, the less visible the threat to their immediate family, the more likely they were to blame civilians as the source of their predicament and to question the necessity of a continuing military presence. Bitterness led many to conclude that it was not the Indians, after all, who kept them on the frontier but “cowardly” and “helpless” citizens who proved unable or unwilling to protect themselves.

Some volunteers attributed the helplessness of settlers to their ethnic background. Though this specious assertion could not be applied to New Mexicans who had long held their own against Navajo and Apache raids, it seemed to fit perfectly the “foreign” residents of Minnesota. The great Sioux uprising of August 1862 left hundreds of Minnesotans dead, many of them German immigrants. Soldiers quickly noted this fact. “The great majority of those subject to this terrible attack were foreigners,” claimed a former captain in the Minnesota Rangers years after the event. “Knowing nothing of the Indian character, incapable of defense, and without suspicion of danger, they fell easy and unresisting . . .” Settlements of native-born citizens, he insisted, fared much better: “Acquainted with frontier life, they generally organized a successful defense.”⁸⁵ Such bosh is easily debunked: the attacks had surprised everyone, and the untested German-American citizens of New Ulm staged a valiant and hard-fought defense against the Santee that proved instrumental in stemming their offensive. Still, soldiers commonly expressed the belief that the German element in Minnesota somehow lacked the

⁸⁵ *Minnesota in the Civil and Indian Wars*, vol. 1. (Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2005), Narrative of Captain Eugene M. Wilson, First Regiment of Mounted Rangers, 519.

prerequisite ruggedness. “this whole Country is settled by Dutch, who are a poor class of settlers for the Frontier,” wrote a member of the 8th Minnesota Infantry from Fort Ridgely in October 1864. “the Indians are not afraid of them.”⁸⁶

New Ulm, in particular, came under heavy criticism. Though many German-Catholic farmers resided in the surrounding rural areas, the town itself was founded and settled in 1856 by *Turnverein* Bohemians. Liberal, middle-class nationalists seeking political asylum after the failed European revolutions of 1848, a substantial number were also “freethinkers” who rejected orthodox Christianity. Consequently, some of the accusations that soldiers leveled against the citizens bordered on the bizarre, and seemingly had little to do with their actions during the uprising or their ability to defend themselves. They did, however, have much to do with American nativism. A captain in the U.S. volunteers, passing through the settlement in May 1865, insisted that the residents were all atheists, had outlawed religious services, had once burned Christ in effigy and, finally, drank beer and danced on Sundays. “I rode down there one day with some of the officers . . . and I had heard so much about the wickedness of the place, that I felt as though I were visiting Sodom and Gomorrah.” If this officer stopped short of explicitly portraying the destruction of the town by Dakota Indians as divine retribution, others did not. “We took a few hours to ourselves to view the once beautiful town of Newulm,” wrote one Minnesota private on September 19, 1862 shortly after the attack. “The town is a complete reck.” Rather than sympathizing with residents burned out of home, he instead provided an extended social critique. “On Sunday [the citizens] have a spree; they do not regard the teaching of the bible at all; they have gone so far as burn the image of Christ.” From their heathenish actions, he could draw only one conclusion: “Their misfortune is the judgment of God upon them.”⁸⁷

Resentment ran particularly high among soldiers who felt slighted or ignored by the people who most needed their protection. In March 1863 a soldier in the 41st Iowa Infantry wrote to the Iowa City *Press* concerning a trend he found to be “exceedingly

⁸⁶ John Henry Strong Diary, 10 October 1864, Dakota Conflict of 1862 Manuscripts Collection, MHS.

⁸⁷ Musgrove, 167; “The Doud Diary,” *South Dakota Historical Collections*, Vol. 9, (1918), 471; For the history of New Ulm and its German population, see Noel Iverson, *Germania, U.S.A.: Social Change in New Ulm, Minnesota*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1966) and La Vern J. Ripley and Robert J. Paulson, *German-Bohemians: The Quiet Immigrants*, (Northfield, MN: St. Olaf College Press for the German-Bohemian Heritage Society, 1995).

aggravating.” Though the papers had detailed the exploits of other Iowa regiments in the South, not once had they mentioned “our noble little band . . . now on the distant frontier.” And what, exactly, had the 41st accomplished? “I venture the assertion that had it not been for the 41st and that noble band of frontiersmen, the Dacotah cavalry, the settlements of the Missouri valley and Sioux City would have been a smouldering heap of ruins”⁸⁸ Privately, a captain in the Oregon Cavalry fumed at the people of the “Webfoot nation” and hoped to see them “squirm” under a military draft. “They have persistently heaped odium and reproach upon their own troops while in the protection and defense of their own frontiers, sneering at brass buttons . . . on the streets,” he wrote in his diary on September 9, 1864. “Were it not for the helpless women and children I would rejoice to see the Indians wipe out the Columbia River country one of these days, just to let the people . . . know what slippery ground they stand on.”⁸⁹ In June 1865, the Civil War over, a trooper in the 11th Ohio stranded in western Dakota queried his relatives back home: “Do tell me what is the popular opinion of this indian war,” he begged. “[N]o news papers we get ever speak of us, they are all gloating over the close of the war in the south and dont seem to remember the soldiers out here fighting a race, whom it would be flattering to call men.”⁹⁰

For the neglected volunteer, “help thy neighbor” was not carried out with much enthusiasm, especially when doing so placed his own family at risk or he regarded the neighbor as unworthy of protection. In August 1863, as the 2nd Nebraska Cavalry galloped over the drought-stricken Dakota prairie as part of a punitive expedition against the Sioux, a small party of Indians crossed into Nebraska and murdered five children on a farm in Helena. Their mother was away in town; their father a trooper in the 2nd Cavalry. The event left the regiment outraged and embittered, and for some called into question the legitimacy of the expedition then underway. The Second had been mustered as a home defense unit in response to the Sioux uprising in 1862. They had never agreed to serve outside the territory, insisted one, and certainly had not signed up “to chase retreating Indians over a country that is cursed by drouth and famine.” Rather than eliminating the threat, their deployment to Dakota had instead left their own families

⁸⁸ Iowa City *Press*, 18 April 1863, quoted in Throne, 141-142.

⁸⁹ Knuth, “Cavalry in the Indian Country,” 97.

⁹⁰ Unrau, 261.

needlessly exposed to attack. “May God forgive the man that called us hence, & console the mourner over his dead babes”⁹¹

Whatever their thoughts on pointless punitive campaigns, an ungrateful public, or heathenish settlers volunteers reserved their greatest contempt for emigrants. Though the arrival of an emigrant train at an isolated western post helped break the monotony of military life, provided all too infrequent female companionship, and sometimes brought reliable news from the East, its presence also raised suspicions. With a calamitous civil war tearing the country apart, many volunteers questioned the emigrants’ motivations for traveling west. Even more wondered why the strong, young men who accompanied the columns, unlike those forced to protect them, were not in uniform. Most, as did a captain in the 7th Iowa, thought they could guess the answer: “They were either deserters from the army, North or South, or were out for cash only.” Soldiers did not take lightly the presence of either group. A trooper in the 6th Iowa, watching a steamboat loaded with prospectors and mining supplies depart from Fort Randall, probably spoke for many: “The passengers may be pretty good people but they look like a pack of scoundrels.” Some men in the 11th Ohio, a few of whom would eventually be involved in a firefight with members of a train, harbored a particularly intense dislike of emigrants. Though actually firing on a train was a rare event, the sentiments expressed by one of the troopers a year beforehand were quite common. “The men were all walking except the teamsters,” he observed of a train passing through Deer Creek in Idaho. “We thought they would make splendid infantry, they stood walking well I expect they thought like we did, but not fancying the name of *infantry* changed it to that of *emigrant* . . . in order to avoid the draft.” Though they claimed to be from Ohio, Wisconsin and other loyal Northern states, he doubted their story. “I think they were from Missouri and other copperhead localities, for they are nearly all copperheads. I look for the biggest kind of a *stink* to be stirred up this summer all along here, if they spit out much of their treason in our presence.”⁹²

⁹¹ Rowen, *Diary of Henry W. Pierce*, 37-38; Pattee, 296-297; A.M. English. “Dakota’s First Soldiers: History of the First Dakota Cavalry, 1862-1865,” *South Dakota Historical Collections*, Vol. 9, (1918), 268-169.

⁹² Ware, 55; Goodwin, “The Letters of Private Milton Spencer,” 265; Unrau, 119.

Of course, not all emigrants were evading military service or heading for gold strikes in search of quick riches. Since its settlement by Europeans, the story of America was one of western expansion. By the nineteenth century, the “inevitable” process even had a name: Manifest Destiny. In the 1860s, many simply came west with hopes of staking out farms and starting life anew, a tradition encouraged by the passage of the 1862 Homestead Act. That some of them were indeed draft-dodgers, deserters or riff-raff in search of gold, however, cannot be denied, and the volunteers did not hesitate to generalize. Driven by genuine notions of duty and service, they accepted with difficulty the idea that anyone could rightly ignore the plight of the country. Too often, this belief led them to assume that most were worthless shirkers at best, traitors at worst. Isolated and prevented from striking a blow against actual treason in the South, they contented themselves with the next best thing: tormenting supposedly treasonous emigrants. But the emigrant’s avoidance of service in a time of national peril was not the only source of their hostility; envy also played a part. Burdened by military regulation and law, disappointed at not being sent South, and weary of fighting Indians, the western volunteer could not help but resent his lot. The appearance of “free” and seemingly oblivious civilians threw his own degraded position into sharp relief, reminded him of what he had sacrificed, and undoubtedly resulted in the projection of frustrations onto the emigrants before him. For some, their resentment culminated in verbal and physical abuse. Others, however, were galvanized into more remunerative courses of action. Though one soldier characterized an emigrant train that accompanied General Sully’s army through Dakota in the summer of 1864 as being full of Southern sympathizers “shunting the draft,” this charge did not concern the forty men who eventually deserted their regiments and “escorted” it all the way to the gold mines of Idaho.⁹³

Those soldiers unwilling to desert their comrades dealt with emigrants in a variety of ways. No doubt there were some who never expressed hostility, while others remained content to scorn them in silence. Company G of the 11th Ohio cavalry, guarding the Overland Trail through Nebraska and present-day Wyoming, seemed to delight in making the emigrants’ journey as unpleasant as possible. They zealously seized contraband

⁹³ A.N. Judd. *Campaigning Against the Sioux*. ed. John M. Carroll. (New York: Sol Lewis, 1973, 1906), 7; Alvin M. Josephy, *The Civil War in the American West*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991), 152.

property such as government horses and saddles, charged three dollars to ferry passengers over the Platte River, and would only agree to mail letters at a price of ten cents each. “[Q]uite a business place our town is when forty or fifty wagons stop here,” wrote one trooper who chronicled the interactions at Deer Creek. “the boys trade horses and ponies with them, steal their dogs and anything else they can lay hands on This is the greatest place in the world to make money.” A month later, in July 1864, an emigrant unsurprisingly derided all of them as “damned rascals.” Not about to suffer such impertinence from a copperhead, they seized him from the train and tied him to a telegraph pole. They grew especially tired of endless and repetitive inquiries: “A hundred men will pass in a day all ask the same questions such as how far is it to grass? any wood there? is the road sandy? how far is it to the crossing how far is it to the bridge? What is the toll. how far is it to Bannac how far to fort Bridger, how far to Salt Lake, is there a post office here? What do you know about the new route? is Bosemans route a good one? how is Bridgers cutoff. How far is it by Lande’s cutoff.” One can imagine the excitement among the exhausted emigrants, but soldiers rarely shared their enthusiasm and offered only flippant responses. How far to grass? “do you mean Bill Grass [an Oglala chief]? he’s dead.” Some would dazzle a crowd with outrageous stories of enormous gold strikes in Idaho, or haggle over oxen and mules they had no intention of buying. Others served as a constant reality check for whatever lofty dreams the westward travelers may have possessed. If the emigrants sought moral support, which they surely needed by the time they reached Deer Creek, they would have to look elsewhere. “A great many have big letters painted on their wagons such as “Bound for Bannick or bust. We told them they would all ‘bust’. Some would have painted up ‘Bound for Big— and then a horn painted instead of the word. We told them when they come back they would have themselves painted coming out at the little end of it.”⁹⁴

Their pettiness betrayed a growing resentment that was compounded by the belief that most emigrants were also completely helpless. In August 1864, an incident occurred which solidified these suspicions for the men of the 11th Ohio. The outpost at Platte River Bridge was strategically placed between an Arapaho village and their agency some thirty miles south of the fort. On peaceable terms with the government, they were

⁹⁴ Unrau, 147, 162-163.

allowed refuge within its confines on their journeys to and from their agent. With an increase in Overland traffic, they often took advantage of the benefit, as emigrants too often shot at Indians on sight. In the latter part of August, four Arapahos left the fort after a stay of several days and headed south. Shortly after, three men from a train of Mormon emigrants appeared at the outpost, complaining that Indians had run off two of their horses and seeking help to recapture them. The troopers of Company G were incredulous. “They acted like they were the only men that had ever lost any stock, and made as much fuss as if they had lost a hundred horses.” Believing the horses had simply run off and the emigrants, rather than searching for them, had blamed the passing Arapahos for their disappearance, the men refused to help. “Any set of men that will let four indians, and two of *them squaws* with *heavily laden pack ponies*, drive off two horses and not go or try to help them selves a’nt fit to own horses indians can do better with them than they can, and they may have them for what we care.”⁹⁵

If nineteenth century Americans idealized the self-made man as glorified in the personages of Daniel Boone and Davy Crockett, emigrants often seemed the antithesis of that image. The volunteers saw before them not models of self-sufficiency, frontier ruggedness and quick-wittedness, but rather the opposite: a people marked by cowardliness, helplessness, and a depressing naivety of the dangers they faced. Emigrants did not exhibit bravery for crossing the West in the midst of an Indian war, but incompetence and foolishness. “The most ignorant of foreign immigrants composed the train,” wrote an officer in the 7th Iowa of Mormon emigrants. “[They] paid no attention whatever to the Indians. They traveled along as if there were no such thing as Indians. They even seemed to be dissatisfied with being protected by us”⁹⁶ The lack of judgment demonstrated by civilians who decided to make the westward trek, especially those who ventured through decidedly “hostile” territory, left soldiers understandably perplexed. Oblivious to danger and accompanied by women and children, they made easy targets. Escorting a train through Dakota, a Minnesotan could only wonder if the

⁹⁵ Unrau, 165-167.

⁹⁶ Ware, 148-149.

trip was worth it. “when I go to Idaho I want to travel by rail road[.] To drag women and children in this way it seems like suffering more than the gold will repay”⁹⁷

Their exasperation at obvious ineptitude turned to outrage when trains appeared at the most inopportune times. Bumbling civilians could cost a soldier his life or impede a campaign. As General Sully struck out against the Dakota Sioux in June 1864, he learned with dismay that he would simultaneously have to protect a train of some two hundred emigrants heading toward the Yellowstone River in Montana three hundred miles distant. Their 123 ox-drawn wagons would be a definite liability for a strategy that depended upon the mobility of the army, and Sully did not mince words with the train’s leaders. “Gentleman, I am damn sorry you are here, but so long as you are, I will do the best I can to protect you”⁹⁸ In the coming weeks Sully, with an army of 2,200 men and two hundred emigrants in tow, crossed several rivers, gave battle to and defeated a camp of 1,600 Sioux warriors, and traversed the imposing Badlands before leaving the civilians at Fort Union on the Dakota border in August. Soldier, citizen and draft animal alike had endured scorching heat, food and water shortages, and incessant sniping by warriors who hounded the column’s trail. “These emigrants,” recalled a lieutenant in the 8th Minnesota, “from the start to our parting with them, were an encumbrance, causing delay and hampering all our movements.” He thought it absurd they should have been allowed to follow on such a hazardous operation, for if the army had been defeated, “what would have been the fate of the women and children . . . ?”⁹⁹

Sully’s experiences with bothersome emigrants did not end with those he left at Fort Union. After trudging back to Fort Rice, he learned on September 8 that a party comparable in size to the one that accompanied him to the Yellowstone was now besieged by 3,000 Indians two hundred miles to the west. Under the command of Captain James Fisk, a volunteer hired by the Quartermaster Department for the express purpose of guiding emigrants, the train had set out from Fort Rice after Sully’s departure earlier that summer. Rather than following him or traveling other well-established routes, however, Fisk decided to blaze a new trail through the heart of Sioux country despite

⁹⁷ John Henry Strong Diary, 3 August 1864, Dakota Conflict of 1862 Manuscripts Collection, MHS.

⁹⁸ Quoted in Josephy, *The Civil War in the American West*, 149.

⁹⁹ David L. Kingsbury, “Sully’s Expedition Against the Sioux in 1864,” *Collections of the Minnesota Historical Society*, VIII, 1895-1898. (St. Paul, MN: Published by the Society, 1898), 451, 458.

being warned of the dangers. Colonel Daniel J. Dill of the 30th Wisconsin Infantry, commanding Fort Rice, dispatched fifty troopers to accompany the train. When it came under attack on September 2, a dozen of them managed to escape and return to the fort. The emigrants, meanwhile, corralled their wagons and organized a rather efficient defense while they awaited relief.¹⁰⁰

Sully was predictably disgusted by the news; the 850 exhausted men who eventually volunteered to relieve the column even more so. After having completed a round-trip of over seven hundred miles, they now had to rescue a train of emigrants who should have “known better.” The volunteers thought the entire situation scandalous. “this man Fiske, had ought not to be allowed to lead Silly Men and Women over these unexplored routes,” wrote a disgruntled soldier in the 8th Minnesota. “it may learn them a lesson with regard to these gold diggings which may do them good.” Most were hard pressed to determine who deserved the greatest censure: the emigrants, Captain Fisk, or Colonel Dill for allowing the train to leave. “The boys . . . were more than willing to go to rescue the women and children and soldiers, but I had my doubts as to any good feelings they entertained towards Col. Dill or Capt. Fiske,” reported a trooper in 6th Iowa fortunate enough to avoid the arduous rescue mission. Colonel Dill, insisted a Minnesota ranger in Brackett’s Battalion, realized the dangers and with special care had managed to avoid sending anyone from his own regiment as part of the original escort. As for the emigrants, he repeated the usual charge: “There are many of them refugees from the draft Cowards & traitors who . . . shirk their duties as citizens. Were it not for the women and children . . . there would be very little sympathy with them here.” Supposedly, the men refused to defend themselves, even when soldiers dragged them from the wagons and forced them to shoulder rifles. Worse, an emigrant cheering for Jefferson Davis and the Confederacy shot a member of the rescue party through the arm. A veteran of the Civil War, the soldier wasted little time in slaying his attacker. “Men who have fought traitors for three years are not likely to see such things coolly even here,” concluded the commentator with satisfaction.¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ Louis H. Roddis, *The Indian Wars of Minnesota*, (Cedar Rapids, Iowa: The Torch Press, 1956), 254-255.

¹⁰¹ Sully, who knew from very recent experience the near impossibility of crossing the barren, sun-scorched Prairie, ranted about the Fisk situation in a note to his superior, General John Pope: “They can’t go forward

A meticulously detailed diary kept by one of the emigrants, William Larned, suggests that the charges of cowardice and treason were mostly rumor. No where does he mention men being dragged from wagons or an event as significant as a soldier shooting a member of the train. That volunteers readily believed such stories says more about their preconceptions of emigrants than reality. The presence of Larned, in particular, might have given them pause. A Civil War veteran, at 44 he had enlisted as a corporal in the 1st Minnesota Infantry immediately after the outbreak of war and was wounded at Bull Run. He recuperated and later served in the 8th Minnesota and the Signal Corps, finally participating in the battle at Winchester, Virginia before being mustered out as a second lieutenant in 1864. He put little stock in Fisk's exaggerated tales of wealth and riches in Idaho, but thought he could turn a decent profit selling supplies to all the would-be gold-seekers who did. Accompanied by his wife and son, Larned did not hide in a wagon when the train was attacked, but vigorously helped to organize a defense, instructed the less martially inclined in the advantages of skirmishers, and cared for the wounded. As for Fisk's responsibility for the fiasco, the veteran left little doubt. "The history of this expedition is yet to be written," he recorded on September 10, "& when it is, it will shed no luster around the name of him who has undertaken its direction. . . .To gain a little personal fame he has thrown the train to the south of a route already open & well defined by Gen Sully under the guidance of the most competent guides, & has been pushing ahead through a rough broken country of which he is utterly ignorant, & his engineer often unable to sit on his horse from intoxication." After a week under siege, he began to question the wisdom of signing on with Fisk's outfit. "To such a man we have given the Care of our persons & property."¹⁰²

With a loss of more than ten emigrants and soldiers, both rescue party and train returned to Fort Rice on September 30. Though Fisk protested vociferously to Sully that he be given a strong enough force to continue the journey, most of his clientele were grateful enough to reach safety and would not be going anywhere in the immediate

on their trail; there is no grass and very little water. Fisk was told of this before he started from here, but he, though he had never been over the country, knew better." Quoted in Utley, *Frontiersmen in Blue*, 280; John Henry Strong Diary, 9 September 1864, Dakota Conflict of 1862 Manuscripts Collection, MHS; Drips, 92; Eugene Marshall to Sister, 11 September 1864, Eugene Marshall Papers, Duke U.

¹⁰² Ray H. Mattison, ed., "The Fisk Expedition of 1864: The Diary of William L Larned," *North Dakota History: Journal of the Northern Plains*, Vol. 36, No. 3 (Summer 1969), 209, 227-238. Quote is from page 230.

future.¹⁰³ For the second time in two months, troops had given their lives to protect a people they overwhelmingly held in contempt as cowards and traitors. Indeed, if only done for the sake of the women and children, the rescuers of the Fisk train had volunteered for the operation. That Sully and his men had not simply abandoned them to their fate out of military expediency is astonishing. With man and horse forced to drink from the same stagnant Badland mud holes as they dodged arrows from the cliff tops, the thought of ditching these civilian nuisances – much as Jefferson C. Davis had done at Ebenezer Creek – must have been tempting.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ Mattison, “The Fisk Expedition,” 235; Utley, *Frontiersmen in Blue*, 280.

¹⁰⁴ It will be recalled that just miles from Savannah, Georgia, Union Brigadier General Jefferson C. Davis was also tempted to rid his straggling column of exhausted soldiers from civilians. By one count, nearly 5,000 freedom-seeking black refugees had joined his corps during the March to the Sea. Fast approaching the safety of the coast, pressed from behind by Confederate cavalry, Davis opted for what Sully had avoided. On December 8, after crossing a swollen Ebenezer Creek, he ordered his engineers to remove the pontoon bridge, leaving the refugees stranded on the other side. Panicked, many of them attempted to ford the river and drowned. Others fell into the hands of pursuing rebel troopers. Some were killed outright, the rest were undoubtedly re-enslaved. See Edward M. Churchill, “Betrayal at Ebenezer Creek,” *Civil War Times Illustrated*, Vol. 37, No. 5 (October 1998) and Nathaniel Cheairs Hughes, Jr. and Gordon D. Whitney, *Jefferson Davis in Blue: The Life of Sherman’s Relentless Warrior*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2002), 305-314.

5.3 Perceptions of Native Americans

5.3.1 “Dull as Hell”

Though constructing forts and trails, escorting emigrants, drill, inspections and other mundane military duties consumed most of the soldiers' days, even the rigidly structured life of the army left gaps that they painfully attempted to fill. The boredom could be overwhelming, even exhausting. “Done nothing all day, got tired of it,” confessed an Oregon trooper in his diary. “Hard work to sit in the house all day and read and sleep.” From the northwest, an Iowan disgustedly noted yet another day spent in “masterly inactivity.” A California soldier spoke volumes with his simple statement: “Dull as Hell.”¹

If not corrected, chronic inactivity affected morale. “There would be glory & honor in being a soldier if we were where we could distinguish ourselves in any way, but to be kept in this out of the way place doing nothing, there is but little fame in it that I can see,” wrote a member of the 1st California volunteers from New Mexico in what was a typical complaint.² Seldom did officers concern themselves with the mental hygiene of their men, and how soldiers handled boredom is a tribute to their creativeness. They drank, gambled, and wrote letters to family. When on a mountain, they rarely missed the opportunity to send a boulder crashing off a cliff, reveling like children in the wake of destruction left behind. A captain at Fort Laramie spent an entire day toying with an ant colony. His conclusion: the insects appreciated the fruit he dropped on the hill, but could do without the percussion cap, match, toothpick, saltpeter, pencil and other inedible objects he offered to them. Reading might help pass the time, but newspapers and books were scarce commodities. Those that soldiers came across were passed around until ragged. Sometimes desperation prevailed. “A comrade of ours who, unable to obtain anything else, has gone to reading the Bible as a pastime,” wrote an incredulous

¹ D.H. Taylor Diary, 10 January 1862, Taylor Family Papers, University of Oregon; Drips, 36; Barth 172.

² Ernest Marchand, ed. *News from Fort Craig, New Mexico, 1863: Civil War Letters of Andrew Ryan, with the First California Volunteers*. (Santa Fe: Stage Coach Press, 1966), 65.

Californian. “Does this not prove the total want of mental sustenance when a soldier voluntarily endeavors to digest such substantial food[?]”³

Another form of “entertainment,” scantily mentioned in official reports, was the routine plundering and desecration of Indian graves. In Minnesota and Dakota, volunteers sometimes sought revenge for similar outrages allegedly committed by the Santee. Not every incident can be attributed to vengeance, however. Just as often, soldiers were driven by curiosity, boredom, or outright greed. A sergeant in the 6th Californian Infantry, leading a scout in the northern part of the state in May 1864, discovered a mysteriously deserted Indian village a brief search of which turned up a few fresh graves. “To satisfy myself, I had one opened and found a dead squaw,” he reported.⁴ Funeral scaffolds made for much easier access. The customary ritual of the Plains Indians of suspending the bodies of their dead from poles protected them from coyotes, but not inquisitive soldiers. From one such platform, a captain in the U.S. Volunteers, who considered himself an amateur anthropologist, collected a pistol and knife left with the skeleton. This apparently not satisfying him, he also took the skull.⁵ The actions of a few West Virginia troopers while on patrol in western Dakota were even more outlandish. “For the good of science,” they cut down a body from its scaffold and tried to determine a cause of death. With no sound medical theories forthcoming, they instead rummaged through the “trinkets” left at the site. With some embarrassment, one of the parties involved later denied the charge of grave robbing, but surely they did not pocket an ornamental tomahawk and silver earrings out of anthropological curiosity.⁶ Before the battle of Dove Creek in January 1865, in which Texas volunteers were sharply defeated by a band of Kickapoos, a few soldiers allegedly opened and plundered the grave of an Indian woman despite protests from their companions. It was “bad medicine” to commit such a ghoulish act, they argued. A fanciful rumor – but one with a moral

³ Hull, “Soldiering on the High Plains,” 36; Diary of Capt. B.F. Rockafellow in Hafen, 189; Bushnell Diary, 17 March 1866.

⁴ *OR*, Ser. 1, Vol. 50, pt. 1, 279.

⁵ Musgrove, 175.

⁶ Holliday, 75-76.

lesson – circulated after the Texans’ defeat a month later: every possessor of a trinket had been killed in the fight.⁷

The folly of wanton grave desecration was not lost on all. Officers under General Sibley tried to stop the practice during the 1863 Dakota campaign, refusing to allow soldiers to leave camp without a special pass.⁸ General Sully was apparently a bit more permissive toward his men. Before embarking on the summer campaign of 1863, troopers from the 2nd Nebraska camped opposite Fort Randall near the Yankton Agency. The onset of the summer hunt had left the reservation deserted, but the fact that the Yankton were on friendly terms with the government should have guaranteed some protection for their property. In the end, it mattered little. “Soldiers broke in & rumaged their things,” confessed one trooper. “their curiosity also incites them to disturb their dead, a dangerous passion to indulge in, even among . . . peaceable tribes.”⁹ Such thoughtless behavior risked more than incurring the wrath of insulted Native Americans. It exposed the latent hypocrisies of civilization and irreparably damaged the credibility of those who would profess its superiority over Indian culture. A corporal in the 4th California Infantry reflected on this unfortunate truth, the ultimate effect of which could be seen in the precautions taken by the Indians around Fort Yamhill, Oregon in the burial of their dead. “The old cooking utensils of the deceased, made useless by punching holes or breaking in pieces as to not excite avaricious ‘whites,’ were sad evidences of their ‘Faith’ in the ‘Christian Promise.’” Given the obvious nature of their past experiences with white culture, the prospects of willing assimilation were not hopeful. “Tell me, Prating Missionaries, you who spent millions in a fruitless cause, how long in the face of this common sentiment . . . will you argue Christian Reformation?”¹⁰

For those uneasy with the idea of grave robbing, the West did offer more legitimate recreational activities, notably the opportunity to hunt an abundance of wild

⁷ James K. Greer, ed., *A Texas Ranger and Frontiersman: The Days of Buck Barry in Texas, 1845-1906*, (Dallas: The Southwest Press, 1932), 185-186.

⁸ Arthur M. Daniels. *A Journal of Sibley’s Indian Expedition During the Summer of 1863 and Record of the Troops Employed, by a Soldier in Company “H,” 6th Regiment*. James D. Thueson, ed., (Minneapolis: 1980, 1864), 21. Arthur M. Daniels of the 6th Iowa recorded the official reaction to the problem in June 1863. “On account of depredations committed at Indian graves, the guard instructions are very strict, and none can pass the lines without special permission.”

⁹ Rowen. *Diary of Henry W. Pierce*, 29.

¹⁰ Barth, *All Quiet on the Yamhill*, 22-23.

and exotic game. Bear, deer, antelope, elk, sage hens and other animals roamed the frontier in immeasurable numbers. Immense herds of buffalo, not yet decimated by white encroachment, left soldiers awestruck. “We have seen the prairie black with these noble animals as far as the eye could reach, all on the run, and thus continuing during all hours of the day, or even two or three days,” insisted a captain in the 1st U.S. Volunteers. “Millions must have passed in that time.”¹¹ Other animals left them baffled. Some they knew of only from stories, others not at all. The prairie dog, for instance, drew universal comment. “They don’t look much like a dog,” wrote one soldier in his diary. “they came up out of their holes and standing up like a gopher they bark like a Lap Dog. they look like and are about the size of Muskrats except the tail which is short and bushy.”¹² An Ohio trooper wrote of seeing antelope, wolverines and magpies, the latter “a much larger bird than I had supposed them to be.” The marine life impressed him the most. While fishing in a river he spied something in the water he could not readily identify. His comrade speared it with a saber and carried it to the bank, but refused to touch it. “he was afraid to take hold of it with his hands,” he recounted, “he uttered several proclamations of surprise and told me to take it off. I got the thing off his saber and looked at it, we did not know what it was, so we called it a shovel-head.”¹³ Apparently they snared their first shovel-nose sturgeon. For all the soldiers knew they had left the United States entirely, so unfamiliar were some of the creatures encountered.

Larger animals, especially on the Plains, augmented a soldier’s diet during campaigns. “This is the great hunting ground of the west and well Does it Deserve its name,” remarked an Iowa trooper of western Dakota.¹⁴ Men subsisting on army hardtack and salt pork eagerly supplemented their rations with venison, antelope, and fowl. Bear meat occasionally found its way into the pot, but not everyone thought the reward worth the risk. One Ohioan, discovering a bear track in the snow, sought reinforcements before continuing. “When I got back to camp I told the boys what I found up in the rocks,” he recounted. “They said they had not lost any bears and did not care to find any.”¹⁵ Bison, or “Buffalo,” provided a seemingly infinite source of food. The lack of “secesh” cattle

¹¹ Musgrove, 206.

¹² John Henry Strong Diary, 25 July 1864, Dakota Conflict of 1862 Manuscripts Collection, MHS.

¹³ Unrau, 60-61.

¹⁴ Nicholas Overholt, 12 August 1864, Nicholas Overholt Diaries, MHS.

¹⁵ Adams, 7.

on the frontier made it more practical to filch the “cattle” of the Indian, and soldiers hunted the beasts with alacrity. Though much has been said of the dependence of Plains Indians on the Buffalo, its corresponding importance to the invading armies should not be underestimated. Without the nourishment it offered, the difficulties of the campaign would have increased exponentially. What allowed Native Americans to thrive also ensured that their conquerors would not starve. Once beyond “civilization,” soldiers entered a veritable Anglo “no man’s land.” Supply lines might stretch hundreds of miles, with scores of wagons and cattle encumbering the actual force. Should supplies give out, an army could not simply emulate Sherman in Georgia or Grant at Vicksburg, sustaining itself by plundering the cornfields and smokehouses of noncombatants. The nomadic nature of the Plains tribes prevented it. Soldiers could, however, hunt with impunity and the ever-present buffalo guaranteed the availability of food.

Men quickly learned to respect the power of the Plains herds, if not the animals themselves. Stampedes could destroy a camp and throw a marching column into disarray. “One day they came so thick and fast directly toward the train that the General had to detail a company of men to keep them away . . . for fear they would run into the train and do damage,” remarked a Minnesotan. “When they get a little affrightened and a herd of them gets to running, they stop for nothing.”¹⁶ Soldiers sometimes awoke in the night to find their camp infiltrated with stray buffalo, knocking over equipment and munching the forage gathered for the draft animals. Even a lone buffalo might cause problems, as did the one that strayed into a column during the 1863 Sioux campaign and wounded a brigade surgeon. “Dr. Murphy got upset [and] rode toward the buf & fired,” reported a soldier who witnessed the altercation. “his hors jumped and throwed him off. Old bull never turned his cours. But run over him goring him with one horn & injuring some of his ribs.”¹⁷ Though the presence of buffalo offered advantages to a hungry army, they came at a cost.

The typical buffalo hunt provided its share of excitement and danger, much appreciated by boredom-stricken soldiers. On a “still hunt,” men crept to the edge of a grazing herd, safely out of range from charging bulls, and easily picked off a few of the

¹⁶ John E. Robinson to “Dear Libbie,” 11 October 1864, Dakota Conflict of 1862 Manuscripts Collection, MHS.

¹⁷ “The Doud Diary,” *South Dakota Historical Collections*, Vol. 9, (1918), 474.

animals from a distance. Transporting the prize back to camp, however, could be logistically problematic as a buffalo might weigh as much as a ton. More commonly, soldiers rode alongside a herd, firing revolvers and carbines, and attempted to divert the wounded toward camp. With luck, they could drive the animal the entire distance before it expired. Most hunting expeditions were not so effortless. As soldiers discovered, a single bullet rarely stopped a buffalo. It did leave it enraged and unpredictable. Capable of matching the speed of a trooper's mount, buffalo, especially when wounded, posed significant risk to horse and rider.¹⁸

Despite the dangers, men recklessly threw themselves into the undertaking. "We ran on to a large Herd of Buffalo when we were nearing the Camp," wrote one. "the men were perfectly wild they dismounted and ran off after them shooting them down in all directions [T]he Balls flew around us thicker and faster than they did in the Indian fights." He believed the meat far superior to that of the cattle accompanying the train.¹⁹ Soldiers exhibited a remarkable lack of restraint during the hunting frenzies. Overwhelmed by the excitement, they could act with incredible stupidity. An air of ineptitude pervades many of these accounts. An Iowa cavalryman described a hunt he witnessed, in which the men had shot down some fifteen or twenty buffalo, to the *Iowa City Republican*. "These hunters are all green hands at the business [and] were nearly crazy with the excitement," he explained. One managed to shoot his own horse; another shot a lieutenant's horse which sent the officer sprawling on the ground. "The General says the men are a d—d sight wilder than the buffalo," he concluded.²⁰

By no means did soldiers consume everything they killed. As the above statements suggest, hunting filled psychological voids as well as stomachs. It was a method of overcoming frustrations and boredom, and sometimes got out of hand. Anything other than a white man became a viable target on the frontier, and occasionally even that boundary was broken. If it moved, the odds favored some soldier taking a random shot at it. Men hunted coyotes and wolves not only because they considered them scavengers and nuisances, but because they enjoyed it. They also targeted the harmless prairie dog, though these creatures could offer a surprising challenge. "the

¹⁸ Musgrove, 205-207.

¹⁹ John Henry Strong Diary, 1 September 1864, Dakota Conflict of 1862 Manuscripts Collection, MHS.

²⁰ *Iowa City Republican*, 18 November 1863, quoted in Throne, 166.

Boys have been trying to shoot some of those dogs but could not get any . . . as the other dogs would drag them into the holes,” complained an Iowa soldier. “out of about 50 shot they only succeeded in getting two of the dogs and they were shot right in two.”²¹ Soldiers fired on targets of opportunity regardless of time of day or situation. In an example of rank amateurism, members of the 1st Oregon Infantry nonchalantly expended several rounds on a few grouse while on a scouting mission. “As we passed along,” noted one, “our bold Lt. fired his revolver at [one] & missed. Several of the men also fired & one made it tumble. Another one was sitting on the ground up above us on the side of the mountain. Corp’l Prine tried to kill it with stones, When Ennis came up & said let me shoot it. He fired & over tumbled the bird.”²² On patrol in hostile territory, they seemed utterly indifferent to the attention they drew to themselves or the warning their shots may have given to the Indians they pursued.

Such frivolousness also extended to the great buffalo herds. Chasing Sioux in Dakota, several members of the 2nd Nebraska Cavalry paused to pick off a few of the animals. “They came so near the men shot them with ease,” commented one. “Indeed it was fun to see them fall. We left several buffalo dead along the route.”²³ A trooper in the 6th Iowa reported a similar incident. The sight of thousands of buffalo covering the prairie was too tempting for the men of his regiment, and their wild charge at the herd inadvertently sent several of the beasts crashing into the front of the column. “The slaughter became so reckless that the General gave an order stopping the killing, as the animals were just shot and left lying on the prairie,” he recalled.²⁴ Astounding as the mass killing of the buffalo was, it should be noted that it had not yet been adopted as a tactic to deprive the Indian of his food source. It simply could not have been accomplished to any effect with the relatively small number of armed men on the frontier at the time. Only later, in the 1870s, would General Phil Sheridan call for the extermination of the animals as part of an overall plan to subdue Native Americans.

²¹ Throne, Henry Wieneke Diary, 120.

²² Nelson and Onstad, *A Webfoot Volunteer*, 84.

²³ Rowen, *Diary of Henry W. Pierce*, 43-44.

²⁴ Drips, 41.

Even then, civilians rather than soldiers accomplished most of the dirty work. The slaughter of the 1860s was merely a harbinger of deeds to come.²⁵

5.3.2 The Indian Hunt

Soldiers also relegated Native Americans into the category of species that could be hunted. If riding down a buffalo herd was exciting, the opportunity to stalk human game proved absolutely exhilarating. Of course, what made the game acceptable was the fact that many men considered the Indian as only one more wild and exotic animal that made its home on the frontier.

In a sense, soldiers also played the part of amateur naturalists. In their diaries and letters, they painstakingly described the plant and animal life they observed. In an overwhelming number of instances, a discussion of the local Indians they encountered in camp and battle immediately followed extended treatises on the wildlife. The transition was often intentionally seamless; soldiers considered Native Americans but an extension of the flora and fauna. A Minnesota Cavalryman, for example, described beaver, grizzly bears, antelope, and the difficulties of killing buffalo. “Now about the Indians,” he concluded.²⁶ An Ohio trooper adopted the same technique in his letters, offering an expose on buffalo, wolves, prairie dogs and “other beasts,” transitioning with the line: “But the Indians I have hitherto neglected saying anything about them[.]”²⁷ Though he does not explicitly link the “other beasts” with Native Americans, his intent is clear. Sometimes it is difficult to discern if the author is writing about an animal or an Indian, so similar were some of the characteristics assigned to man and beast. Consider the following statement by a West Virginian: “You may catch a young one, civilize him as you can, feed him on canned groceries . . . and he will voluntarily and ungratefully leave your hospitable roof, and from choice become a roving vagabond on the plains, living on

²⁵ For a discussion of the Army’s role in the destruction of the buffalo, see Andrew C. Isenberb, *The Destruction of the Bison: An Environmental History, 1750-1920*, (Cambridge University Press, 2000), 128-130; Lance Janda, “Shutting the Gates of Mercy: The American Origins of Total War, 1860-1880,” *The Journal of Military History*, Vol. 59, No. 1 (January 1995), 7-26; David D. Smits, “The Frontier Army and the Destruction of the Buffalo: 1865-1883,” *Western Historical Quarterly*, 25 (Autumn 1994), 312-338.

²⁶ Eugene Marshall to Sister, 11 September 1864, Eugene Marshall Papers, Duke U.

²⁷ Unrau, 60-61.

carrion and sharing his meals with the buzzards.”²⁸ For reasons that will be seen, it is not immediately apparent that this soldier is discussing coyotes.

In referring to military operations, seldom did soldiers make use of the language of the eastern armies. They rarely talked of “campaigns,” “expeditions,” “battles,” “feints,” or “flanking maneuvers.” Such terminology, when used, was reserved to officers. Soldiers simply referred to “Indian hunts.” Wrote a Californian in what was a typical diary entry: “Remain in camp. A detachment sent out Indian hunting under command of Capt. Noyes.”²⁹ Others were more explicit in the comparison. “The Guadalupe Mountains Abound in wild game of all kinds,” exclaimed a soldier in the southwest, “and we boys had some rare sport hunting we were out forty six days Indian hunting.”³⁰ At the battle of Big Mound in Dakota, members of the 6th Minnesota Infantry eagerly awaited the chance to engage the Sioux in their front. “We saw several antelope while we were skirmishing, but now had bigger game,” related one.³¹ Clearly, all of these men employed language and imagery that was more than just derogatory; it was dehumanizing. Grasping the nature of the Indian-soldier relationship in the 1860s requires an understanding of where the language originated, how soldiers adapted and expanded it for their own purposes, and of the ramifications of its use during the Indian campaigns.

5.3.3 A History of Indian-Hating

American conceptions of the “Indian” in the 1860s can be traced to the initial impressions of the native peoples encountered by European explorers 400 years earlier. Columbus, in describing the Arawak, found them generally friendly and hospitable but lacking European sophistication. From these “guileless” and simplistic people he learned also of a ferocious neighboring tribe that practiced cannibalism and terrorized the more peaceful inhabitants of the region. His accounts of these two groups – one simplistic but

²⁸ Holliday, 72.

²⁹ Bushnell Diary, 1 December 1865.

³⁰ Konrad F. Schreier, Jr. “The California Column in the Civil War: Hazen’s Civil War Diary,” *The Journal of San Diego History*, Vol. 26, No. 2 (Spring 1976). Online at <http://www.sandiegohistory.org/journal/76spring/civilwar.htm>. 23 November 1862. Hereafter referred to as “Hazen Diary.”

³¹ Arthur M. Daniels. *A Journal of Sibley’s Indian Expedition During the Summer of 1863 and Record of the Troops Employed, by a Soldier in Company “H,” 6th Regiment*. James D. Thueson, ed., (Minneapolis: 1980, 1864), 36.

pleasant, the other depraved and savage – established the framework through which Europeans subsequently categorized Native Americans. Later colonizers, either borrowing from Columbus or formulating the notion on their own, identified the Indians they encountered through the same rubric of “good” and “bad.”³²

The competing images of the Indian continued to stand centuries later. The “good” Indian, articulated in the eighteenth century as the “Noble Savage,” possessed a number of admirable traits. Physically impressive, stoic, fierce in battle and capable of showing genuine affection to loved ones and family, the good Indian lived in harmony with nature and his surroundings. His was a life marked by simplicity and innocence. Conversely, Europeans labeled the “bad” Indian as indolent, deceitful, treacherous and cruel. He countered his own laziness by virtually enslaving female members of the tribe. Driven by lust and animalistic instinct, he lived in a constant state of war (though he cowardly fled when confronted with European weaponry), showed no signs of industry or progress, and dwelt in a squalor no white man would tolerate. A third category, that of the “degraded” Indian, arose well after white colonization to describe those indigenous people who had managed to survive white encroachment and yet still refused or were unable to successfully adapt to civilization. Corrupted by white culture, the degraded Indian adopted all of civilization’s vices and none of its virtues. Drunken and shiftless, he wandered as an outcast from both societies, a relic to be pitied and scorned.³³

By the nineteenth century, Americans increasingly equated the image of the good Indian with those tribes unsullied by European contact – and they were few. Romantic writers looked upon the passing of their pristine society with a sense of nostalgia, creating an image no less stereotypical than that of the savage or degraded Indian. Those who espoused the image of the Noble Savage, of course, did not usually reside in proximity to any tribes that might have changed their opinion. Frontier soldiers and civilians, in regular contact with the remaining tribes, scoffed at such romanticism. Rarely did Native Americans suffer white encroachment without a struggle, and those that accepted their fate seemed to lose an essential element of their “Indianness.” Both

³² Robert F. Berkhofer. *The White Man’s Indian: Images of the American Indian from Columbus to the Present*. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1978), 4-7.

³³ Berkhofer, 28-30; Reginald Horsman. *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), 103-105.

cases fulfilled white expectations of them as either ferocious or hopelessly degraded. Ultimately, the outlook for Native society was bleak. Noble, savage or drunk, the only good Indian appeared to be a dead Indian.³⁴

When Europeans viewed the “savage” Indian, they did so through the twin lenses of Christianity and “Civilization.” Initially, this was an ethnocentric rather than racist response. Colonists judged Indians by white standards and found their society wanting religiously, culturally and technologically. This “description by deficiency” inevitably led to moral evaluations of Indian character, measured against the beliefs and values held by Europeans. It has also resulted in considerable speculation over the role of the Indian as “counter-image” in establishing white identity. Europeans and Americans described their own society as righteous, diligent and civilized in opposition to the depravity, indolence and savagism that marked Indian culture.³⁵ Further, because colonists (and by implication Americans) found in the Indian what they most feared existed within themselves, his elimination signified the conquering of those inner doubts. The Puritans, according to this hypothesis, were able to project onto Indians their own sins. By destroying neighboring tribes, they spiritually cleansed themselves while simultaneously eliminating a threat to their survival.³⁶

Though Anglos considered the Indian as being outside of civilization, this did not mean he was beyond redemption – at least initially. Enlightenment thinkers held to the belief of monogenesis and, consequently, assumed the unity of all mankind. They explained visible differences among groups of people through the ideas of environmentalism. If human nature was constant, they reasoned, environmental differences such as climate or culture must account for variations in physical characteristics or levels of societal achievement. Eventually, comparisons between ancient societies and Indian culture, particularly in the area of religion, resulted in a theory of natural progress. Philosophers believed that cultures, like people, followed predictable life-cycles. Savage in infancy, mankind progressed through a multitude of

³⁴ Berkhofer, 72-80, 145-153; Horsman, 105-115.

³⁵ Berkhofer, 23-27; Roy Harvey Pearce. *Savagism and Civilization: A Study of the Indian in the American Mind*. (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988, 1953), 3-49; Richard Slotkin. *Regeneration through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860*. (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1973), 25-56.

³⁶ Berkhofer, 80-85; Slotkin, 57-179.

stages, finally reaching maturity upon the attainment of “civilization.” Indian culture, therefore, was viewed as an earlier stage of European development. As such, Anglos could rank the Indian inferior in achievement, but, because of prevailing monogenetic beliefs, still consider him an equal under God. This understanding of Indian nature resulted in predictably paternalistic policies – certainly Native Americans did not receive respect as social equals – but neither did it preclude the possibility of Indian “advancement” and assimilation into American culture.³⁷

The hope of civilizing rather than exterminating Native Americans continued in the early years of the United States among many of the nation’s leaders. The importance that republicanism attached to land ownership, however, led to some debate over how exactly the Indian might be saved from extinction. The Founders believed the independent farmer the ideal citizen. Economically and politically autonomous, he could preserve public virtue and prevent the advent of tyranny. Cheap land also ensured the propagation of social equality. The greatness of the new nation, therefore, depended upon the expansion of its people into new territories and the proper agricultural use of the acquired land. The high-minded ideals of the Revolution prevented the formulation of explicit policies of destroying the Indian. It was generally believed, however, that the inevitable encroachment of American citizens onto Native lands would lead to their ultimate demise. In the early nineteenth century, many officials expressed the hope that they could be civilized and transformed into productive citizens. Not only would such a policy result in an abundance of inexpensive land, it would also eliminate a potential enemy without recourse to violence – thereby upholding the image of a nation based on the equality of man.³⁸

The theory proved unworkable. Federal idealism collapsed in the face of state intransigence. The willingness of Americans to tolerate other races diminished in direct proportion to the frequency of their interactions. The optimistic rhetoric of eastern philosophers did not sit well with frontiersmen living in close proximity to Native lands. Encroaching settlers were not desirous of treating with Indians and cared even less about

³⁷ Berkhofer, 38-49.

³⁸ Berkhofer, 134-153. Richard Drinnon. *Facing West: The Metaphysics of Indian-Hating and Empire-Building*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1980), 78-89. Wilcomb E. Washburn. *Red Man’s Land/White Man’s Law: A Study of the Past and Present Status of the American Indian*. (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1971), 47-58.

civilizing them; land was paramount. Furthermore, by the 1830s and 1840s, the arguably benign ideas of republicanism and environmentalism gave way to democracy and scientific racism. Democracy, previously looked upon with scorn by the elite, came into its own in the 1830s. Jacksonian rhetoric expounded the virtues of the common man, majority rule, a liberal government beneficial to all, and free enterprise. With the supposed abolishment of the class system, Americans were free to pursue their ambitions. The potential for success, economically or otherwise, seemed limitless. If a person failed in their endeavors, it could only be attributed to his own shortcomings. For many Americans the image of the self-made, self-reliant citizen served to differentiate their country from all other nations. The rugged frontiersman in particular, once denigrated as half-civilized and lawless, came to exemplify the new democratic ideal as he struck out to conquer the wilderness. More than ever, the Indian stood physically and ideologically in opposition to white advancement.³⁹

Several factors contributed to the legitimacy of race as science in the nineteenth century. Polygenesis, formerly looked upon as Christian heresy, gained wide-spread acceptance. The theory held, in contrast to monogenesis, that the differences in man could more aptly be explained by their origins as separate species. Separate origins implied that men were not necessarily equal, an assumption verified by “scientific” calculation as seen in the voluminous publications on craniology and phrenology. Increasingly, physical characteristics were used to explain the supposed inferiority of darker skinned peoples. Scholars equated smaller craniums with diminished mental capacity. Darwin’s theory of natural selection was quickly usurped in the name of racial science, as well. The Anglo-Saxon “race,” so went the argument, achieved its advanced level of society not through accident but through biological superiority. Racial overtones pervaded much of the popular literature, while “experts” preached the superiority of the Anglo race in multitudinous tomes that provided a stamp of legitimacy to the new science.⁴⁰ Josiah Nott, a leading American craniologist, offered this oft-quoted and unflattering critique of non-whites in 1854:

Intelligence, activity, ambition, progression, high anatomical development, characterize some races; stupidity, indolence, immobility, savagism, low

³⁹ Berkhofer, 153-157; Slotkin, 157-565; Washburn, 59-74.

⁴⁰ Berkhofer, 49-61; Horsman, 116-157; Pearce, 105-134.

anatomical development characterize others. Lofty civilization, in all cases, has been achieved solely by the “Caucasian” group. Mongolian races, save in the Chinese family, in no instance have reached beyond the degree of semi-civilization; while the black races of Africa and Oceanica no less than the *Barbarous* tribes of America have remained in utter darkness for thousands of years. . . .

Furthermore, certain savage types can neither be civilized or domesticated. The *Barbarous* races of America (excluding the Toltecs) although nearly as low in intellect as the Negro races, are essentially untameable. Not merely have all attempts to civilize them failed, but also every endeavor to enslave them. Our Indian tribes submit to extermination, rather than wear the yoke under which our Negro slaves fatten and multiply.

It has been falsely asserted, that the *Choctaw* and *Cherokee* Indians have made great progress in civilization. I assert positively, after the most ample investigation of the facts, that the pure-blooded Indians are everywhere unchanged in their habits. Many white persons, settling among the above tribes, have intermarried with them; and all such trumpeted progress exists among these whites and their mixed breeds alone. The pure-blooded savage still skulks untamed through the forest, or gallops athwart the prairie. Can any one call the name of a single pure Indian of the *Barbarous* tribes who – except in death, like a wild cat – has done anything worthy of remembrance?⁴¹

Racial theories offered Americans a biological explanation for their newly realized exceptionalism. It also imbued them with a sense of mission and served to rationalize and justify continental expansion at the expense of “inferior” races. All of this unsound reasoning held enormous significance for Anglo relations with American Indians. If Native society was not simply a rung on the evolutionary ladder, it meant that Indians were permanently destined for inferiority. They could not, as many of the enlightened Founders wished, be incorporated into the body politic because they would dilute the pool of Anglo-Saxon superiority. As historians have pointed out, the fear of racial amalgamation was one of the key arguments against incorporating all of Mexico into the Republic in the 1840s. Reginald Horsman has contended that thereafter, the United States adopted a policy of economic rather than imperial expansion. In actuality, imperial expansion would and did continue as the newly acquired territory from Mexico was colonized. Diluting the body politic with inferior genes in the undertaking, however, would not be an issue. Most Americans considered the area “open” and devoid of

⁴¹ J.C. Nott and George R. Glidden. *Types of Mankind: or, Ethnological Researches Based Upon the Ancient Monuments, Paintings, Sculptures, and Crania of Races, and Upon their Natural, Geographical, Philological, and Biblical History*. (Philadelphia: Lippincott, Grambo & Co., 1854), 461.

meaningful settlement. Few seriously considered the possibility of assimilating the Indians actually there. Americans, in fact, did not give Native Americans much consideration at all. It was presumed they would simply “fade away” as white civilization enveloped the region.⁴²

5.3.4 A Soldier’s View

In February 1863 an Iowa trooper expressed satisfaction at the news that many of the Santee Sioux allegedly involved in the 1862 Minnesota uprising were on the verge of starvation. “I wish they would all die it would save us the trouble of killing them next Summer,” he wistfully remarked.⁴³ As much as Americans liked to deny the right of Indians to exist, such wishful thinking could not alter reality. In 1861, many still “stubbornly” refused to renounce their savage lifestyle and embrace civilization – though by that time the rhetoric of benevolent assimilation rang hollow. Nor, as many emigrants discovered, would they conscientiously step aside and allow whites to undermine their way of life in the name of progress. The Indian would not just “fade away.” The Anglo-Saxon race required more than idealistic platitudes in order to fulfill its Manifest Destiny, for the journey would be violently contested. Though the volunteer soldier of the 1860s was but one of many agents responsible for the ultimate subjugation of the American Indian, his role was especially conspicuous. As a citizen-turned-soldier, he was the military manifestation of decades of popularized racial theory and American triumphalist oratory.

The soldiers sent to the frontier were thoroughly imbued with racial preconceptions. Even had they been illiterate automatons, it is difficult to imagine them escaping the theories and stereotypical language that so pervaded the period. Most were literate, however, and voracious readers to boot. Well aware of popular works on phrenology, they frequently studied them to pass the time. “We have a copy of ‘Phrenology’ by Fowler & Wells,” reported one, “and some amusement is afforded in

⁴² Horsman, 189-207, 272-297. Gregory Nobles, *American Frontiers*, 14-15. Nobles has elaborated on this idea, noting that western colonization was not solely undertaken by restless citizens seeking out new freedoms. Rather, “it was a process that depended on the participation, even the active promotion, of the national government.”

⁴³ Throne, Henry Wieneke to wife, 17 February 1863, 138.

examining the soldier craniums.”⁴⁴ An Iowa veteran likewise turned to the subject in boredom, though how firm a grasp he had of its basic tenets is uncertain. “So I read a while in Fowler’s Phrenology,” he explained to his wife. “I like . . . Phrenology pretty well. Some nights we have quite a time examining heads and talking about character.”⁴⁵

The brothers Orson and Lorenzo Fowler helped to popularize the phrenological “science” and the notion that the shape of the skull determined a person’s character. Their works offered more than just entertainment; they explicitly linked cranial size with mental capacity and helped disseminate the idea of innate differences between races. The Fowlers determined that Caucasians were the most advanced of all races because of the superior development of the frontal and coronal areas of the head. These areas, they posited, controlled the intellectual and moral powers of an individual. “The European race (including their descendants in America), possess a much larger endowment of these organs, and also of their corresponding faculties, than any other portion of the human species. Hence their intellectual and moral superiority over all other races of men.” As for the Indians, the Fowlers held out little hope. “Their small amount of brain in the coronal region of the head, when compared with their immense development of the animal passions and selfish feelings, would bring them chiefly under the dominion of the animal nature of man, and render them little susceptible of becoming civilized, humanized, and educated.”⁴⁶ Exposure to the Fowlers’ ideas did not result in a revelation among the soldiers. On the contrary, it only reinforced what they already suspected or “knew.” As products of a racist society, the men reflected as well as propagated contemporary observations. Many had never seen an Indian before their military service, yet their remarks make clear a previous subscription to commonly held ideas of where Native Americans stood in the racial hierarchy.

⁴⁴ Nelson and Onstad, *A Webfoot Volunteer*, 131.

⁴⁵ Charles Oscar Torrey to wife, 17 October 1863, Charles Oscar Torrey Papers, LC.

⁴⁶ O.S. and L.N. Fowler. *Phrenology Proved, Illustrated, and Applied*. (Philadelphia: Fowler and Brevoort, 1839), 26, 30; O.S. Fowler. *The Illustrated Self-Instructor in Phrenology and Physiology*. (New York: Fowler and Wells, Publishers, 1857), 29-34. In the 1857 edition, Orson Fowler went beyond the phrenological and made suppositions about the character of races based on voice tone, hair texture, and skin color. “The barbarous races use the guttural sounds, more than the civilized,” he concluded. “Thus Indians talk more down the throat than white men, and thus of those men who are lower or higher in the human scale. Those whose voices are clear and distinct have clear minds, while those who only half form their words, or are heard indistinctly, say by deaf persons, are mentally obtuse.”

5.3.5 The Elusive Noble Savage

Archetypes of the good, bad, and degraded Indian all appear in soldiers' letters and diaries. As had former generations, they judged the people they encountered against their own culture. With the exception of Minnesotans, few articulated the negative image of the treacherous Indian until after a battle. Then, a raging flood of epithets inundated their writing. In the interim, soldiers' contact with Native Americans was usually limited to the peaceful treaty Indians who came and went from the various frontier posts or were confined to reservations. On occasion, the opportunity to observe a peaceful tribe on their native land presented itself. Often they were allies against a tribe hostile to the United States. Soldiers tended to have a good opinion of them not only for the military assistance they offered but because they seemed relatively civilized. The Maricopa and Pima, for instance, drew much praise for their help in running down the Apache and for their agricultural way of life. "[The Maricopa] have always been the white man's friend & in my judgment have the most benevolent countenances of any Indians that I ever saw," commented a California soldier. "They subsist principally on wheat which they raise by irrigating with water brought from the Gila River [in present-day Arizona]."⁴⁷ Wrote another Californian, "The Maricopas and Pimas are two of the finest tribes of Indians I have ever seen the Women are strictly virtuous and their lands are well cultivated."⁴⁸ A third noted approvingly that they made some "pretensions" to clothe themselves and admired their "scrupulously neat and clean" villages and farms. "They fight the Apache in their own way," he added, "and in this respect are superior to our soldiers, perhaps."⁴⁹

Few tribes garnered more praise from soldiers. Virtuous, clean, loyal and courageous in battle, the Pima and Maricopa seemed to possess all the characteristics of the Noble Savage. Predicating these beliefs was the tribes' adherence to agriculture. To the California troops, it marked them as more advanced than their "warlike" neighbors, the Apache. The commendation they received, however, stood on a brittle foundation. It was based on the suppositions that the Pima and Maricopa were not and had never been at war with the United States and, more importantly, that whites were not then desirous of

⁴⁷ Walker, 38-39.

⁴⁸ Hazen Diary, 31 May 1862.

⁴⁹ Bushnell Diary, 21, 23 October 1865.

their land. As the Cherokee discovered thirty years earlier, covetous settlers backed by federal and state troops cared little about how “civilized” a tribe had become, and beneath the soldiers’ admiration lurked the image of the treacherous, indolent Indian. “[The Pima] are honest and quite industrious,” reported one, “but are also great beggars, and somewhat filthy in their persons.”⁵⁰ Others dismissed their pretenses to civilized ways as ridiculous. “They presented a comical appearance,” wrote an observer of the Maricopa chief and several warriors, “half civilized, half barbarous, as they rode up to our camp on their raw boned ponies, dressed off in some United States uniforms, given them by order of the General, brass buttons, and red paint, infantry dress coats and bare legs, military caps and long hair.”⁵¹ Like a precocious child donning his father’s clothes, they could only play at being civilized. One soldier admitted that the Pima and Maricopa were indeed a “better class” of Indian, but still believed them far from truly civilized. Despite their agricultural way of life, they still had more in common with the scavenging coyote than the white man. “They sleep in the sand or on the earth, very much like animals,” he wrote. “When we have an animal die, no matter if there is no Indian within twenty miles of us – to our knowledge, that is – within hours . . . they will be on hand to carry off and eat the last morsel.” In the end, he could not avoid lumping them with all Indians in a sweeping generalization: “As a general rule, Indians are born thieves and consider they have ‘carte blanche’ to steal anything they can get their hands on that belongs to the whites”⁵²

Ultimately, no amount of respect for the Pima and Maricopa could change the fact that they were still Indians. The image of the “Indian” carried significant historical baggage, and soldiers found themselves entrapped by traditional stereotypes. For their part, the Pima and Maricopa could not have achieved the status of good Indian even had they made a conscious decision to do so. The ideal of the Noble Savage was an impossible achievement; such Indians existed only within the white mind. Measured against this mythic image, even the most “civilized” tribes were bound to fall short of white standards and expectations, and therein lay the paradox. The Pima and Maricopa

⁵⁰ San Francisco *Alta*, 11 June 1862, published in Andrew E. Masich, *The Civil War in Arizona*, 183-184.

⁵¹ San Francisco *Alta*, 23 June 1862, *Ibid*, 195.

⁵² Herman J. Viola, ed. *The Memoirs of Charles Henry Veil: A Soldier's Recollections of the Civil War and the Arizona Territory*. (New York: Orion Books, 1993), 80-81.

were atypical in that they received a fair amount of praise from soldiers, even if tempered with some criticism. The soldiers' critiques of their society are significant, for they demonstrate the ever-present duality of the Indian image. Their observations of other tribes were not nearly as generous; there was no hint of the good Indian. Yet their criticisms echoed, in exaggerated form, those of the Pima and Maricopa.

5.3.6 The Degraded Indian

Since the Noble Savage was a figment of white imagination, soldiers consequently could only perceive Indians through the remaining stereotypes of either bad or degraded. They wasted little time in labeling them, and as both images were overwhelmingly negative they tended to overlap. Some mentioned the classic degraded Indian, unable to adapt to civilization and therefore destroyed by it. "Yesterday I went down to the Cheyenne Indian camp and smoked and ate with the chief," wrote one Missouri cavalry officer from Kansas. "They are regular savages. Civilization has made no advances amongst them. It has only created a love for tobacco and whiskey. As soon as they get whiskey they stay drunk until it is all gone."⁵³ The few remaining survivors of the Mandan tribe along the Missouri River in Dakota elicited pity more than scorn. Decimated by smallpox in the 1830s, the tribe had been reduced to less than 125 members by the 1860s. "All their weapons are the most primitive and clumsy, and of flint and stone," observed a trooper in the 6th Iowa Cavalry. "The tribe is a remnant and is the slave of the fur company. They have not advanced for centuries. . . . They are just waiting to die, [a] slow disintegration of the great unfit."⁵⁴ Death as remedy for the hopelessly corrupted Indian was a common theme. After witnessing an initiation ritual in which prospective warriors of an unnamed southwestern tribe were brutally flagellated, a Colorado volunteer pondered if they could indeed be the descendants of those Noble Savages, King Philip and Tecumseh. "Whatever of savage grandeur in the Indian character they conjured from the records of history or romance, was speedily dissipated on entering a lodge," he maintained. "The squaws, miserable and emaciated, were baking human excrement on shingles for food, while the bucks were usually engaged in

⁵³ Peter F. Clark to wife, 16 December 1863, Peter F. Clark Papers, Missouri Historical Society.

⁵⁴ Judd, 35-36.

lousing themselves. The squalid misery of these wasted creatures is past belief, and must be seen to be appreciated. Utter and speedy extinction is their only cure. Association with our race injures rather than benefits them. It has already done its work. Their ruin is accomplished.”⁵⁵

Observations of the true “degraded” Indian – that is, one whose societal woes could be linked directly to the vices of “civilization” – were mentioned only sporadically. Several factors probably account for the infrequency of the image among soldiers. In 1861, the reservation system that marked the latter decades of the nineteenth century was just beginning. Many tribes, especially in the West, still lived on sizable if truncated ancestral lands. Further, most tribes were allowed to leave their reservations to hunt. Consequently, few soldiers had extended contact with the archetypal reservation Indian who was commonly assigned those characteristics. A more fundamental reason was the refusal of whites to accept responsibility for the condition of the tribes. Conventional wisdom held that the inability of the Indian to cope with civilization was not a white problem, but an Indian problem. As a result, soldiers often attributed the lamentable circumstances of some Indians not to the turmoil caused by disruptions of their traditional culture, but to an inherent deficiency in the Indian character.

5.3.7 The Savage Indian

The most prominent stereotype was the Indian as “savage.” Because the artificial categories of savage and degraded were fluid, however, soldiers tended to conflate them. How they eventually classified them mattered little. Savage behavior prevented the Indian from entering civilized culture just as much as degraded behavior, and many considered Indians degraded because they were savage. As with white images of the good or degraded Indian, the characteristics assigned to the savage Indian reflected what soldiers valued in their own culture rather than the true nature of the people they encountered. Diverse tribes and their numerous bands such as the Sioux, Arapaho, Kiowa, Comanche, Navajo and Apache were all described in remarkably similar terms. Because soldiers denigrated the living conditions of even those tribes who lived in permanent dwellings, their responses to nomadic Indians should not be surprising.

⁵⁵ Hollister, 30-31.

Everything about their way of life seemed antithetical to democratic American values, and the implication that they were something less than human was regularly expressed.

The nomadic frontier military life had acquainted soldiers with numerous hardships. Forced to sleep in the elements or beneath temporary shelters and driven to hunt for survival, their routine began to resemble that of the Indians they pursued. Many soldiers resented the transformation, and found it difficult to accept that anyone would voluntarily choose to permanently live in such a manner. Inevitably, they denigrated the Indians who did so. “All the Indians of the plains are nomadic,” wrote an officer in the U.S. Volunteers. “The home life inside the tepees is but little above that of cattle.”⁵⁶ The migratory nature of Indians also drew criticism from an Ohio volunteer. “Well an Indian village is not like a human village,” he wrote to his sister. “The latter is stationary, always seen in the same place. The former is wherever it suits the inhabitants to put it[.]”⁵⁷ The critique of the nomadic plains Indians was in essence a critique of their rejection of traditional republicanism. Improper use of the land prevented the establishment of farms, the bedrock of civilization. Without a permanent settlement Indians, according to the logic of soldiers, hardly differed from the wild animals they hunted.

As for the people who inhabited the villages, volunteers utilized any number of historical stereotypes to describe them. They were habitually labeled as beggars and thieves. “[A] band of Indians camped near us, Ogilallas [Oglala Sioux],” reported an Ohio cavalryman en route to Fort Laramie. “Men, women, and children in camp, great beggars.”⁵⁸ The Indian as beggar motif was echoed by another Ohioan, who insisted that Indians exhibited a friendly disposition only when hungry or in need of something. He and his comrades reluctantly fed a group of warriors who entered their camp, but refused to supply corn for their horses. “[T]he chief told his men to take the corn anyhow,” he recounted. “He no sooner gave the order than he was looking over the barrel of a Weston breech-loading rifle . . . and I politely ordered them to vamoose, which they did.”⁵⁹ While disdainful of what they considered beggary and panhandling, soldiers were

⁵⁶ Musgrove, 210.

⁵⁷ Unrau, 118.

⁵⁸ Hull, 10.

⁵⁹ “On the Plains: Scouting, Indian Fighting and Hunting,” *National Tribune*, 11 April 1889.

absolutely intolerant of apparent “thievery” and considered it a vice inherent to the Indian. An Iowa trooper, reflecting this belief, expressed wariness toward a seemingly friendly group of Crow Indians near his camp. “No matter how friendly an Indian appears to be they belong to a race of hereditary thieves,” he remarked. “They will almost steal rocks because they are in your camp if nothing else offers.”⁶⁰

Soldiers also viewed Indians and Indian culture as somehow impure, filthy and “dirty.” Even their hygienic methods were deemed barbaric and savage. All volunteers battled with lice at some point in their career and were well acquainted with the vermin. To counter the pests they boiled clothes, roasted them over a fire, and ran their thumbnails down the seams in order to destroy the eggs. The Indian routine of delousing horrified them, however. “Notice an old Squaw combing a child’s head,” wrote a Californian stationed at the Siletz Agency in Oregon. “She was in luck and every time caught some game which she eat.”⁶¹ An Ohioan noticed the same ritual among the Arapaho. As he wandered through their village, the activities of a group of young girls drew his attention. “I watched them a moment, and what do you think they were doing. Nothing much but picking the lice off of each other and eating them, a simple innocent amusement[.]”⁶² “Cracking” lice, either with the nails or the teeth, had been a common practice in Europe for centuries. As entomophagists, American Indians sometimes ingested them as a dietary supplement. For the white observer, the custom evoked images of apes and monkeys and provided further “evidence” of Indian degradation. Most soldiers did not feel the need to point out any specific example to support the notion of the filthy Indian, however; they assumed all were naturally unclean. “There are about fifteen hundred of the *red devils* about the country here, and about two hundred hanging around the fort all time,” wrote an Iowan from Fort Randall. “They are the dirtiest, laziest, lousiest, set of creatures I ever saw; I don’t see how they live at all.”⁶³ The Shoshone were likewise “dirty” and “greasy,” according to another who watched them roam a military camp. “They were like pet coons, all over you—in your clothes,

⁶⁰ Judd, 21.

⁶¹ Barth, 134.

⁶² Unrau, 122.

⁶³ Iowa City *State Press*, 19 February 1862, quoted in Throne, 106.

everywhere.”⁶⁴ A trooper in the 14th Pennsylvania Cavalry was similarly unimpressed with a group of Indians he observed at Fort Laramie. “Their dress was gaudy but dirty, and in many cases very brief,” he noted. “We looked in vain for the noble looking warrior and the handsome squaw, but turned away convinced that they existed only in fiction.”⁶⁵

In place of the “noble looking warrior” they found only the “lazy buck.” Few aspects of Native American culture infuriated soldiers more than the unwillingness of male tribal members to assist women in their daily labors. The division of labor in a hunting society differed markedly from its agricultural or “civilized” counterpart. Men hunted and protected the tribe; women attended to the more mundane duties of cooking, making clothing, preparing a camp for a move, and harvesting crops if planted. Many of their duties entailed substantial physical effort which, in white society, would have been undertaken by men. Because soldiers were not cultural relativists, they looked upon the warrior’s avoidance of “women’s work” as an insult to their own society and masculinity and branded them as derelicts. An Ohio trooper, observing Cheyenne women at work, indignantly commented on the scene. “The bucks were sitting around in little groups talking trade, while the squaws were occupied dressing robes, cooking, putting up their wig-wams, and other *household duties*,” he reported. A comrade’s attempt to help met with laughter and ridicule from one of the men. “it made me mad enough to knock the old fool over but it is just the way with the brutes, . . . the squaws do every thing. . . . (ig) Noble sons of the forest indeed”⁶⁶

Opinions of the physique and constitution of Native American men varied. Some admitted that the warriors they observed were impressive to behold despite their “laziness.” Few, however, complimented them simply as well-toned specimens of humanity. More often, praise bordered on the absurd. Soldiers described Indians as supermen with animal-like strength and agility. “These Indians, physically, are a superb race of men, almost a race of giants,” wrote one volunteer. “[B]y nature and training [they] are capable of great endurance—a marvel to the white man.”⁶⁷ Notably, the above

⁶⁴ Judd, 22.

⁶⁵ M.A. Gherst. *A History of a Trip across the Plains*. (Pittsburgh, PA?: s.n., 1893?), 9.

⁶⁶ Unrau, 118; Bushnell Diary, 15 March 1866; Judd, 11-12; Glanville, 102-103.

⁶⁷ Musgrove, 210.

opinion was provided decades after the end of the Indian wars. With the passage of time and danger, elements of the Noble Savage again came to the fore even among the recollections of some veterans.

Contemporaneous observers, while acknowledging the extraordinary fortitude of the Indian, saw him not as superhuman but inhuman. Such observations commonly revolved around the supposed inability of the Indian to feel pain or express emotion. In essence, soldiers twisted the “stoicism” of the Noble Savage into something grotesque and perverted. One Iowan was mystified by the Cut Head band, a branch of the Yanktonai Sioux who ritually scarred their faces. “You could not tell whether they were laughing or crying,” he remarked, “and no one ever saw a full grown Indian do either.”⁶⁸ Soldiers had ample opportunity to attend Native American rituals, initiations and dances. Rather than impressing upon them a greater understanding of Indian culture, the events reinforced preconceptions of Indian savageness. A volunteer described one such affair undertaken by Yankton Sioux as “wild and barbarous.” Warriors’ chests and backs were pierced with wooden rods, and to each rod was attached a length of rope. At the height of a frenzied dance, the initiates pulled on the ropes and violently tore the rods from their bodies. “During the entire proceedings,” he marveled, “not a lip quivered, not a muscle moved, to denote that they experienced anything but the most exquisite pleasure. Everything was done with the stoical indifference peculiar to the savage.”⁶⁹ This “stoical indifference” to pain carried over to the battlefield, as well. After the battle of Whitestone Hill, in which Federal troops overran and destroyed a Sioux village, soldiers made a gruesome discovery: a Sioux child shot in the face, with a gaping exit wound in the back of his head. Miraculously, he survived. “He has never cried or appeared to suffer pain, but is as well as anybody,” wrote an astonished Nebraska trooper.⁷⁰

The myth of the stoical superhuman had its detractors, of course. In January 1863, concerned citizens reported several lodges of Sioux encamped fifty miles north of Fort Randall in Dakota. They were suspected of participating in the Minnesota massacre the previous year, and in short time a squad of Dakota cavalymen surrounded their winter encampment with carbines at the ready. Taken completely by surprise, the Sioux

⁶⁸ Judd, 24.

⁶⁹ Iowa City *Republican*, 9 July 1862, quoted in Throne, 123.

⁷⁰ Rowen, *Diary of Henry W. Pierce*, 49

immediately surrendered. “Tell me that an Indian never gets scared; that he is stoical and never shows by his actions what he feels and I will respectfully decline to believe it,” remarked an officer afterwards. “They were badly frightened and showed it plainly.”⁷¹ Others were just as dismissive of their supposed physical prowess. One officer believed that the weakness of the Ponca (and by implication all Indians) stemmed from the effeminate nature of the men. The Pawnee, hired as guides and trackers against the Sioux, also failed to impress him. “There has been so much of fancy written about the Indian that the truth ought at times be told,” he insisted. “In physical strength, discipline and heroism the Indian does not compare and is not in the same class with the white man . . .”⁷² Indians were also accused of cowardice in battle because they tended to run, naturally enough, when faced with artillery or concentrated rifle fire. In many accounts of Indian “cowardice” however, one detects a bit of braggadocio and graveyard whistling. With the Sioux campaign of 1864 safely behind him, one Minnesotan boldly dismissed his late opponents. “Say what you will of the Indians none of them have that courage which enables men to face bullets coolly & steadily & in their own mode of warfare they are not a match for white men,” he confidently asserted. “After my experience I have no fear of Indians or Indian fighting.”⁷³

Women, or “squaws,” also received their share of commentary. The character of the relationship between armed men and noncombatant women is an important factor in determining the overall nature of any conflict. Regular abuse is a solid indicator of disrespect for the opponent, in general. This is especially true of the nineteenth century volunteers who had been taught to revere women. If *they* found it possible to rationalize the poor treatment of females the rationalization of other acts would not be particularly difficult. Acts of violence against Indian women were, unfortunately, all too common. In December 1863, several troopers from the 7th Iowa attacked a group of Ponca women returning to Fort Randall from Omaha. The altercation stemmed from an argument earlier in the day when several troopers, drunk and belligerent, entered the Ponca camp intent on causing trouble. Outnumbered by warriors, the men left without a fight, but not without a grudge. According to a member of the 6th Iowa who reported on the widely

⁷¹ Pattee, 290.

⁷² Ware, 28, 188.

⁷³ Eugene Marshall to Sister, 11 September 1864, Eugene Marshall Papers, Duke U.

circulated story, the soldiers shadowed the Indians when they broke camp, fell upon a group of isolated women, and “went to work and killed seven of them.” Authorities promised the tribe that the murderers would be punished, and that seemed to placate most. The relative worth of a “squaw,” however, soon became apparent. Three months after the event, those responsible had still not been called to account.⁷⁴

Reactions to Indian women, though generally negative, were still notably mixed; some did manage to point out what they considered virtuous traits. If they thought the men lazy, virtually all were agreed on the “industriousness” of females. One Minnesotan watched with amazement the work of several Winnebago women as they prepared for the tribe’s permanent removal from the state following the Sioux uprising. “I noticed one poor mother carrying a lad about sixteen years old (who had been accidentally shot in the leg), besides other things,” he observed. “It is surprising what loads these poor squaws can carry. . . .I have arrived at the conclusion that, if an Indian is the laziest of men, a squaw is the most industrious of women.”⁷⁵ Soldiers also admitted, with a degree of surprise, the attractiveness of women they encountered. “Some of the girls were not so bad looking as some white girls I have seen,” confided an Ohio cavalryman who observed a group of Brulé Sioux as they tore down lodges.⁷⁶ Another, after wandering through several Arapaho lodges, likewise confessed that “in some we found squaws that were real good looking . . . [.]”⁷⁷

To be sure, soldiers’ admirations were marked by a racial distance. To the extent that they complimented women, they did so with a measure of reserve, hesitation or embarrassment. Indian women were not *supposed* to be attractive, yet before them stood

⁷⁴ Goodwin, “The Letters of Private Milton Spencer,” 256-257; The sergeant in charge of the military patrol reported that the Poncas had been threatening citizens. Upon complaint his men tracked down the band and immediately fired on them, killing seven warriors. Indian Agent Major J.B. Hoffman later insisted that the troopers were guilty of “criminal conduct” toward the Indians, and an investigation ensued. Captain George Armstrong of the Nebraska Cavalry headed the inquiry, and determined that only the soldiers and Indians involved knew the true story. This did not prevent him from declaring that he placed “little reliance” on the Indian version of what occurred. See *OR*, Ser. 1, Vol. 22, pt. 1, 768-769; Ser. 1, Vol 34, pt. 2, 75, 90, 114, 235. Helen Hunt Jackson insisted that the soldiers entered the Ponca camp and insulted the squaws, “offering money with one hand, and presenting a revolver with the other.” Their overtures rejected, the troopers returned later, destroyed the camp, and gave chase to the fleeing women. They wounded three, who managed to escape, but killed four others, including a child, when their barking dog betrayed their location. See Helen Hunt Jackson. *A Century of Dishonor: A Sketch of the United State Government’s Dealings with some of the Indian Tribes*. (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1881), 193-194.

⁷⁵ Glanville, 102.

⁷⁶ Hull, 10.

⁷⁷ Unrau, 122.

proof to the contrary. Some tried to rationalize their attraction, as did a young West Virginia trooper. “She was much whiter than the others,” he wrote of a Ute girl that had caught his attention, “and there evidently flowed in her veins a small portion of the blood of the pale face.”⁷⁸ As soldiers admired those aspects of Indian culture that resembled their own, so too did they admire white physical characteristics over red. This young volunteer was exceptional not in his attraction to an Indian, but because he attempted to pursue a relationship with the “pale-faced” girl. Significantly, and unlike Union volunteers in the South who frequently courted and even married Southern women, frontier soldiers did not normally establish romantic relationships or intermarry with Indian women. Cultural taboos and stereotypes usually prevented their occurrence, though there were exceptions. A trooper in the 11th Ohio Cavalry, recovering from an illness at Deer Creek in Idaho Territory, married the Sioux woman who had cared for him. According to his own memoirs, however, he was an inveterate drifter and the marriage was but the first of many in his lifetime.⁷⁹

In the rare event when soldiers did pursue such relationships, they normally met with ridicule from their comrades. Further, as the case of the infatuated West Virginian demonstrates, soldiers tended to either idealize or denigrate the women before them – there was no middle ground. Scorned by his would-be lover, the trooper’s demeanor quickly changed. “I could have seen her scalped without a thought of sympathy,” he wrote later. “I felt sick – sick of everything – especially Indians . . . and dirty deceptive squaws.” The relationship failed, he believed, not through any fault of his own but because he had been “foolish” enough to think that a woman of an innately deceptive race could express anything like love.⁸⁰ As they did with Indians in general, soldiers struggled to accept women simply as people. They romanticized them as “Indian Princesses,” as counterparts to Noble Savages, and when that image inevitably collapsed, labeled them as “dirty squaws.”⁸¹

⁷⁸ Holliday, 28.

⁷⁹ Amberson G. Shaw Autobiography, recorded in the *Nebraska Valentine Democrat*, 32, no. 51, <<http://web.archive.org/web/20031205053558/http://www.schmoopielooopy.com/agbio.html>>

⁸⁰ Holliday, 28-31.

⁸¹ For discussions of the “Indian princess” image see Rayna Green, “The Pocahontas Perplex: The Image of Indian Women in American Culture,” *Massachusetts Review*, 16, no. 4 (Autumn 1975), 703-704, 713; and Alison Bernstein, “Outgrowing Pocahontas: Toward a New History of American Indian Women,” *Minority Notes* 2 (Spring/Summer 1981), 3-4.

Even though soldiers did not generally consider Indian women acceptable partners for “meaningful” relationships, this did not rule out sexual encounters – willing and unwilling. It is unclear if the troopers who “went to work” on the Ponca women were also guilty of rape, but there are numerous cases where evidence of the crime was indisputable. The rapes that occurred after the massacres at Bear River and Sand Creek are only the most infamous. They tend to obscure the fact that rape of Native American women occurred quite routinely, especially in comparison to how rarely it occurred against Southern women. In October 1862, a California paper reported the gang-rape of several Indian women by a squad of soldiers on patrol. During the winter of 1863-1864, troopers from the 6th Iowa garrisoned at Fort Randall entertained themselves by committing various offenses at the nearby Yanktonai reservation, including burglary, assault and rape.⁸²

These were not just random criminal acts, for they were aimed at a specific group. The obvious question is why? If the act of rape is never about sex, but rather the power wielded by the aggressor over his victim, the purpose of that power in these instances must be considered in the context of war. Some have posited that rape in warfare is simply part of the traditional celebration of a conquering army. While there are certainly enough historical examples to back this assertion, as an answer it is wholly unsatisfying and begs the question as to why the celebration involved rape rather than ticker-tape parades. Others, such as Susan Brownmiller in *Against Our Will*, have speculated that the sexual abuse of women serves a more practical purpose: a final humiliation for the men of the defeated nation. In this case, she argues, “rape of a woman in war may be as much an act against her husband or father . . . as it is an act against the woman’s body.” Rape, according to Brownmiller, is offensive to men because crudely speaking it violates their “property” rights. By violating the most sacred property of all, a victorious army ruthlessly demonstrates the powerlessness of those they have conquered. There is, however, another possibility beyond that of vengeance, humiliation or subjugation that is particularly relevant to the Indians wars. As one student of the subject remarks, women acted as a “repository of racial purity.” When soldiers raped Indian women, therefore,

⁸² *Red Bluff Beacon*, 9 October 1862, quoted in Robert F. Heizer, ed., *The Destruction of the California Indians*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1993, 1974), 283; Scott, “A Journey to the Heart of Darkness,” 7.

they symbolically expressed their desire to eliminate Native Americans as a race. Which of these beliefs most adequately explains the actions of frontier soldiers is probably unknowable, even to them. The plausibility that they acted under one or more of these assumptions, however, reveals a point of much greater importance. The rape of Native American women was not incidental to war, but an act of war itself.⁸³

More often, or at least more commonly remarked upon, was sex as a “consensual” act.⁸⁴ As with rape, these were encounters of opportunity, and normally occurred when soldiers were in proximity to a reservation or village for an extended period. One soldier insinuated that the virtue of the Maricopa was a little too “relaxed,” though not nearly as much as the Yuma and other tribes he had observed.⁸⁵ A Californian was more direct in his accusations. “There is all around the [Siletz Agency in Oregon] any amount of Squaws, young & old, some good looking and some not, and to say virtue could be found out of the cradle is to lie, and to deny the existence [of] Soldiers concubines would be equally untrue.”⁸⁶ Whether or not armed soldiers, in their capacity as conquerors or occupiers, can ever engage in consensual sexual relations with enemy women is questionable, however. In the case of frontier soldiers, their positions of authority (by virtue of their weapons and access to power) renders the “willingness” of Indian women to accommodate them suspect. The absence of physical force, in other words, did not necessarily rule out the absence of psychological duress.⁸⁷ At the Bosque Redondo reservation in Arizona, the duress was immediate. Many of the Navajo arrived already

⁸³ Susan Brownmiller. *Against Our Will: Men, Women, and Rape*. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1975), 31-40. Quote is from page 40; Sarah Deutsch, “Landscape of Enclaves: Race Relations in the West, 1865-1990,” in *Under an Open Sky: Rethinking America’s Western Past*, William Cronon, et al. (New York: 1993), 117.

⁸⁴ In reviewing the memoirs, diaries and letters of nearly one hundred soldiers, I have not found a reported incident of rape outside of the engagement at Sand Creek. This obviously does not mean that they did not occur, only that they were not reported or discussed by soldiers. Given the prevailing Victorian principles, their reticence on sexual issues is not surprising.

⁸⁵ San Francisco *Alta*, 29 June 1862, published in Andrew E. Masich, 182.

⁸⁶ Barth, 123.

⁸⁷ Sherry L. Smith. *The View from Officers’ Row: Army Perceptions of Western Indians*. (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1990), 80-82. Smith has noted the existence of Native American concubines kept by regular officers and the reluctance of the officer corps to discuss the issue. Following the defeat of Black Kettle’s Cheyenne at the battle of Washita in 1868, officers from the 7th Cavalry procured for themselves female prisoners of their choice and held them in forced concubinage. “Under these circumstances,” she asserts, “officers apparently saw the Indian women as the spoils of war, as sexual conveniences, as powerless and depersonalized objects.” Similar thinking likely explains the actions of enlisted men during the Civil War assigned to reservations where defeated tribes were held under guard.

infected with gonorrhea and syphilis, and it was not long before soldiers also became symptomatic. The cause: rampant prostitution. Because of the extreme food shortages that resulted from repeated crop failures at the reservation, women often entertained soldiers in return for money or extra rations. Navajo parents even forced their daughters, some as young as twelve and thirteen, to work as prostitutes to prevent malnutrition and starvation. The physical consequences of these consensual relationships, let alone the psychological impact, were abysmal. Venereal disease became widespread among the enlisted men, and many women, unwilling to accept children fathered by soldiers or hesitant to bring children into a place where food was already in short supply, died when their crude attempts at abortion went awry. The post surgeon predictably held the Navajo women responsible for the conditions, as they were without “the slightest idea of virtue.”⁸⁸ The frequency or extent of these encounters throughout the West is uncertain, but they clearly reinforced the image of Indian women as morally bankrupt and less “virtuous” than civilized white women. Sexual encounters resulted not in the mingling of cultures but rather in further objectification and denigration of the “squaw.”

Many soldiers, however, refused to participate in such carnal gratification. They found the manner and appearance of “squaws” disgusting, and believed that sexual contact demeaned the white man. A Nebraska officer was not at all pleased with the character of the Santee women at the Crow Agency or with the behavior of his men. “While here the Indians, particularly the Isantee squaws (seeking substitutes for ‘Bucks’ I presume, in which I opine they were quite successful) swarmed our Camp . . . their dusky forms frequently seen flitting in the pale moonlight performing their ‘rites’” They were, he concluded, “filthy hags whose ugliness was only equalled by their want of anything like modesty or virtue.”⁸⁹ A Minnesotan agreed with the assessment, and included in his diary an image of a Sioux woman. “Here is a picture of a Squaw which, by and by, is much better looking than they will average,” he wrote. “As a general thing, they are very repulsive looking.”⁹⁰ Some even speculated on the causes of the Native American woman’s “ugliness.” A trooper in the 2nd Minnesota, observing the Mandan

⁸⁸ Gerald Thompson. *The Army and the Navajo*. (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1976), 48,81. Quote is from page 81.

⁸⁹ Rowen, *Journal of Colonel Robert W. Furnas*, 16.

⁹⁰ Glanville, 30.

people, insisted that the men were much more attractive than the women. “The reason being,” he conjectured, “the squaws have to do all the drudgery while the Indians do nothing but hunt, and lie around.” For this volunteer, the question of appearance was ultimately irrelevant: “They are, take them together, a miserable race of beings.”⁹¹

Few aspects of Native American culture escaped ridicule. Not only did soldiers roundly condemn their appearance but also their diet, language and religion. Though they cringed at the sight of Indians eating lice or grasshoppers, soldiers expressed horror at the practice of consuming dog flesh – especially when they were unwitting participants in the feasts.⁹² The consumption of bovine organs and entrails also evoked disgust. One Iowa officer described the slaughter and parceling of a cow at Fort Laramie as similar to a bird caring for its young. He watched with wonder as a woman cleaned the entrails and fed them to several children. “I should have considered this revolting if it had not been for the happy, cheerful way in which the little Indians devoured this stuff, and shouted for more,” he reported with astonishment. “And the old Indian woman seemed to be proud and happy to feed the little creatures so well.”⁹³

Many soldiers managed to learn a smattering of tribal languages during their time on the frontier. The pidgin they utilized allowed them to convey little more than basic ideas, and the complexities of Native languages often left them befuddled and dismissive. “Their language,” wrote one Californian of the Apache, “if it may be dignified with the name, consists of a series of guttural sounds or grunts which would be very difficult to express in English.”⁹⁴ Yet, despite the obvious difficulties of learning just one of the many languages that existed, soldiers dismissed Indian languages as simplistic. According to one officer, Indians had but few thoughts to convey, and therefore needed but few words. “To illustrate,” he expounded, “there is no word in their language [the plains tribes] to correspond to the word virtue in the English because such a trait is unknown among their men and women. The word would as appropriately apply to the buffalo of the plains as to them.”⁹⁵

⁹¹ John E. Robinson to “Dear Libbie,” 11 October 1864, Dakota Conflict of 1862 Manuscripts Collection, MHS.

⁹² Holliday, 31; Musgrove, 214; Pattee, 338.

⁹³ Ware, 253.

⁹⁴ Bushnell Diary, 15 March 1866.

⁹⁵ Musgrove, 212

They similarly made short shrift of Indian religion (their thoughts on Indian rituals has previously been noted), even when it contained aspects of Christianity. “It may be said that the Indian is a very superstitious being,” commented one. “He believes in the existence of a good spirit and a bad spirit, who are constantly at war in their efforts to obtain mastery over him.”⁹⁶ Former attempts at proselytizing often resulted in the selective assimilation of the more palatable aspects of Christianity, resulting in a hybridized religion which soldiers viewed as little better than paganism. “It is not uncommon,” a Californian observed of the Pima, “to find the history of the crucifixion connected and mixed up with some of their own traditions, leaving a strangely chaotic jumble of religious ideas and notions among the people”⁹⁷ Some thought the Indians’ lack of “civilized” religion, in combination with their nomadic nature, the root of their problems. A Minnesotan who encountered the body of a Sioux child killed in a crossfire between warriors and soldiers meditated on the character of his foe: “I could [not] but help feel sorry for and pity them, to think that they could not have been civilized and enlightened and taught the true religion of Christ, that they might not have committed such heathenish acts and unheard of crimes as they did in the outbreak of 1862.”⁹⁸

5.3.8 The Verdict

“Almost entirely without tradition,” wrote an Iowa officer in a sweeping dismissal of the Sioux. “There is no doubt that [they] are the most degraded set of savages on this continent. There is but little among them that can be found to interest anyone.”⁹⁹ Though directed at the Sioux who purportedly took part in the Minnesota massacres, the statement could have been applied by almost any soldier to any tribe. Historical stereotypes prevented soldiers from forming a balanced and realistic view of Native Americans. Though personal contact and association invariably shattered illusions of the Noble Savage, the result was only to replace one extreme with another. If Indians were not noble, then they must be savage: “dirty” and “greasy,” “beggars” and thieves,” “lazy” and “lousy,” “weak” and “cowardly,” “ugly” and lacking in “virtue.” As harsh as

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ San Francisco *Alta*, 9 July 1862, published in Andrew E. Masich, 200.

⁹⁸ John E. Robinson to “Dear Libbie,” 11 October 1864, Dakota Conflict of 1862 Manuscripts Collection, MHS.

⁹⁹ Pattee, 338.

these descriptions appear, they are really quite generic. Union and Confederate soldiers regularly used terms such as “dirty,” “lazy,” and “cowardly” to describe white civilians. They are terms traditionally utilized by Americans to wage war on their enemies. Though there is certainly a degree of objectification involved, it does not necessarily follow that the people to whom the adjectives were applied were considered less than human.

There are, however, key differences in the manner that both Union and Confederate troops viewed Indians. One is left with the strong impression that the “dirtiness” soldiers ascribed to Native Americans referred to much more than just their physical appearance. Everything about them seemed somehow tainted: clothes, culture, religion, their very being. The dirt, in fact, could never be washed away, and separated Indians from the rest of humanity. Most significantly, it seemed to mark them as part of the animal kingdom. From their initial encounter, and with alarming frequency thereafter, soldiers tended to equate Indians with wild beasts. They commented with evident distaste on the “nakedness” of males, often clothed in only a breechclout, which vaguely suggested a certain degree of animal-like promiscuity. Indians did not reside in “human” villages, but migrated like the buffalo. They scavenged for food like the coyote. They communicated through grunts, rather than words. Nor did they move like humans; always “skulking” and “swarming” but never walking or congregating. Even the innocuous-sounding “buck,” “squaw,” and “papoose” – as opposed to man, woman and infant – served to rob Indians of their humanity. It placed them on the level of a wolf pack with cubs rather than parents with children. And it was, after all, much easier to destroy a papoose than it was to murder an infant.

Even in the nightmarish guerrilla wars of the border regions, which most closely resembled the character of the Indian conflicts, soldiers did not immediately denounce their opponents as animals. It is also easy to forget amid all the bloodshed that those who expressed the rhetoric of dehumanization in the guerrilla wars did so with a measure of selectivity. They applied it against so-called “bushwhackers,” not women and children. The early appearance of dehumanizing language aimed at *all* Native Americans virtually assured two results: the rapid escalation of brutal tactics, and their application regardless of age or gender. There should be no mistaking the significance of the wolf as the animal

most often equated with the Indian. As one trooper insisted, “The hostile red men, and the ravenous wolf . . . always seem to prowl together.”¹⁰⁰ Like the wild wolves of the mountains and prairie, Indians were thought to be nothing more than cold, calculating, emotionless killers. Resistant to pain and fear and devoid of human compassion, they were difficult to kill and merciless in battle. The two would be dealt with in similar fashion. “The Indians were a wild, bloodthirsty set of barbarians,” concluded an Iowa officer, and “deserved killing as much as the wolves which barked around their tepees.”¹⁰¹

5.3.9 The Treacherous Indian

In August 1862 the Santee Sioux of Minnesota rose in a bloody revolt, leaving hundreds of dead civilians in their wake. The settlers had reaped the whirlwind sown by years of governmental neglect and deception against the tribe. The uprising paralyzed several northwestern states, diverted to the region thousands of troops destined for southern battlefields, and touched off a war that would last more than a decade and spread throughout the west. Ultimately, a kangaroo court would convict over 300 Sioux of complicity in the massacres, and thirty-eight were eventually hanged in the largest mass execution in American history. Though Union and Confederate troops had intermittently battled Apache and Navajo warriors in a vicious guerrilla war in the southwest, the Dakota Conflict that began in 1862 marked the first significant clash between Anglos and Indians during the Civil War. The campaign and its punitive expeditions would set the tenor of subsequent conflicts not only with the Sioux but with all Native Americans. If Indians refused to discriminate in who they killed, soldiers would adopt the same tactic. Because all Indians were deemed savage, none received the protection traditionally accorded to “civilized” noncombatants.¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ Holliday, 67.

¹⁰¹ Ware, 147.

¹⁰² For general discussions of the Sioux Uprising and the subsequent Dakota Wars see Utey, *Frontiersmen in Blue*, 261-280; and Josephy, *The Civil War in the American West*, 95-154. More detailed studies include Louis H. Roddis, *The Indian Wars of Minnesota*, (Cedar Rapids, Iowa: The Torch Press, 1956), Kenneth Carley, *The Sioux Uprising of 1862*, (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1961), and Michael Clodfelter, *The Dakota War: The United States Army versus the Sioux, 1862-1865*, (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1998). For the Native American perspective, see Gary Clayton Anderson and Alan R. Woolworth, eds., *Through Dakota Eyes: Narrative Accounts of the Minnesotan Indian War of 1862*, (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1988). Some of the punitive expeditions against the Sioux have

As the Sioux retreated from Minnesota, the destruction of life and property left behind filled soldiers with horror and rage. They often reached settlements too late to be of use – other than assisting in the grim task of burying the dead. “We buried thirty bodies,” reported a Minnesotan of one day’s work at the Redwood Agency. “Found them in every conceivable situation. . . .We found a man lying on the ground beside some framing timber with his broad ax, square, and chalk-line beside him. His head was cut off.”¹⁰³ Similar scenes were reported from other communities. At the town of Breckinridge, a member of the 9th Minnesota Infantry helped rebury fourteen victims killed in the uprising. “Soldiers from the Fort [Abercrombie] buried them first and the Sioux Indians came along the second time dug them up and drove stakes through their bodies into the ground,” he recalled.¹⁰⁴ There seemed to be no pattern to the carnage; warriors killed indiscriminately. Soldiers found scores of mutilated bodies missing hands, feet, heads. They listened with anger as survivors told of husbands murdered in their fields and mothers beaten to death in front of their children who, if they had not also been killed outright, were now held captive by the Sioux. The press, politicians, civilians and soldiers screamed for vengeance. The treachery of the Indians could not go unpunished – their sins would be paid for in blood. John G. Nicolay, a Lincoln aide sent west to ascertain the situation, witnessed the Minnesota war machine inexorably creak into motion: “As against the Sioux it must be a war of extermination.”¹⁰⁵

As soldiers and civilians sorted through the wreckage, stories of Sioux atrocities quickly exceeded the bounds of reality. The actual slaughter had been terrible enough, but the exaggerated tales that eventually gained credence made clear that no less than the minions of Satan had visited the land. “These people had taken their lives in their hands and had settled on the frontier,” wrote one soldier, “[and] were now driven from their homes by the merciless savages who spared neither age or sex, even in some instances

also been portrayed in historical fiction. See Dee Alexander Brown, *Killdeer Mountain: A Novel*, (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1983).

¹⁰³ Glanville, 45-46.

¹⁰⁴ James A. Shotwell Letter, 15 January 1898, Dakota Conflict of 1862 Manuscripts Collection, MHS.

¹⁰⁵ *War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, 128 vols. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1880-1902), Ser. 1, vol. 13, 599. Referred to hereafter as “OR.”

tearing unborn babes from their mother's wombs"¹⁰⁶ A story repeated by a Minnesota trooper was even more ghastly. "I will here mention an account of an Indian outrage which I received from a neighbor," he recorded in his diary. A "Mr. Hill" had been shot shortly after leaving his house. His wife, defenseless, was caught by Indians, tied to a tree and tortured. "They then cut her open," he continued, "letting her bowels drop on the ground. They then forced a large pumpkin in their place, drawing the flesh up tight and fastening it there by case knives from the house, in which inhuman shape they left her to die Comment is useless."¹⁰⁷ Similar stories of pseudo-crucifixion and mutilation abounded, some more specific than others. Most, though nothing more than hearsay, would be repeated during the Sioux trials. They helped convict many Indians not involved in the massacre and fueled the hatred of the volunteers against their "inhuman" enemy.

Predictably, soldiers expressed outrage and disgust upon learning that Lincoln intended to pardon a vast majority of the Sioux found guilty of participating in the massacre. "I would not care if the administration would go down," snarled one. "If our frontier settlement can be massacred and then the Government will not punish the perpetrators when they are caught [it] ought not to have the rule of any nation."¹⁰⁸ The furor over the Indians continued even after the execution. Nor was subsequent removal of all Indians from the state, regardless of whether they had actually participated in the uprising, enough to quell the blood-lust of many. "If our Government fails to punish these murderers, it ought to sink into perdition," wrote an Iowan in February 1863 before the first of several punitive expeditions against the Sioux.¹⁰⁹ Vengeance continued to motivate some troops as late as 1864, well after the original perpetrators of the massacre had been killed or driven out of the country. A veteran of the 8th Minnesota, commenting on the disposition of his comrades before the Sioux campaign of that year, believed the event still haunted them. "Every soldier had witnessed scenes to arouse the uttermost bitterness toward those who seemed destitute of any sentiment of humanity, and all were

¹⁰⁶ English, 255-256.

¹⁰⁷ Glanville, 2-3.

¹⁰⁸ James M. Woodbury to "Dear Father," 15 December 1862, James M. Woodbury Papers, Duke U.

¹⁰⁹ Iowa City *Press*, 7 March 1863, quoted in Throne 137.

filled with an insatiable desire for revenge,” he remarked.¹¹⁰ By that point, it no longer mattered if the Sioux that wrathful soldiers hunted were actually guilty of murder. Legal niceties were no longer necessary. They judged Indians guilty simply by virtue of being Indians. “Such was the animosity against the Indians after this massacre,” claimed a cavalryman, “that one of them could not have passed through the state safely even if he had the stars and stripes wound around him.”¹¹¹

The reaction of soldiers to the Minnesota Sioux was in many ways unexceptional. In every quarter of “Indian country” the basic pattern of atrocity, rumor and reprisal repeated itself in an escalating cycle of violence. Though most soldiers did not usually have direct familial connections to the extent of the Minnesotans, they were in a very literal sense still protecting their “homes.” Largely recruited from western territories and states, the soldiers saw in the Minnesota massacre a danger they might rather forget: what happened there could have easily happened to their own families. The Santee uprising was all the more shocking because as reservation Indians they were thought to be more “civilized” than their wild counterparts who still roamed the plains. Its consequences were far-reaching, and cast a pall of suspicion over all Indians. Soldiers saw treachery everywhere. In a common accusation, a Nebraskan insisted that the plains tribes were uniting in a “war of extermination against the whites.”¹¹² Some even believed they received aid and encouragement from Confederate or British agents.¹¹³ Consequently, the “routine” murders of emigrants took on greater significance, raised more alarm, and resulted in more drastic countermeasures than they might have otherwise.

The regulars, many of who came from settled areas in the South or the urbanized east, did not necessarily have a vested interest in permanently ridding the country of Indians. A number of volunteers, however, held long-standing grudges and always took depredations personally. They viewed their own mobilization as an opportunity to

¹¹⁰ Kingsbury, 450.

¹¹¹ John Cumming, ed. *The Autobiography of Theodore Edgar Potter: An American Adventure*. (Berrien Springs, MI: Hardscrabble Books, 1978), 204.

¹¹² English, 251; H.C. Nutt to Samuel J. Kirkwood, 15 September 1862, *OR*, Ser. 1, Vol. 13, 640.

¹¹³ *Iowa City Republican*, 1 October 1862. In a letter to the editor of the *Republican*, a soldier expressed the opinion that the Sioux could not have orchestrated the uprising without assistance: “I feel as hundreds of others, that there is a perception surpassing and superior to that of the untutored Indian, planning their movements.” Quoted in Throne, 127.

completely eliminate the Indian “problem” under the sanction of the national government. “I wish to say,” reported a Californian in 1862, “that I am an advocate for the extermination of the Apaches. They . . . have ever been thieves, highwaymen, and murderers; year out and year in, hundreds have perished upon the roads by their hands . . . some of which murders were most horrible, tying up their victims by the heels, and building slow fires under their heads.” With soldiers working in conjunction with neighboring tribes, he believed the Apache could finally be driven from their Mountain sanctuaries and “rendered harmless.”¹¹⁴ On his tour of the divided nation in 1863, the British observer Sir Arthur Fremantle had opportunity to converse with a group of Texas partisan rangers recently returned from a scouting expedition. “They told me they were usually in the habit of scalping an Indian when they caught him,” he wrote, “and that they never spared one, as they were such an untamable and ferocious race.”¹¹⁵ Rivaling the Minnesotans in their fanatical hatred of all Indians, Texans could be unusually brutal in their attacks. A long history of Comanche depredations on the Texas frontier left many residents convinced of the necessity of extermination. Advocates included Lieutenant Colonel John R. Baylor of the 2nd Texas Mounted Rifles and his brother George Wythe Baylor, who had once listed his occupation as “Indian Killer.”¹¹⁶ As the provisional governor of the newly created Confederate Territory of Arizona, Colonel Baylor adopted extreme measures against the formidable Apache, hoping to curtail their incessant raids. Allegations arose that he killed at least sixty by distributing as gifts poisoned sacks of flour.¹¹⁷ In March 1862 indisputable confirmation of the brutality of his tactics emerged when he issued orders against the Apache that quickly became infamous: “The Congress of the Confederate States has passed a law declaring extermination to all hostile Indians,” he falsely declared to a subordinate. “You will therefore use all means to persuade the Apaches or any tribe to come in for the purpose of making peace, and when you get them together kill all the grown Indians and take the children prisoners and sell them to defray the expense of killing the Indians.” They had, he reminded him, “already murdered over

¹¹⁴ San Francisco *Alta*, 10 August 1862, published in Andrew E. Masich, *The Civil War in Arizona*, 228.

¹¹⁵ Sir Arthur James Lyon Fremantle. *Three Months in the Southern States: April-June, 1863*. (Edinburgh, Scotland: William Blackwood & Son, 1863), 19.

¹¹⁶ George Wythe Baylor, *Into the Far Wild Country: True Tales of the Old Southwest*, Jerry D. Thompson, ed., (University of Texas at El Paso: Texas Western Press, 1996), 9.

¹¹⁷ Ray C. Colton, *The Civil War in the Western Territories: Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico, and Utah*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1959), 122.

100 men in this territory.”¹¹⁸ Soldiers did not have to hail from the West or believe their homes and families under attack to despise Indians, however. The deaths and mutilations of comrades shocked all volunteers, and could turn even the most open-minded into advocates of extermination.

¹¹⁸ *OR*, Ser. 1, vol. 50, pt. 1, 942.

5.4 An Elusive, Illusive Enemy

5.4.1 The Reality of “Battle”

In September 1865 troopers from the 6th West Virginia Cavalry gazed upon Chimney Rock in Nebraska for the first time. Since receiving their orders to head west they had crossed hundreds of miles of plains, spent countless hours in the saddle, and endured scorching heat and torrential rain storms. Amazingly, they reported not a single casualty along the route. The journey had been completed safely, if not effortlessly, and spirits ran high. Lulled into complacency and seeking relief from chronic boredom, several men from Companies H and K strayed from the main column, against orders, and took off in pursuit of a herd of antelope. In the free for all that followed, they seemed to forget the circumstances that brought them west in the first place. They would soon be given a forceful reminder, for their movements had been observed.

As the party neared the Platte – several miles from the rest of the regiment – a sergeant veered from the group in an attempt to cut off the fleeing game. A lone shot rang out. The sergeant, separated from his comrades by a considerable distance, fell from his mount while the antelope continued on their course. Only when a dozen or more warriors sprang from the brush along the river and descended upon the wounded man did it dawn on the hunting party what was occurring. The troopers spurred their horses on to no avail; the distance could not be covered in time. They watched helplessly as the Indians stripped their friend of his weapons and scalp and then fled into the hills. The attack ended as quickly as it began. Shocked, angered and bewildered, the men stared in disbelief at their mutilated companion. After some debate as to their course of action, they left the body covered with a blanket and solemnly returned to their regiment.¹

The men of the Sixth were certainly not the first to make the unpleasant discovery that there was little “glory,” as they defined it, in fighting Native Americans. Unless presented with no alternative, rarely would an entire tribe enter into a pitched battle with an army. Culturally, such tactics went against their preferred mode of warfare. Practically, they understood the disadvantages they faced. Repeating rifles and revolvers

¹ Holliday, 59-60.

(which most tribes, contrary to legend, did not possess in significant numbers), and especially artillery were weapons to be feared. To stand against concentrated firepower was suicidal, and the slaughter that accompanied the few instances when tribes were forced to fight in that manner seemed to prove the assumption. Necessity, therefore, compelled Native Americans to adopt hit and run tactics. In the face of superior numbers and weapons, the asymmetric strategy allowed them to maximize strengths while minimizing weaknesses. They considered it way of survival – and were quite proficient in its use.

Hardly admirers of their proficiency, volunteers damned Native Americans as “cowards,” “thieves,” highwaymen,” and “bloodthirsty barbarians.” Soldiers did not fall in battle, but were “murdered” by treacherous assassins. Unsurprisingly, the Minnesota Sioux received a disproportionate share of the condemnation. “Next to killing a white person, be it male or female, child or adult, the bravest thing an Indian can do is to steal a horse,” insisted a Nebraskan following the massacres, “and in a case where they accomplish both, it is heralded throughout the tribe and the felon is crowned the bravest of the brave.”² That many soldiers also assumed the Santee had planned the uprising well in advance only affirmed their belief in the treacherous nature of the Indian.³ What is surprising, however, is the opinion expressed by those who managed to learn something of Sioux combat prior to the massacres. “The Indian mode of warfare is that of surprise and murder,” wrote one volunteer from Fort Randall less than a month before the uprising. Inquiring about a celebration which lasted nearly two weeks, he discovered that a war party had attacked and killed a group of Pawnee – including women and children – and had returned with thirty scalps. “This is the manner the Braves of the North West fight, and if it was not for the presence of the soldiers, the citizens of Dakota and Nebraska would be without mercy, murdered, their fields laid waste, and their houses

² English, 259.

³ Collins, 6; Musgrove, 165; Cumming, 161-162; *Minnesota in the Civil and Indian Wars, Minnesota in the Civil and Indian Wars*, vol. 1. (Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2005), Narrative of Captain Eugene M. Wilson, First Regiment of Mounted Rangers, 519. Wilson believed that the Sioux “undoubtedly” suffered neglect because of the government’s preoccupation with the Civil War. “But,” he insisted, “this formed no adequate excuse for an outbreak of war, and not the slightest apology for the fiendish outrages that spared neither infancy, age nor sex”

pillaged and given to the flames,” he observed with disturbing prescience. “Treachery and barbarity is the composition of the Indian.”⁴

Given the severity of rebukes before the attacks, even the harshest criticisms in the wake of the slaughter tended to sound superfluous. Hatred of the Indian was not contingent upon his killing of “innocent” whites, though that was certainly an important component. Nor was it his treacherous tactics that ultimately condemned him in the eyes of whites. Rather, it was the belief that those tactics were merely an outgrowth of his fundamentally treacherous character. In short, the Indian did not utilize the element of surprise, capture enemy horses, and kill or capture women and children because those tactics were combat effective. He did so because he was an inherent criminal and “felon:” a “sneaky” and “cowardly” horse-thieving “baby-killer.”

Soldiers everywhere expressed chagrin at the realization of what they were up against. Though they desired to punish Native Americans for their depredations, they first had to find and engage them in battle, a feat that sometimes seemed impossible. Large columns of uniformed men moving through open country presented a conspicuous sight, and warriors did not find it especially difficult to track their opponents. At times, soldiers might glimpse groups of them on cliffs or in the distance, observing their movements. They would just as quickly disappear. “An Indian’s courage oozes out when he is seen,” proclaimed an Iowa volunteer, “and he must get out of sight.”⁵ An officer in the U.S. Volunteers concurred. “The Indian as a rule is never seen when it is for his interest not to be.”⁶ This meant, of course, that the Indian would appear when it was in his best interest, usually as part of a small raiding party that quickly descended on an unsuspecting target. A Colorado volunteer noted with disgust the success of a Navajo raiding party which made off with several mules from his command. “No pursuit was made,” he recorded, “it being the climax of heroism with the Indians to sneak up behind a rock and kill a man without exposing themselves.”⁷

More than anything, soldiers wished to avoid being pulled into a guerrilla war. They yearned to find an Indian village and to be able to attack warriors on the white

⁴ Iowa City *Republican*, 6 August 1862, quoted in Throne, 126.

⁵ Judd, 42.

⁶ Musgrove, 193.

⁷ Hollister, 196.

man's terms. Encumbered by their women and children, they would not be able to run. Rarely were they blessed with such an advantage, and typically arrived on scene well after a tribe had moved on. When they did happen to surround an entire village, it was more often than not accomplished by complete accident. The armies tended to stumble into rather than plan pitched battles. Even then, soldiers were bound to be frustrated in the outcome, as was a Minnesota trooper at Killdeer Mountain in 1864: "The mode of their fighting was so very different from what I expected that I was very much disappointed," he wrote. [T]hey would ride up at full speed pretty near to our troops, fire a volley and run back, we kept following them up fighting them all of the time they scattered all around and we could soon see them all around us in every direction, but they kept at so great a distance the most of them that it was impossible for our troops to reach them with our guns except with shell from our cannon."⁸ The confusion of this soldier's letter is indicative of the confusion of the entire conflict. The volunteers sought a decisive, cathartic battle and the chance to prove their mettle. Instead of the climactic and "gallant" charge, however, they encountered the "bandit-like" tactics of the Native American. It was more than many had signed on for, and the reality of the Indian wars could leave the most dedicated volunteer overwhelmed with dismay and discouragement. A soldier in the 6th Minnesota clearly had had his fill by the conclusion of the 1863 Sioux campaign. "All, I think, are sick of Indians and Indian war," he exclaimed, "sick of a foe, who is as treacherous and cowardly as he is wild, and only brave, when . . . he can steal upon his victim with serpent-like stealth, and glory over him thus fiendishly slain."⁹ A similar complaint made by an Ohio cavalryman is at turns both pitiable and laughable. "The boys out here have all come to the conclusion that fighting indians is not what it is cracked up to be, especially when it is fighting on the open prairie against five to one, we always have to fight at such a disadvantage, we always have to shoot at them running[.]" The problem with the Indians, he thought, could be explained easily enough: "They wont stand and let a fellow shoot at them like a white man."¹⁰

⁸ John E. Robinson to "Dear Libbie," 11 October 1864, Dakota Conflict of 1862 Manuscripts Collection, MHS.

⁹ Daniels, 49.

¹⁰ Unrau, 267.

5.4.2 Indian Fighting

Short of finding a tribe willing to line up in front of a regiment to be gunned down, a successful army would have to adapt to Indian fighting. This entailed the greater use of smaller patrols or “scouts” in lieu of large, unwieldy forces. Usually mounted, but sometimes on foot, the scout might spend several weeks away from base, hoping to “chastise” groups or bands of Indians sought after for any number of depredations. Even when accompanied by Indian allies, however, the volunteers faced serious military handicaps. Chronic supply problems, food shortages, disease, and uniforms ill-adapted for western climates plagued them. Woe to the unfortunate volunteer on foot patrol, whose shoddy government brogans consistently failed to meet the most basic requirement: not falling apart during a campaign. As a disgruntled colonel of Oregon cavalry discovered in the summer of 1864, substandard footwear could end a military operation before it began. Most of the Oregon infantrymen sent to accompany his troopers were barefoot, having worn out two pairs of shoes each over the course of three weeks. Cavalry, too, posed problems. Thought to be indispensable for Indian fighting, its advantage of speed was offset by the logistics of caring for the giant, grain-fed “American” horses. Though troopers could live off the land, their mounts could not. Unlike Indian ponies, which the military rarely utilized, they required enormous amounts of forage which usually had to be shipped from eastern suppliers. Patrols lasting more than a day or so required that it be carried along with the column in bulky wagon trains. Even then, horses too frequently broke down. Men noticed that the longer the campaign, the less useful their horses became: after a week on the trail, troopers could often outdistance their mounts.¹¹

Though a smaller force increased mobility, it effectively neutralized the military’s primary advantage in numbers. The difficulties of operating with reduced numbers were compounded by the terrain. Native Americans were familiar with it; soldiers generally were not. The volunteers, then, had to contend with a catch-22. To effectively ferret out their enemy, they had to mimic their tactics. By doing so, they engaged in a contest at

¹¹ *OR*, Ser. 1, Vol. 50, pt. 1, 384; Utley, *Frontiersmen in Blue*, 1-9, 20-21, 52-53, 108-112. In the 1850s, Secretary of War Jefferson Davis, a former regular officer, advocated the use of camels in the Southwest. Thinking them more adapted to the extreme environment, the government purchased seventy-four of the animals, but the Civil War prevented further experiments.

which their opponent was much more adept. Finally, soldiers had to contend with the elusiveness of their foe, which went beyond simply using the terrain to fade into the countryside after an attack. The Indian wars could be incredibly ambiguous. Native Americans accused of a crime might seek asylum with a neighboring band. Chiefs, to the frustration of many commanders, could not always control all members of the tribe. The Navajo, for instance, were held accountable for the activities of the “ladrones,” a group of younger warriors who continued to carry out depredations despite constant rebukes from tribal elders. Authorities similarly blamed all Cheyenne for the actions of dissident “Dog Soldiers” who refused to make peace with the whites. The inability or unwillingness of soldiers to discriminate between “hostile” and “friendly” worked against peaceful resolutions. In their frustration, they might attack a peaceful band or tribe; mostly by accident, sometimes intentionally. The end result was the same: a widening of the conflict that might have been avoided.

The difficulties entailed in campaigning against Native Americans were no secret to the regulars. For most of the nineteenth century, the army existed solely for the purpose of frontier protection. Despite this obvious reality, however, West Point instruction did not include comprehensive study of Indian tactics. Before the Civil War, the curriculum stressed European military theory and Napoleonic strategy: perfect for a conventional war but of little use in countering guerrillas. Officers as well as their men, therefore, were forced to learn their occupation on the job. During their tenure they struggled, and mostly failed, to effectively subdue their enemy.¹² Worse, when the regulars went east, no cadre of professional and experienced officers remained behind in an advisory role. The military did not intersperse qualified veterans throughout the new regiments. As a result, the despairingly few revelations garnered by regulars through decades of brutal trial and error went largely unreported to the volunteers who replaced them. Abandoned on the frontier without guidance they could not learn from the mistakes of their predecessors, but only repeat them.

Whether part of a larger expedition or a small scouting force, rarely did soldiers have the opportunity to engage Indians in a meaningful battle. In August 1865 Indian

¹² Coffman, *The Old Army*, 76-78.

auxiliaries attached to Conner's expedition against the Sioux warned soldiers to corral the force's mules; they expected an attack by a raiding party. The men frantically gathered the livestock and waited, peering into the darkness for an assault that never materialized. "I didnt see no Sues," reported a trooper in the Sixth Michigan afterwards.¹³ Warriors did, however, make their presence known. They "lurked" or "prowled" around a camp at night, capturing unguarded livestock and mutilating oblivious sentries. "The Indians are constantly prowling around trying to steal our horses and kill stragglng men," reported an Iowan during the 1864 Sioux campaigns. "There have been six or eight [soldiers] killed this spring. Thus far we have been unable to catch the murderers."¹⁴ An officer in the 1st Oregon Cavalry, determined to protect his command, ordered his men to clear away the brush from around their camp and posted pickets in the surrounding hills, to no avail. "There seems to be an impossibility of finding out where these devils conceal themselves," he wrote with exasperation, "as no signs or trails can be found anywhere in the surrounding country."¹⁵

Occasionally, a quick-reacting and ambitious squad of men might pursue a band of would-be attackers, but as the raids normally occurred at night most considered it unwise to wander very far outside of camp. A chase could be a harrowing experience. Seldom was the undertaking worth the risks, and quite often a sense of relief pervaded the group when they failed to overtake the enemy. A party of Texas rangers, in pursuit of Comanche raiders, warily approached old Fort Terrett in the western part of the state. The fort was supposed to be deserted, but a cloud of smoke emanating from the structure suggested otherwise. With hearts pounding, they readied their weapons and cautiously advanced. This was to be their first encounter with the "pest of the frontier," according to one, and the men were overcome with fear. Gone was the brave campfire talk, replaced by lethal silence and images of fierce warriors with scalping knives glistening in the sun. "It is hard to describe the feelings of a person when about to encounter an unseen foe," he explained, "and especially one of the most cruel and inhumane enemies that our race is troubled with[.]" As they entered the fort, they realized they were alone. The Indians had gone, but not before setting fire to several buildings. "We all feel greatly relieved

¹³ Geyer, 102.

¹⁴ Scott, 7.

¹⁵ Knuth, 40.

when we find no Indians,” he admitted, “and each man must tell how well HE was prepared for the Red-skins, and what HE would have done had they been there.”¹⁶

The anxiety of the rangers was typical. As their time on the frontier dragged on interminably, however, soldiers’ fear of the “unseen foe” increasingly turned to disappointment and frustration. The Indians picked them off by ones and twos, raided their camps, stole their supplies and animals, and yet the volunteers could make no measurable gains against them. Their tactical scouts seemed inept and useless. A Californian’s thoughts on the standard military offensive are worth quoting at length. Under the heading of “Scouting,” he offered a biting treatise on the follies of the practice.

At this season of the year, carrying one blanket, your overcoat, half a shelter tent, your gun accoutrements and 210 rounds of ammunition, is not very desirable pastime, especially when you are out seventeen days without finding an Indian. If Jomini could peruse a detailed account of our expedition, he would, no doubt, see fit to change his definition of military terms considerably. Thus the term Scouting (in an Indian country, at least) as our experience proves, is to start out and travel 8 or 10 miles a day, camping about noon and keeping good fires burning all night so as to warn all Indians of your whereabouts. In the morning a large fire should be built so as to make smoke so that the enemy can see it and flee your approach. It is also well to take the precaution a few days before leaving the garrison to post all guides and interpreters so that they can easily go out into the mountains and intimate the coming danger to their savage brother. Thus you will easily avoid coming into collision with the noble red man. An appropriate report to send to Headquarters would be something like this:

Deserted Rancheria,
December 1865

General:

We are at the camp of the enemy and they are ours (hours ahead of us).¹⁷

Cut off from “civilization,” engulfed by a “barren” land and surrounded by a “hostile” people, soldiers felt besieged and were constantly on edge. Officers warned their men to never turn their backs on a live Indian, and examples of what happened to

¹⁶ Wiley, *Diary of William Williston Heartsill*, 36-37.

¹⁷ Bushnell Diary, 11 December 1865.

those who ignored the advice or let down their guard were common enough.¹⁸ An altercation that left two Minnesota cavalymen wounded could easily have been avoided, according to one soldier, had the men shown better judgment. While on patrol in July of 1863, troopers stumbled across two sleeping Sioux warriors and made a foolish decision. “They felt so shure of captureing them,” he reported, “that instead of killing them as they ought to have done they waked them up and the indians fired at them and wounded two of them[.]” They eventually managed to kill and scalp both warriors, thereby earning fifty dollars from the state (Minnesota offered a bounty of twenty-five dollars per scalp).¹⁹ Others were not so fortunate. Men from the Eighth Minnesota raised the alarm when two of their pickets failed to report. A search party later discovered both men brutally slain, one of them shot through with eleven arrows.²⁰ When a popular captain in the 6th Michigan met a similar fate, the men of his command were outraged. He had performed admirably during three years of service in the Civil War, and his death on the Plains seemed an obscene waste. “It was sad indeed,” wrote one, “to think that after escaping from the many battles in which this brave soldier had been engaged . . . he should finally meet his death at the hands of these miserable, skulking, cowardly Indians.”²¹

As with the Sioux uprisings, atrocities not witnessed by soldiers were always worse than those that actually occurred. Stories of Indian cruelty spread quickly through the ranks. Their devilish ingenuity knew no bounds. An Ohio trooper, absent from a fight at Julesburg, Colorado in January 1865, still confidently explained the fate of a captured dispatch courier in a letter to his family. “The Indians scalped him, then bored through his skull, filled it with powder, and blew him to pieces,” he matter-of-factly reported.²² Some recognized such reports for the mere atrocity propaganda they clearly were, but most took them at face value. The operations of the rumor mill fascinated one Iowan, who commented on its machinations. While on patrol, he recognized that his command had absolutely no contact with the outside world. “There was no news in camp

¹⁸ *Minnesota in the Civil and Indian Wars*, vol. 1. (Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2005), Colonel M.J. Thomas quoted in the narrative of William H. Houlton, Eighth Minnesota Volunteers, 392.

¹⁹ James M. Woodbury to “Dear Brother Frank,” 31 July 1863, James M. Woodbury Papers, Duke U.

²⁰ Kingsbury, 455.

²¹ Albert M. Holman’s *Reminiscent Account of the Sawyers Expedition in Hafen*, 320-321.

²² Unrau, 210.

except what sprung up in some one's imagination and told to see what effect it would have," he noted. "And it is strange that some of these improbable yarns were fully believed, the listener not taking time to reflect that the narrator had no opportunity of hearing such news."²³

Assisted by rumors and conjecture, the Indian attained the status of frontier bogeyman, at once everywhere and nowhere. As a Texan passed the site on the Nueces River where just weeks prior Indians had killed two trappers, he reflected on their fate. Both had been scalped, their hearts cut from their chests. "Just for one moment in your imagination picture this tragic scene," he recorded in his diary. "It would have been merciful had they been slain instantly, but from the nature of the Savage we know that . . . they appease their Hellish appetites by the cry of anguish forced from the suffering and dying" The thought of their torture was too much. The Texan went fishing to clear his mind.²⁴ Even those sympathetic to the Indian were susceptible to the image. A young soldier in the 25th Wisconsin, ridiculed by comrades for his belief that the Santee had been wronged by the government, still felt uneasy about venturing out at night despite the fact his regiment was miles from the hostilities in Minnesota. "In the woods . . . where the moon shone in spots under the pine trees I thought I saw figures of Indians," he wrote to his mother, "but I would brace up and walk right up to them and I always found them stumps or trees. I can't say I was really afraid, but I was miles away in an Indian country and sometimes my heart would pump a little hard."²⁵

It is difficult to surmise what demons other men thought they saw in the darkness, but nervous soldiers would take no chances. If an important aspect of the study of Indian-Anglo relations rests on defining "in-groups" versus "out-groups," no better example of the phenomenon exists than that of the insulated camp separated from outside dangers by the picket line. Soldiers considered the camp an oasis of civilization in the middle of a savage desert, and protected its integrity at all costs. A virtual free-fire zone surrounded it; everything beyond was assumed hostile. Pickets fired first and asked questions later, if at all. At night they focused on the slightest disturbance and paid heed to the disposition of their horses. Were they skittish? What had they detected that their

²³ Drips, 33.

²⁴ Wiley, *Diary of William Williston Heartsill*, 17.

²⁵ Cooke, 16.

masters had not? Was that object barely visible in the twilight moving? Was it a bear? A wolf? Or a treacherous savage in disguise ready to pounce and slit the first throat he could reach? They knew what had happened to their less vigilant comrades. Some had seen the mangled bodies, and all had heard the unsettling rumors. They would not share that fate. “Alarms became common,” wrote one Californian of the march to New Mexico. One night, “three of the pickets saw an object which they took to be an Indian, and fired upon it. The bugles sounded to arms, and the men crawled to their posts” In the morning sun, inquisitive soldiers discovered the bullet-riddled carcass of a wolf.²⁶ Usually, they found nothing. At times picket firing went beyond an isolated sentry and could rouse an entire camp, as happened with Sully’s men after the battle at Whitestone Hill. “Pickets firing every now & then,” recorded a Nebraskan, “at some dog or imaginary object & also in camp, accidental shots from men being excited & alarmed, no damage done only two or three horses killed, but it might have been men”²⁷ On another occasion a cacophony of howling wolves resulted in chaos. “A picket gun was fired,” recounted an officer, “and then another, and the men seized their arms, and, because they were awakened, damned everything. . . .The men thought they had seen something and fired. To reassure them was impossible; the firing was kept up all night long, and only the warm sunshine of the morning dispelled the delusions of the night.”²⁸

Soldiers shot at nothing and everything. They killed wolves, coyotes, buffalo, stray livestock, and sometimes their own men. Pickets frequently fired on returning cavalry patrols. Irritated commanders, hoping to curb the problem, issued “private” instructions to their troopers to fire back.²⁹ False alarms, besides keeping men in constant anxiety, also left them chronically sleep deprived. “We had strict orders to lie on our weapons out in our intrenchments,” wrote one soldier after an alarm had been sounded. “No one could permit himself the luxury of sleep. Ah, how good it would have felt to have had a bit of sleep!”³⁰ Sleep, however, did not always offer a refuge from terror, as one rattled Colorado trooper discovered. Ordered to shoot anything that

²⁶ San Francisco *Alta*, 10 August 1862, published in Andrew E. Masich, 227.

²⁷ Rowen, *Diary of Henry W. Pierce*, 48.

²⁸ *Minnesota in the Civil and Indian Wars*, vol. 1. (Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2005), Colonel M.J. Thomas quoted in the narrative of William H. Houlton, Eighth Minnesota Volunteers, 391.

²⁹ *Minnesota in the Civil and Indian Wars*, vol. 1. (Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2005), Narrative of Captain Eugene M. Wilson, First Regiment of Mounted Rangers, 520-521; Pattee, 310.

³⁰ Ole Paulson Reminiscence, Dakota Conflict of 1862 Manuscripts Collection, MHS.

approached unless it was walking upright (which signaled a white man) he stared intently into the darkness, fighting off a weariness that went to the bone. He closed his eyes for a moment – only a moment – and when he opened them again, saw an Indian not ten feet in front of him, squatting. He silently readied his weapon and prepared to fire, but the interloper was no more than a comrade who had crawled out to the bushes to relieve himself. He had almost shot one of his friends. “After the above incident I was in no condition to stand guard,” he recounted. “Every bunch of grease wood, or sagebrush, was an Indian. I could distinguish their voices as they conveyed signals amid the howling of wolves, which had had no effect on me before. In fact, I was under the influence of *fear – abject fear . . .*” He left his shift early and went to bed, but sleep did not come easy. “i started up every little while, as my imagination conjured up some horrible sight in my dreams.”³¹

His experience was not unique. Unsurprisingly, the perpetual strain of Indian warfare manifested itself in the form of recurrent nightmares with a common theme: the Indians were coming. It was not unusual for soldiers to be awakened by screaming comrades cornered by phantom savages. A company of Iowans, roused from sleep by a disturbance among their horses, enjoyed a “good hearty laugh” when they discovered the cause. “One of the boys in L Company got to dreaming,” explained one. “He fancied the Indians were after him sure, and got on his hands and feet, boo-hoo-ing and crying.”³² Incidents such as these, though rarely given much thought, reflected considerable mental strain and sometimes turned violent. Stationed at a blockhouse twenty-five miles northwest of Fort Laramie, members of the 6th West Virginia Cavalry and 3rd U.S. Infantry learned just how seriously the Indian wars could affect participants. Camped outside, the men awakened to rifle shots and cries of “Indians.” No attack was forthcoming, but the reality was little better. An infantryman delirious with typhoid had grabbed a repeating rifle and locked himself in the blockhouse. “In his wild ravings he imagined that everything and everybody around him were hostile Indians,” reported one.

³¹ Paul A. Malkoski, ed. *This Soldier Life: The Diaries of Romine H. Ostrander, 1863 and 1865, in Colorado Territory*. (Denver: Colorado Historical Society, 2006), 1-2.

³² Drips, 76.

For hours, he screamed for help and sporadically fired out the windows. Only when he finally ran out of ammunition could the others subdue him.³³

In July 1863 the *Robert Campbell Jr.* was steaming its way down the Missouri River toward Fort Randall in Dakota. A large band of Indians had been trailing the boat for three days when the captain decided to send a delegation ashore to treat with them. Despite misgivings from the crew and soldiers on board, they watched as six volunteers in a yawl slipped away from the steamer and crossed the river. The Indians greeted them warmly as they approached, and several of them even stepped into the boat and shook hands with the occupants when it reached shore. All seemed well. The surprise must have been total when one of the warriors drew a knife and jammed it into the gut of a passenger. On cue, the rest of the Indians attacked, killing three and wounding two others. Dozens of soldiers on the steamer fired on the band as the sole survivor of the massacre frantically rowed to safety. A score of Indians “bit the dust” in the ensuing enfilade, claimed one commentator, and the rest fled out of sight.³⁴ Though many viewed the attack as just another instance of Indian treachery, there was more to the story. It was later determined that those who assailed the landing party were Yanktonai Sioux, “the most loyal and friendly Indians that could be found in the entire country,” according to an Iowa officer.³⁵ What had driven them to their actions?

In the spring and summer of 1863, preparations for the impending punitive campaigns against the Sioux resulted in a surge of troop levels throughout Minnesota and Dakota. Fort Randall bustled with new recruits. Among them were the men of the 6th Iowa Cavalry, who quickly gained reputations for unruliness and provocatively harsh treatment of Indians.³⁶ The behavior was encouraged by their commander, Lieutenant

³³ Holliday, 67.

³⁴ Iowa City *Republican*, 26 August 1863, quoted in Throne, 163; Rowen, *Diary of Henry W. Pierce*, 33-34.

³⁵ Pattee, 293.

³⁶ Throne, Henry Wieneke to wife, 17 June 1863, 156. A member of the 7th Iowa Cavalry, Wieneke expressed doubt concerning the character of the men from the Sixth. “Yesterday one of the men set fire to the Prarie above the Fort, and in half an hour time all the grass on the Bluffs for Two miles above and below us were blazing thus destroying what little feed there was for the [horses] around here and all done out of wanton meanness They are the meanest set of men take them all together that I ever set my Eyes on some few of them are good but the greater part of them are secessionists an jaolbirds – if the whole Reg’t are like the 2nd Batallion I would not give any thing for the fighting they will do, but I hope they are the poor end of the Regt and the rest are better.”

Colonel Samuel Pollock, whose fanatical hatred of all Native Americans blinded him to the differences between hostile and friendly bands. He later testified that in determining whether or not an Indian was hostile he followed “one infallible rule”: examine his liver. Upon arrival at Randall, he alienated most of the friendly Yanktonai that regularly visited the fort to trade. An assembly of chiefs, expecting to receive a traditional feast from the new commander, instead received an unwelcome surprise. Pollock gruffly ordered them to leave within five minutes; if they and their people refused they would be shot. Their access to the fort was permanently revoked.³⁷ His demeanor affected the men of his command, and if not the source of their hatred certainly enabled it. “I understand that Col. Pollock’s motto is, to take no prisoners,” reported a volunteer in the 7th Iowa, “and I believe that it is well imbued into the spirit of his whole Battalion.”³⁸ On June 9, when Indians stopped a steamer near Fort La Framboise and demanded gifts, a bloody confrontation between Iowans and Sioux was narrowly avoided. The commander of the 7th Iowa Cavalry urged the captain to accede to their demands, thereby diffusing the situation. In response, men from the Sixth damned him for cowardice. “It would be superfluous to say that the boys of the Second Battalion . . . begged for the opportunity of turning the ‘bull dogs’ on them,” recalled a trooper. “[We] were anxious for the fray.”³⁹

Given their attitude, it seemed only a matter of time before blood would be shed. On June 13 a trooper searching for a lost horse north of Fort Randall reported that he had been fired on by several Indians. Though he later claimed he could not be sure if the shots had been directed at him or nearby antelope, the incident set off a chain of events that resulted in atrocity. In response to the “attack,” Colonel Pollock dispatched a squad of troopers to apprehend the perpetrators. The small party under Captain Abraham Moreland rode out in the direction of the Yanktonai agency. In their approach, they surprised a group of eight Indians – six men and two boys – and promptly took them prisoner. Moreland then ordered the better part of his command to continue the search for the lost horse while he and two sergeants remained behind to guard the captives. The captain could not have known for certain if the Yanktonais in their custody were responsible for the shooting, but it was a trifling point. They were Indians. They were

³⁷ Scott, 5-6.

³⁸ Iowa City *Republican*, 24 June 1863, quoted in Throne, 157.

³⁹ Drips, 26.

Sioux. They were horse thieves, rapists and baby-killers. Guilt was assumed. Punishment would be swift. That their band had been on good terms with the whites made little difference.

Accounts of what happened next vary, but the evidence points to one conclusion: as the troopers marched the prisoners toward the fort, Moreland ordered his men to execute them. They gunned down all eight in cold blood – shot while trying to “escape.” A Dakota trooper reported with evident satisfaction that “seven good Indians – the entire party – were left for food for the coyotes.”⁴⁰

Not all had been killed, however. One of the boys, wounded, managed to crawl into the bushes and escape. He ran to nearby Fort Pierre, where the same 7th Iowa officer who had staved off an earlier conflict between the Sixth and Sioux listened to his story with apprehension. Over 2,000 warriors resided at the Yanktonai agency. If aroused, they would gladly satiate the Iowans’ hunger for battle. Hoping to prevent a bloodbath, he went unarmed to the agency and with the help of an interpreter promised to make arrangements for restitution to the families of those killed. “This I thought was the only way to avoid trouble,” he recalled.⁴¹ Few were as conscientious or sympathetic. “they all have relations here [outside of Fort Randall],” wrote one annoyed trooper of the Indians killed, “and these have commenced howling and crying allready”⁴²

Predictably, no satisfactory restitution was offered, nor was it likely that anything short of blood could have consoled the Yanktonai. In response to the murder of their tribesmen, they attacked the *Robert Campbell Jr.* – and were branded “treacherous” for their efforts.

⁴⁰ English, 265; Drips, 33; Pattee 293-294; Scott 7. A.M. English of the 1st Dakota claimed the Indians had been killed during a “gallant” charge on their encampment by the Iowa troopers. Sergeant J.H. Drips of the 6th Iowa offered yet another version of the story: “Capt. Moreland with Company G went out to Ponca creek and found some seven or eight Indians. He took them prisoners, put a guard over them and went on with the rest of the company to hunt up some more. While they were gone, the soldiers said the prisoners attempted to escape and the soldiers fired on them, killing all but one, and he was so badly wounded that he died shortly afterwards. The Indians after they found they were betrayed fought like tigers, but superior numbers soon trod them down.” The account of John Pattee from the 7th Iowa was probably closer to the truth. “Lieutenant-Colonel Pollock, after reaching Fort Randall, instructed his officers to treat all Indians above that place as hostile. Soon after some horses were allowed to get away and Captain Moorland, with a small party of men started out to hunt them up and while out on Ponca Creek found a small camp of Indians an by signs ordered them to go towards the fort and with eight of these Indians marching in front after they got well away from the Indian camp, shot seven of them without any warning and one ran away.”

⁴¹ Pattee, 293-295.

⁴² Throne, Henry Wieneke Diary, 158.

It is tempting to dismiss the Yanktonai murders as nothing more than an isolated episode perpetrated by organized thugs in blue uniforms. The killings, however, represented a typical incident that just happened to be carried out by unsavory characters. They demonstrated a propensity among volunteers to assume the hostility of all Native Americans. The ramifications of that assumption, exacerbated by the violence-charged atmosphere of the Civil War, were great. As increasing numbers of emigrants encroached on Native lands, in many cases destroying food sources and leaving the inhabitants destitute, a flood of volunteers inundated with racist suppositions and stories of Indian atrocities forcefully responded to the inevitable reprisals. Rarely did they bother to contemplate the reasons behind Indian attacks. Such ruminations were as pointless as questioning why the vicious wolf mangled defenseless sheep. It was simply the nature of the beast. The popular phrase, “nits make lice,” a veiled reference to the acceptability of killing Native American children as a preventative measure against future depredations, exemplified that kind of thinking.⁴³ It encouraged a reckless policy of indiscriminate warfare based on the notion that if Indians had not yet acted in an overtly hostile manner, it was only a matter of time before they did so. Consequently, if soldiers mistakenly attacked an innocent Indian they might easily be excused, for no Indian was truly “innocent.”

The mistrust, confusion and ambivalence that marked Indian-Anglo relations could lead to regrettable altercations, ones which Indian scouts who worked closely with whites understood well. The Pawnee auxiliaries riding with Sully’s men in 1864 changed into Federal uniforms before every battle. Despite distinct physical differences between Sioux and Pawnee, they still feared they would be accidentally shot by soldiers once a battle commenced.⁴⁴ Some volunteers tried to warn friendly tribes of the impending dangers. “Met a large party of Crows who seem to be friendly,” reported one, “but we never allow but a few in or around our camp. We tell them at night we can not tell them

⁴³ This rather self-explanatory maxim has been attributed to both Patrick Connor and John Chivington before the massacres at Bear River and Sand Creek, respectively. Though bandied about by American Indian fighters for decades, it dates from at least 1675 and was first used by the British during their colonization of Ireland. See Katie Kane, “Nits Make Lice: Drogheda, Sand Creek, and the Poetics of Colonial Extermination,” *Cultural Critique*, No. 42 (Spring 1999), 81-103

⁴⁴ Myers, 14.

from Sioux or Blackfeet and we shoot them on sight.”⁴⁵ Ohio troopers were less trusting when a group of Indians bearing a white flag approached their fort at Platt Bridge, Dakota Territory in June 1865. The garrison motioned at them to stay away but the Indians, pointing to their peaceful banner, tried in vain to have it acknowledged. “The boys ‘couldn’t see it’ in the same light the indians did,” wrote one, “and fired on the party, dismounting three of them, They were picked up by their comrades, but instead of returning the fire the whole party moved off to the mountains . . .” The soldiers feared the white flag was simply a ruse to gain admittance to the fort and, once inside, “pounce upon and butcher the garrison at leisure.” In true witch-trial form, the men afterwards determined that the peaceful overtures of the unidentified Indians must have been sincere. They had not fired back when fired upon.⁴⁶ The consequences of the mindset are also evident in the actions of volunteers who, like those of the 6th Iowa, lashed out blindly in response to real or imagined attacks. Avenging the death of one of their officers, a squad of troopers from the 11th Ohio attacked a band of Sioux in their vicinity thought responsible for the deed. They returned triumphantly to camp, bearing the scalp of one of the slain perpetrators. A visit from an Indian agent afterwards revealed the counterproductive effects of their rage. “[He] says it was a friendly Sioux that Co. B killed,” reported one soldier. “Indians talking of revenge.”⁴⁷

Soldiers hunted Indians as they hunted wild game: recklessly and with little forethought. They paid a price for their rashness. Even if done by mistake, the killing of Indians did not occur in a vacuum, and could fan the flames of a localized conflict into a raging inferno of war. Like the fires that regularly engulfed the prairie, it took only a spark to set them off. In the first of the punitive campaigns against the Sioux, the armies failed to bring to bear any of the Mdewakantons involved in the 1862 massacres. They did, however, manage to attack peaceful bands of Sissetons and Wahpetons, thereby igniting a war that spanned the plains. No matter. The volunteers had set out to punish the Sioux, and one band was as good as the next. A drunkard captain’s audacious actions against the Shoshoni, which included the indiscriminate murder of a number of Indians in retaliation for depredations of which they were innocent, only increased that tribe’s

⁴⁵ Judd, 21.

⁴⁶ Unrau, 255.

⁴⁷ Hull, 17.

attacks on the Overland Trail in a fit of violent reprisals. The heavy-handed tactics of Colorado troops in 1863 and 1864 similarly resulted in an expansion of violence on the Plains.

Many of these incidents were genuine mistakes. They resulted from campaign related stress and fatigue, ignorance, incompetence or a combination of all. Less frequently, soldiers deliberately attacked Indians for depredations they knew they had not committed. In every case, however, they demonstrated a disturbing ability to shrug off any remorse they felt for their actions, even when they inadvertently targeted the wrong Indians: they were, after all, only Indians. “There was no confidence to be placed in any of these Indians,” wrote an Iowa officer in defense of the massacre at Sand Creek. “They were a bad lot, they all needed killing”⁴⁸ Sent to the frontier to curb Indian depredations and protect emigrants, volunteers more often exacerbated the former and therefore could not effectively accomplish the latter. As they ranged from fort to fort, always one step behind their foe, they left behind a trail marked by broken alliances, missed opportunities and an ever-expanding number of alienated Native Americans.

5.4.3 Retaliation

If the Sioux massacre evoked images of women impaled to trees and barn doors, probably the most memorable image of the Dakota Conflict was that of the heads of three Santee warriors, impaled on pikes and a set atop a hill on the prairie in the spring of 1864. General Sully, in retaliation for the murder of his topographical officer, had ordered them so placed as a warning to other Indians. The scene impressed itself on the soldiers who witnessed it. “It was curious to note the effect of this melancholy incident on the men of the command,” observed one officer. “On every face appeared a sort of grim earnestness and every man seemed to have tightened up his belt.”⁴⁹ The event announced the nature of the coming campaign: if the Sioux and their allies insisted on behaving like bandits and outlaws, they would be treated as such. No quarter would be offered. No prisoners would be taken.

⁴⁸ Ware, 308.

⁴⁹ Pattee, 304.

The Union had adopted a similar policy against guerrillas, eventually codified in April 1863 as part of General Orders No. 100. Also known as the “Lieber Code,” the regulations spelled out how civilized nations should conduct themselves in war. With few exceptions, “legitimate” combatants were to be marked by distinctive uniforms that signified their connection to an officially recognized belligerent. All men out of uniform and therefore not identified as legitimate combatants who engaged in hostile acts against the government were liable to summary punishment as “highway robbers” and “pirates.” In short, they faced execution.⁵⁰ Lest one carry the comparison between guerrillas and Indians too far, however, an important distinction must be noted. The Federal government, by de facto recognition of the Confederacy, gave southern men a legitimate means of resistance. They could don the gray uniform and be accorded the rights entitled to prisoners of war. Native Americans, even though the government recognized them as members of separate non-state societies (officially known as “domestic dependent nations”) and did not consider them citizens of the United States, never received the same guarantees. Any Indian caught in arms against the government, regardless if he was “legitimately” identified as a warrior, was considered an insurrectionist, as were any noncombatants that might support him. Any form of resistance, then, was looked upon as illegal. Though Union and Confederate soldiers did not kill every Native American they captured, labeling them as criminals, outlaws, and felons made harsher treatment easier to condone and atrocities easier to excuse.⁵¹

The Lieber Code made little difference to the volunteers. Even had Native Americans been granted belligerent rights, it is doubtful soldiers would have honored them. They did not need the guidance of their governments or general officers to show them how to fight their war. Indeed, they had been following their own “code” since

⁵⁰ Francis Lieber authored the regulations at the request of the Lincoln administration. Section 4, Article 82 reads, “Men or squads of men who commit hostilities, whether by fighting or inroads for destruction or plunder or by raids of any kind without commission without being part and portion of the organized hostile army and without sharing continuously in the war, but who do so with intermitting returns to their homes and avocations or with the occasional assumption of the semblance of peaceful pursuits, divesting themselves of the character or appearance of soldiers – such men or squads of men are not public enemies and therefore if captured are not entitled to the privileges of prisoners of war, but shall be treated summarily as highway robbers or pirates.” *OR*, Ser. 2, Vol 5, 671-682.

⁵¹ The comparative treatment of Indians in the post-war conflicts and Civil War guerrillas has received some attention. See Mark Grimsley’s “‘Rebels’ and ‘Redskins’: U.S. Military Conduct toward White Southerners and Native Americans in Comparative Perspective,” in *Civilians in the Path of War*, Mark Grimsley and Clifford J. Rogers, eds. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), 137-161.

their initial encounters with Native Americans. As their frustrations mounted, they gave less and less consideration to the rights of their opponents. Some finally came to the conclusion that Indians had no rights at all – including the right to exist. There was only one method of dealing with “blood thirsty red devils,” “fiend incarnates,” and “imps of hell”: they had to be exorcised from the nation. Support of the ultimate solution to the “Indian question” came from soldiers in every corner of the frontier. “If the President and the country want us to exterminate the whole Dacotah Nation all they have to do is to try and keep them in our state,” wrote a surgeon in the 10th Minnesota.⁵² From Arizona came this call from a Californian: “It is useless to make treaties with the Apache, for they will violate them as soon as they have an opportunityUntil they are collected and placed under the guns of a fort, or totally annihilated – which they deserve to be – they will be nothing but a murderous band of robbers, a terror to the traveler and settler.”⁵³ And from an Ohio trooper in western Dakota, this suggestion: “[The Indians] can hardly ever be found when there are men in pursuit of them. . . .The only way to ‘cure them out’ will be to send out here about fifteen thousand men, to go into their villages, and plunder burn and kill, without regard to age or sex. *They* make no distinction in their depredations and that is the way to play the game with them.”⁵⁴

As harsh as these words are, one should also note their ambivalence. The Sioux could leave Minnesota *or* suffer extermination; the Apache could be imprisoned *or* be totally annihilated. Soldiers did not always believe that the Indian required eradication, but they certainly thought he should be punished in a manner befitting his crimes. The inconsistency reflected an unsettled national policy toward Native Americans. The reservation system was still largely untested, the future role of Native Americans within white society uncertain.⁵⁵ In the absence of clear directives from the government,

⁵² Samuel B. Sheardown to “Dear Brother and Sister,” 2 January 1863, Dakota Conflict of 1862 Manuscripts Collection, MHS.

⁵³ San Francisco *Alta*, 14 January 1864, published in Andrew E. Masich, *The Civil War in Arizona*, 262.

⁵⁴ Unrau, 213-214.

⁵⁵ For a discussion of the improvised nature of the first reservations, see Richard White, *“It’s Your Misfortune and None of My Own”: A History of the American West*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), 91-93. “American officials,” states White, “in attempting to halt conflict between Indians and whites, prevent expensive wars, and open up lands to white settlement, created reservations the way survivors of a shipwreck might fashion a raft from the debris of the sunken vessel.” The “sunken vessel” is a metaphorical reference to the idea of a permanent Indian nation west of the Mississippi that for whites became increasingly impractical after 1850.

soldiers in effect made their own. They offered Indians a choice, albeit not a pleasant one: total subjugation or death. That much of the latter would be required to achieve the former mattered little; the accompanying deaths would fulfill soldiers' driving needs of justice and vengeance. Regardless of the means, the end goal remained the same: total elimination of the Indian as a threat to American society. The adoption of a policy of punishment over one of extermination to achieve that end depended on a number of situational factors: military leadership, the disposition of soldiers, the outcome of a battle, and the feasibility of removal all played a part. In Minnesota, for example, the espousal of a more "lenient" policy can be attributed in great part to simple geography. The extermination-minded populace was content to forcibly drive the Sioux from the state, leaving them stranded in what many considered the "wasteland" of Dakota. In that instance, physical removal proved every bit as effective as extermination, with none of its associated moral complexities. In most circumstances, however, the "problem" could not be so neatly resolved. Unable or unwilling to relocate, other tribes stood fast against Anglo pressure while civilians, Indian agents, regular and volunteer officers struggled to implement competing policies ranging from assimilation to annihilation. As these disparate groups vied for dominance, the influx of soldiers into the West continued. They would "play the game" with the Indians, and in the process become "savage," themselves.

5.4.4 Trophies and Atrocities

Though civilized soldiers ostensibly followed a code that governed their actions in war, did those rules apply to uncivilized opponents who eschewed them? The volunteers who tossed strychnine-laced biscuits by the wayside as they marched through Dakota did not think so.⁵⁶ Soldiers quickly embraced the tactics they felt were

⁵⁶ *OR*, Ser. 1, Vol. 48, 503-504. On January 12, 1865 Major General Samuel R. Curtis, in command of the Department of Kansas, wrote to Colorado Governor John Evans of the tactics being used in recent Indian campaigns. "There can be nothing gained by excusing Indian atrocities in any way, for all these prairie tribes are about as bad as they dare to be. Terrible and shocking blows are necessary to quell the rascals, and we may always expect our troops to be guilty of indiscretions. I abominate the extermination of women and children; but these latter years such conduct has received so much applause that in Minnesota a premium has been given for scalps, and in General Sully's recent campaign one officer reports his success in this line of extermination by throwing out crackers by the way impregnated with strychnine for poisoning his pursuing enemy."

necessitated by the war that faced them. They lived like the Indians they pursued and embraced their method of war. They also showed little mercy to those they captured. One of the more time-honored traditions of war, taken up first by soldiers on the spot and later by civilians, is the collection of battlefield souvenirs. In the east, volunteers commonly mailed home spent bullets, swords, pieces of shells, and a variety of other memorabilia they scoured from the field. It was a method of remembrance; a tangible reminder of the dangers they had faced and overcome. Some have even suggested that the collection of battlefield artifacts serves a more basic purpose of offering soldiers some assurance of their future. After all, discussing the harrowing circumstances of their acquisition with friends and family requires first that soldiers survive the conflict.⁵⁷ Whatever the motivation, the need of frontier volunteers to collect “souvenirs” was no less pressing.

Many, but not all, Native Americans traditionally scalped their opponents as a way of authenticating their achievements. It did not take long for soldiers to follow suit in the practice, alarming some commanders. Following the battle of Big Mound in July 1863, the retreating Sioux left behind all manner of camp implements, lodge poles, and foodstuffs. The results of Minnesotans’ vengeance could also be clearly seen along the trail. “An occasional Indian corpse, stiff and stark, minus his hair, told of others being able and ready to scalp beside ye aborigines,” noted a soldier in the 10th Regiment.⁵⁸ General Sibley, in command of the column, ordered against the taking of scalps – a command he felt necessary to repeat a year later. “Should you kill any more Indians who are trying to do mischief,” he instructed a cavalry commander, “do not allow your men to scalp or cut them up, for that is not like white men or Christians.”⁵⁹ As with General Robert E. Lee’s orders against pillaging during the Gettysburg Campaign, Sibley hoped to prevent the debauchment of his men by maintaining some level of civility during the campaign. As with Lee’s Confederates, soldiers under Sibley’s command had their own agenda that did not include graciousness toward the enemy. In the regular war, however, the absence of civility did not necessarily equate with atrocity. Not so in the Indian wars,

⁵⁷ J. Glenn Gray, *The Warriors: Reflections on Men in Battle*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998, 1959), 81-82.

⁵⁸ Glanville, 146.

⁵⁹ *OR*, Ser. 1, Vol. 34, 664.

where savagery would be met with savagery. Soldiers, encouraged by officers, tended to “set aside” Sibley’s directive. Scouting parties that bragged of killing scores of Indians were queried by Colonel Samuel McPhail of the 1st Minnesota Rangers. “He would ask what they had to prove the truth of their statement,” according to one, “adding that it was necessary, in most places, to obtain the bounty for the killing of gophers, foxes, and wolves, to produce their scalps or tails . . . and unless they could produce some secular proof, he could not place any confidence in what they said.”⁶⁰ McPhail’s insinuations were not lost on his men, and the practice continued unabated. Little Crow, leader of the Sioux uprising, ultimately lost his scalp after being killed by a farmer. The Minnesota Historical Society subsequently took possession of the trophy and kept it on display.⁶¹

The practice of scalping spread far beyond vengeful Minnesotans. A Missouri lieutenant described a “tussle” between Sioux and several men of his command while on the way to Fort Laramie. “5 of our men were killed by arrow shots . . . and one of them scalped,” he reported. “Some of our men run upon them and killed two, and in the heat and excitement (also thirst for revenge) scalped the Indians.”⁶² Californians and Kansans reported similar undertakings, and in some instances scalped Indians before they killed them.⁶³ The butchery that attended the aftermath of a skirmish could be appalling, with Indians losing far more than their hair. High Wolf, a northern Cheyenne leader, met a particularly grisly end at the hands of infuriated Ohio troopers. In leading an ambush against several of the cavalrymen near Platte Bridge in western Dakota, he sustained a gunshot wound to the abdomen which knocked him from his horse. As he laid on the ground, bleeding and feigning death, two troopers discovered him and began to repeatedly stab him in the chest. Only when they made out to scalp him did he finally

⁶⁰ Glanville, 146-147.

⁶¹ Collins, 21; Walter N. Trenerry, “The Shooting of Little Crow: Heroism or Murder?” *Minnesota History*, Vol. 38, No. 3 (September 1962), 150-153.

⁶² Charles H. Springer. *Soldiering in Sioux Country: 1865*. Benjamin Franklin Cooling, ed. (San Diego: Frontier Heritage Press, 1971), 44-45.

⁶³ Neil B. Carmony, ed. *The Civil War in Apacheland: Sergeant George Hand’s Diary*, (Silver City, NM: High-Lonesome Books, 1996), 101, 138; Isaac B. Pennick Diary, 25 July 1865, Hay Star-Brown University Library. Hand reported a fight that occurred between Apaches and Californians near Fort Craig in August 1863. “The boys had met or surprised the Indians, killed 5 or 6 of them. The rest ran. . . . Hightower jumped in the river & caught [an] Indian who was still trying to get away. He scalped him.”

plead for his life. No pity was forthcoming. The troopers shot him in the head, took his scalp, and castrated him.⁶⁴

If not excusable, these vengeance mutilations can at least be understood. One can only imagine the thoughts that went through soldiers' minds prior to the episodes. Riding through a "hostile" land, constantly on edge, and filled with a nagging perception of being watched that sometimes borders on paranoia, their task was not an easy one. They had seen friends mutilated and dismembered – picked off by an enemy that seemed to disappear as would an apparition in the morning sun. If not for their bleeding comrades, they would be hard pressed to determine if an attack had even occurred. Rarely did the Indians leave their dead on the field. They brooded over losses, overcome by feelings of impotence and vulnerability and rage, seething at both the enemy before them and a civilian populace which could not hope to understand the conditions under which they labored. Fed up, civilized restraint gave way to savagery.⁶⁵

After the fact, when passions had cooled, many understood that their actions might have appeared overzealous – especially to the unacquainted civilian. They explained away their behavior as best they could. "In all Indian wars, whites have engaged in scalp taking," reported a member of the 7th Minnesota, "more perhaps, 'as evidence of good faith' as the papers are prone to say, than for any other purpose."⁶⁶ But there was more to the practice than just securing evidence of martial prowess. If that was the case, a good portion of the Army of the Potomac would have been bald by 1863, their scalps prominently displayed by Lee's wily Confederates. As another explained, scalping seemed the only proper way to treat such fiendish animals and satisfied a deep-seated rage. In many cases, mutilation of their earthly remains was not enough; soldiers hoped to destroy their very souls. "They knew . . . the savage superstition as to the improbability of a bald man's success in the next world. Many of them had lost their

⁶⁴ Unrau, 273; J.W. Vaughn. *The Battle of Platte Bridge*. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1963), 42, 48-50.

⁶⁵ On the frustrations experienced by would-be Indian fighters, see Ware, 55; Unrau, 150, 281; Marchand, 40; Myers, 7; Drips, 78-79; Adams, 16. The psychological effects of guerrilla warfare on Civil War soldiers has been given some attention, and in some respects they are applicable to the Indian wars, as well. See Phillip Shaw Pauldan, *Victims: A True Story of the Civil War*, (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1981), and Michael Fellman, *Inside War: The Guerrilla Conflict in Missouri During the American Civil War*, (New York: Oxford, 1989).

⁶⁶ Collins, 19.

families by Indian massacre, and it was not surprising that . . . they forgot the humanities of civilization.”⁶⁷

Succumbing to their rage, however, only exacerbated a serious moral dilemma. A return to civilization required the besting of a savage foe. The most effective way to defeat their enemy, they determined, would be to forget the “humanities of civilization” and meet savagery with savagery. But forgetting came at a cost: savage tactics only widened the distance between themselves and the civilization they so desperately desired to rejoin. The paradox was unnerving, and highlighted for some the thin line between white “civilization” and red “savagery.” They felt themselves slipping further and further from what they once cherished most. “Civilization. That word is fast losing its charms for us,” reported one. “A year from now we will dread it. The innate animal instincts are actually getting the upper hand. All our natures are close to the ground – only a few removes from the aborigines and they not one in some instances from an animal. It is a continual struggle to prevent turning back to them. . . . There is a fascination about this life that cannot be explained, but thousands that half live in these wilds prove that it is stronger than the word ‘civilization.’”⁶⁸

If, as some historians have suggested, the Civil War soldier was defined by the Victorian ideals of self-control and self-discipline (almost to the point of repression), the opportunity to cast off “civilized” restraints must have been both powerfully attractive and frightening.⁶⁹ That the savagery of their enemy would presumably excuse their own “indiscretions” certainly made the prospect of indulging in a savage hedonism all the more exciting. Many must have felt the internal tug-of-war, a sense of being pulled toward the darker side of their humanity. Most approached that line warily, never quite crossing, afraid of what the other side might expose within themselves. They did what “duty” required and little more: attacking when ordered, inadvertently killing noncombatants, and destroying villages. Avoiding excesses, these volunteers rarely suffered from issues of conscience. Of those who actually crossed the line, the vast

⁶⁷ *Minnesota in the Civil and Indian Wars*, vol. 1. (Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2005), Narrative of Captain Eugene M. Wilson, First Regiment of Mounted Rangers, 521.

⁶⁸ Judd, 36-37.

⁶⁹ True of all soldiers, it was especially so of Northerners. Because of their sincere effort to live up to the moral code of “be under control or be lost,” author Michael Barton has described them as “Goodmen.” See Michael Barton, *Goodmen: The Character of Civil War Soldiers*, (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1981).

majority later expressed remorse, hoping they could be forgiven for their actions. A small percentage of these men, however, walked over and never looked back, reveling in the gore. These were the “Sand Creekers” of the frontier volunteers. Scalping a warrior – a fellow combatant – in the heat of battle might be excused. That was just the way things were done. Killing women and children in a cross-fire, well, that was regrettable but sometimes unavoidable. Contemporary military planners would call it “collateral damage.” Besides, the Indians had killed plenty of innocent women and children themselves. The volunteers were just playing their game. And there was the hitch: the insidious rationalization that accompanied each indiscretion. It was a slippery slope, at the end of which waited the post-battle executions of children and the raping of dying women.

Despite their reprehensible actions, Sand Creekers were not monsters and madmen. Appealing as that explanation may be, it is much too simplistic. Their hatred of the red man was no more pathological than that of the society which produced them. They were merely extreme symptoms of a disease that wracked their entire culture, separated from their less enterprising comrades in deed but rarely in thought and opinion. Their only “pathological” trait – shared by all human beings – was a startling ability of rationalization. Aside from that commonality, the Sand Creekers were as diverse as the Indians they slaughtered. They came from Ohio, Iowa, Minnesota, California, and Oregon as well as Colorado. They might be veterans who had suffered the frustrations of prolonged Indian campaigns, or they might be hundred day volunteers. They might have entered the ranks as bona-fide Indian haters, or they may have reached that status incrementally. Maybe their actions were not even personal, but driven by fear and group pressure. Regardless, in every aspect of their lives they differed little from their companions. What is most terrifying about the Sand Creekers was their inconspicuousness. The avenging soldiers of the 3rd Colorado who returned to Denver with poles bedecked with scalps and women’s genitalia stretched over their hats were, so to speak, “ordinary men.”⁷⁰ That their actions met with wild approval by the populace

⁷⁰ This is an intentional reference to Christopher Browning’s *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland*, (New York: HarperPerennial, 1998, 1992). I do not mean to make an overly simplistic comparison between the Order Police and the Third Colorado Cavalry, for such a venture is rife with complications. I am suggesting, however, that in both cases the killers would have been

and many of their fellow volunteers across the nation spoke volumes. They had accomplished what others had only fantasized. “The operator took off a despatch this morning concerning a fight . . . between the Colorado boys under Col. Chevington and about nine hundred Cheyenne warriors,” recorded an Ohio trooper concerning the massacre. “The soldiers surprised and attacked the vilage at daylight, they killed four hundred indians . . . with a loss of only nine men killed and thirty eight wounded.” The lopsided casualty report troubled him not at all. “That is the style I would like, this way of following indians night and day like we did last summer has about played out with me.”⁷¹ The Sand Creekers were not an exclusive bunch; all were welcome to join. Simply check your scruples at the door. More than a massacre, it was a state of mind – perhaps even a sickness – to which none were totally immune. The potentiality for atrocity lurked within every volunteer, and left its mark on many an encounter from Dakota to Idaho to Arizona.

5.4.5 The Great Conundrum: Native American “Prisoners of War”

By September 1862, after a month of fighting and numerous setbacks, the followers of Little Crow were losing faith in their leader. They had not been able to defeat the Minnesotans, who now counterattacked with fury. Dissension and despair pervaded the ranks of warriors. General Sibley, suspecting as much, left a letter on the battlefield at Birch Coulee offering to meet with one of the chief’s emissaries. Little Crow, with the help of a mixed-blood scribe, responded to the general in English. He ruminated on the causes of the war and the grievances of the Sioux, and let it be known that he had in his possession a significant number of white captives. If he hoped to use them as a guarantee of the safety of his people or as a bargaining chip in negotiations, the prospect was dashed by Sibley’ response: “Return me the prisoners, under a flag of truce, and I will talk with you then like a man.”⁷²

Nothing came of the proposed exchange, and a message from some of the chiefs who opposed the war convinced Sibley to forego any more attempts to negotiate with

virtually indistinguishable from society at large, neither more nor less prone to violent actions than their fellow citizens.

⁷¹ Unrau, 198-199.

⁷² Kenneth Carley, *The Sioux Uprising of 1862*, (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 1961), 57.

Little Crow. Given enough time, they insisted they could free the captives and transfer them to their own camp. They made good on their offer, and following a heated argument between members of the war and peace parties that nearly resulted in violence, they managed to secure most of the captives. With withering support, Little Crow was hard-pressed to gather a substantial enough force to oppose Sibley as his army approached the Sioux camps along the Chippewa River. Though 700 warriors eventually decided to join the fight, many did so unwillingly, and a considerable number refused to participate at all, instead remaining in camp with the captives. On September 23, Sibley's men roundly defeated the Sioux at Wood Lake. The warriors and their families scattered north and west, leaving behind the remainder of their captives with the peace chiefs. Two days later Sibley entered the camp, where they turned over to him 269 white and mixed-blood prisoners.

Shortly after, the general established Camp Release, a temporary internment site. In the weeks following Wood Lake, his men continued to capture destitute Sioux who had fled after the battle – now starving and wandering the plains. With no where else to go, others turned themselves in voluntarily. Soon, nearly 2,000 men, women and children resided within the camp, guarded by Sibley's soldiers. Trials began almost immediately. Sibley established a five-member panel to pass judgment on those Sioux accused of participating in the uprising. Based on flimsy evidence provided by the released captives, in a month's time the board had condemned to death over 300 men on charges that ranged from rape to taking up arms against the government. Though hardly fair, the trials likely prevented a full-scale massacre of the imprisoned Sioux, as the semblance of Federal legal proceedings placated the outraged, offered a more legitimate means of doling out retribution, and discouraged vigilante action. At the insistence of missionaries who had worked among the Santee, however, most notably Bishop Henry W. Whipple, Lincoln agreed to review each case individually. The prospect that any of the accused might escape punishment infuriated Minnesotans, and vigilante mobs swore to carry out the sentences despite any decision from the President.

In the meantime, hundreds of shackled Indians were being transferred to Mankato for their impending execution, guarded by the some of the same troops that had been active in the summer campaigns. As the convoy approached New Ulm in early

November, a town decimated by the Sioux three months before, the men caught wind of a plot by civilians to kill the prisoners in their custody. Residents had boarded up their store fronts, leaving openings from which to fire upon their victims. Rather than pass through the town and provoke an altercation, officers decided to bypass New Ulm completely. Surrounded by ranks of infantry, the wagons carrying the prisoners and their guards had nearly completed their southerly detour when citizens discovered their location on the outskirts of the town. Bedlam ensued. A mob led by hysterical women descended on the convoy. They pelted the captives with rocks, fracturing their skulls and knocking some of them from the wagons. One was dragged along on the ground by the chain that bound him to another.⁷³ Some of the women managed to break through the cordon of infantry; the soldiers barely tried to stop them. “[We] made a show of resistance, but nothing in earnest,” recorded a volunteer in the 10th Minnesota. “Our orders were to let *no man* through and we didn’t.” When they did attempt to push some of them back, the women screamed out their horror-filled tales. The wretches had killed their husbands, fathers, brothers, children. The guards could not reason with that logic. They let through women carrying all varieties of knives and blunt instruments. One stood by with an iron bar, beating the passengers of every wagon that passed.

What seemed fitting retribution quickly spun out of control, and the volunteers now found themselves in the awkward position of protecting the Sioux from outraged Minnesotans. Men began to join the fray, one approaching on a horse with revolver in hand, threatening to shoot the person who had killed his wife. Others threw rocks carried to them by women and children. The captives covered themselves with blankets, trying to dodge the hail of stones that struck Indian and soldier alike. The guards grew irritated. They were willing enough to let defenseless women get their licks, but they drew the line when men took action. “Our boys would yell out, ‘You d____ cowards. You can come out of your cellars now and face the Indians when they are chained up. You couldn’t come out and fight them like men when they were free.’” The situation nearly exploded in a riot between soldier and civilian. Battered by the crowd, volunteers threatened to bayonet anyone who got near them. One nearly ran a woman through, prevented only by

⁷³ Amos B. Watson, “Reminiscences of the Sioux Outbreak,” n.d., Dakota Conflict of 1862 Manuscripts Collection, MHS.

the soldier next to him who threatened to blow his brains out if he did. Finally, they managed to form a barrier along the road, bayonets at the ready, and the convoy continued toward Mankato. Some of the captives reportedly died that night from injuries sustained during the brawl.⁷⁴

At Mankato, a repeat of New Ulm was narrowly avoided. Chained and confined in a barracks, the Indians presented an easy target. On the night of December 4 a hostile crowd gathered on the streets, determined to storm the prison. Though one officer later insisted that the mob was comprised of some of the best and bravest men in Minnesota, others were less certain of their character.⁷⁵ Warned of the planned attack, troopers from the 10th Minnesota raced toward the city from their encampment. “I had not gone far before I met a mob,” recalled one, “mostly Dutch, and quite a number of them drunk.” They watched as the ringleader goaded the crowd, exhorting the people to follow him. Remembering the debacle at New Ulm, the troopers surrounded the participants and cut short the demonstration.irate citizens cursed the volunteers and struck their horses, intent on carrying out their plans. The leveling of carbines brought them to their senses, however, and the crowd dispersed with promises of future good behavior.⁷⁶ Not even “friendly” Indians were safe. Mobs also attacked the peaceful Dakota on their way from Camp Release to Fort Snelling. During one of the altercations, a baby was wrestled from its mother’s arms and beaten to death by angry citizens.⁷⁷

On December 6 Lincoln finally approved the execution of forty of the condemned Indians, later reduced to thirty-eight, significantly paring the original number of 303. In reviewing their cases, he had dismissed the charges against those accused of participating in battle, limiting the punishment of death to those found guilty of “massacre” and rape (of the latter there were only two). The execution was to be carried out by hanging on December 26. Thousands of spectators thronged the city in the days before the event. Colonel Stephen Miller, in command of the guard, declared martial law to prevent an outbreak of violence. At 10:00 A.M. on the appointed day, soldiers unshackled the condemned men and led them to the enormous scaffold. They chanted war hymns or

⁷⁴ Glanville, 37-45.

⁷⁵ Cumming, 184.

⁷⁶ Glanville, 60-63.

⁷⁷ Daniel Buck, *Indian Outbreaks*, (Minneapolis: Ross & Haines, 1965, 1904), 222-223.

death songs – no one was sure which – as they mounted the platform, but the adjusting of nooses and the donning of white hoods left them noticeably subdued. Moments later, the rope was cut and all fell through the trap doors. “The prisoners met their end like true soldiers of the plains,” recalled one of the guards.⁷⁸ The crowd offered a wild cheer, but the executions had not all gone smoothly. One of the ropes had snapped, leaving a dazed Indian heaped on the ground. Three volunteers quickly shuffled him atop the scaffold again. The rope held on the second attempt, and the crowd dispersed.⁷⁹ The presence of a heavy guard probably deterred mob violence against the pardoned Sioux, and that was just as well; many of the volunteers sympathized with the citizens. “It was well understood among them,” insisted a cavalry officer, “that if an attack was made upon the barracks, and they were ordered to fire on their own friends, they . . . would see that none of the attacking party should get hurt.”⁸⁰ It was belatedly discovered that several of the executed – including a mentally handicapped boy – had been among those pardoned by Lincoln. The mistake was attributed to the difficulty of distinguishing between Sioux names.

Afterward, the bodies were buried in a mass grave outside of town and guarded by a detachment of Minnesota volunteers. If authorities had hoped to prevent grave-robbing, they should have assigned a less emotionally invested crew. As an officer in the Minnesota Rangers rode toward St. Peter that night accompanied by regimental surgeon Dr. Joseph Weiser, several tarp-covered sleighs barreled past the pair.⁸¹ The doctor offhandedly remarked that it looked as if they were carrying dead Sioux. His companion, thinking him joking, remarked that he need not worry as there was no danger of losing his scalp. Arriving at a hotel in St. Peter shortly after, Weiser invited his friend upstairs. He had several Indian “relics” he wished to show him. The officer opened the door to the surgeon’s room and looked on with astonishment. “There on the floor lay three of the

⁷⁸ Cumming, 185.

⁷⁹ Amos B. Watson, “Reminiscences of the Sioux Outbreak,” n.d., Dakota Conflict of 1862 Manuscripts Collection, MHS.

⁸⁰ Cumming, 186.

⁸¹ Dr. Weiser claimed to be a “friend” of the Sioux. In July 1863 he was shot and killed while trying to negotiate with members of Standing Buffalo’s camp. His death touched off the ensuing battle of Big Mound.

Indians that had been buried that afternoon and placed under a guard consisting of a full company of *live* Minnesota soldiers,” he exclaimed with wonder.⁸²

Military and civilian physicians alike wasted little time in gathering the bodies for “research.” Two days after the execution, Colonel Miller complained that each night some of the corpses were being removed or left exposed. Though Sibley ordered that all possible measures be taken to prevent the thefts, many of the bodies ended up as cadavers in medical facilities. “I think it would be safe to say,” recorded one volunteer, “that if all the good those Indians ever did, in all their romantic career, was added together, the sum would not equal that done to surgical science”⁸³ What civilian practitioners thought about their “specimens” is unknown, but among some of the military surgeons their passion for science was tintured with a strain of vengeance. It was an ugly combination. “I had the pleasure one week ago to day to assist in hanging thirty eight of these baby killers by their accursed necks until they were dead,” wrote Dr. Samuel Sheardown of the 10th Minnesota to his brother and sister. “I am going to have the further pleasure cutting the meat from [the] worthless bones of two of them. They were buried about noon & before 7 o’clock in the evening I helped to raise eight of their carcasses from a soil to sacred to hold them.” Perhaps realizing that his civilian relatives might not understand the situation as he did, he offered some explanation for his comments. “I have [been] treating their victims for the last three months and therefore you must not wonder at my bitterness.”⁸⁴

Given the soldiers’ prevailing beliefs about Indians, it is not surprising they rarely took prisoners during combat, shooting even those warriors who tried to surrender. Capturing such a “wily” foe was a hazardous undertaking; better to just kill them during the confusion of battle. Also, because all Indians in arms against the government were considered outlaws and therefore not entitled to protection as legitimate prisoners of war, killing them sooner rather than later only expedited the inevitable. A Minnesota officer

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Glanville, 69.

⁸⁴ Samuel B. Sheardown to “Dear Brother and Sister,” 2 January 1863, *Dakota Conflict of 1862* Manuscripts Collection, MHS; For a secondary analysis of the trial, execution and aftermath see Carol Chomsky, “The United States-Dakota War Trials: A Study in Military Injustice,” *Stanford Law Review*, Vol. 43, No. 1, (November 1990), 13-98.

described a typical incident that occurred at Big Mound, Dakota in the summer of 1863. Under fire from three Sioux warriors using a ravine for cover, his troopers eventually managed to work their way behind the Indians' position and unleash a volley of their own. "Two of them were killed," he later reported, "and the other one threw down his gun and offered to surrender, but some of the men fired [anyway]."⁸⁵ The day after Whitestone Hill, Sully's men combed the battlefield "flushing out" warriors from the grass like pheasant from a field. One of them gave quite a startle to a squad of troopers from the 7th Iowa: "An Indian jumped in front of them without any arms, but, savage to the last, he shook his clenched fist at them while they shot him down."⁸⁶ For the volunteer who believed in absolutes, however, a battle could be fraught with ambiguity. What of women and children? What of men taken by surprise, suspected of participating in outrages and "criminal" activity, but neither caught under arms or in the act? One response, of course, was to deny the existence of ambiguity. They were Indians, and therefore guilty of *something*. Killing them was a simple and efficient way of ending all uncertainty. The less sanguine found themselves in the uncomfortable position of taking prisoners, often against their better judgment, and despite the fact that doing so only added to the complexity of the situation.

A notable feature of the Indian wars was the practice of capturing women and children along with combatants. Sometimes this was intentional, as when tribes were rounded up to be placed on reservations. Other times it was incidental, as after the destruction of a village. Those who had not been killed during or after the fight were at the mercy of the army, which was not always prepared or willing to care for them. Neglect of their welfare could mean death. After killing 250 Shoshoni men, women and children at Bear River, Idaho in January 1863, Patrick Connor's Californians had to care for the 160 women and children they had taken captive. Their village had been destroyed, including the winter's supply of food and clothing. Conner issued them a few rations, then left them to fend for themselves in the subzero temperatures that had already claimed a number of his men. More often, the army managed to make crude accommodations, rounding up the women and children and holding them in makeshift

⁸⁵ Cumming, 196.

⁸⁶ Letter from Corwin Lee, 7th Iowa Cavalry, in *Iowa City Republican*, 18 November 1863. Found in Throne, 171.

internment camps. For all their talk of extermination, Minnesotans took a surprising number of captives during the Dakota wars. Several thousand prisoners, mostly women and children, were eventually relocated to sites such as Fort Snelling and Camp McClellan until the government could decide their fate.

Captured warriors posed another problem. Those determined to be guilty were executed, assuming they lived long enough to stand trial. But what of the others? If not charged with a crime, it still seemed foolish to turn them loose. They would simply rejoin their tribe and continue the depredations they had undoubtedly been committing all along. A Dakota trooper reacted with skepticism to the treatment accorded scores of Sioux warriors captured by surprise with their families north of Fort Randall in the winter of 1863. No evidence pointed to their participation in the previous year's massacre, so they were eventually released after several months of internment. "They were fed army rations," he complained, "and in the spring were in fine condition to again take to the warpath, which I have no doubt many of them did . . ." ⁸⁷ He was not the only one irked by the sight of imprisoned warriors. An Iowan noted that the Sioux held at Camp McClellan in Davenport were "fat and hearty, well fed and clothed in government clothing and guarded by U.S. Soldiers. It would not have been very healthy for these red gents if the soldiers just from Dakota had been placed guard over them." ⁸⁸ Soldiers and civilians alike assumed the guilt of captive Indians, and responded with fury to what they perceived as "coddling." That they should be fed, clothed, protected by soldiers and allowed to grow "fat" at the expense of the government was considered outrageous. On December 3, 1863 the *Davenport Democrat* reported the arrival of a company from the 30th Wisconsin, "to stand guard about those red skinned devils that are clothed, warmed and fed at Camp McClellan, when they ought to be hung." ⁸⁹

Soldiers observed the people they guarded as they would fish in a bowl. For many, the circumstances offered a rare glimpse of the Indian in what they considered his "natural" state: dirty, lazy and savage. When a Nebraskan remarked that the women and children captured after Whitestone Hill were "the most ridiculous looking outfit of human

⁸⁷ English, 263.

⁸⁸ Drips, 125-126.

⁸⁹ *Davenport Democrat*, 3 December 1863, located in Seth J. Temple, *Camp McClellan During the Civil War*, (Davenport, Iowa: The Contemporary Club, 1928), 34.

beings I ever saw,” he at least acknowledged their humanity.⁹⁰ Others were not prepared to grant them even that. ““Lo the poor Indians,”” commented a Minnesotan in October 1862 of captured Sioux warriors on trial for murder and rape. “There they sat, one hundred thirty of them, human tigers, painted up most savagely, playing cards or smoking . . . thinking, maybe, of the ‘high old times’ they had a few days ago, when they gave vent to the instinct of their ‘untutored mind’ and pitched into our defenseless women and children.”⁹¹ When confined near a town, the presence of Indians created something of a spectacle. Volunteers and citizens thronged around the gates of the stockade, eager to glimpse a live savage without leaving the comforts of civilization. The resemblance to a zoo was unsettling. “It is worth ones while to look at them to apreciat how lazy & dirty an Indian can be,” wrote a guard from Fort Snelling. “If they are kept here long they will probably die of some disease as they cannot bear confinement for any length of time.”⁹²

Though most volunteers looked upon their Indian charges with disgust and hatred, such views were not unanimous. At least one soldier struggled with the “righteousness” of his cause. Strolling through the Sioux encampment at Fort Snelling in November 1862, a Wisconsinite noted the poor condition of the people as he considered their impending deportation to the Black Hills country. The adults were thinly clad, many of the children could be seen running barefoot through the snow, and their dogs and ponies were starving. At times he lifted up the flap of a lodge, only to be met with silent stares and furrowed brows. They hated the white man. He could see it in their eyes. “Why shouldn’t they? What had they done? What was their crime?” he pondered. “The white man had driven them from one reservation to another. They were weary and broken hearted and desperate at the broken promises of the government. And when they took up arms in desperation for their homes and the graves of their sires they are called savages and red devils. When we white people do the same things we are written down in history as heroes and patriots. Why this difference? I can’t see into it.”⁹³ These were genuinely thoughtful questions that deserved answering. Unfortunately, the answers were lost in a sea of hate and hostility.

⁹⁰ Rowen, *Diary of Henry W. Pierce*, 49.

⁹¹ Glanville, 22.

⁹² Eugene Marshall to Sister, 10 April 1864, Eugene Marshall Papers, Duke U.

⁹³ Cooke, 17.

As captives languished in squalid conditions, fell victim to disease, and grappled with forced inactivity – factors that confirmed the image of the dirty and lazy Indian – their captors wrangled over what should be done with them. As late as June 1865, Camp McClellan still held a number of Sioux captives and drew the ire of area newspapers. “Many are the queries of why the greasy Indians who are kept in Camp here, are not disposed of in some way,” reported the Davenport *Gazette*. “Either these Indians are guilty of the offence with which charged, or they are not. It must be one of the two.” If guilty, they deserved execution. If not, they should be released to save the government the expense of caring for them. Better yet, proposed the *Gazette*, why not put them to work? “If pale-faced felons can work in the penitentiary to earn their living, we don’t see why these red-skinned chaps could not be made to do the same.”⁹⁴ Though forcing captives to work technically violated the rules of war, it was not of major concern. As the *Gazette* pointed out, Indians were considered felons rather than legitimate combatants entitled to specific rights. The real problem was how to make a naturally lazy Indian “earn his living.” Proper motivation was the key, according to an Ohio trooper stationed at Platte River Bridge. Several Indians had been hanged outside the fort in the spring of 1865, their bodies left in plain view for the benefit of the remaining prisoners who busied themselves hauling water and chopping wood. “It has always been thought that an indian could not be made to work,” he remarked, “but the sight of those indians still swinging in sight of the Fort has a very moral effect”⁹⁵

Rather than going through the trouble of forcing captives to toil on mundane projects or risking their release through acquittal, a third option was available to those who sought retribution from prisoners: military vigilantism. In early 1864 a riot broke out among the Santee detained at Fort Thompson over the ownership of a horse. In response, troopers from the 1st Dakota excitedly formed ranks and hurried toward the disturbance. As they swung open the stockade gates, the men watched with amusement as the fight ebbed and flowed. The Sioux tore down lodges and hurled camp kettles, rocks and anything else that could serve as a missile. Officers commanded their men forward into the mêlée. Here was their chance. “We broke for the struggling mass of

⁹⁴ Davenport *Gazette*, 2 June 1865, located in Seth J. Temple, *Camp McClellan During the Civil War*, 47.

⁹⁵ Unrau, 259-260.

humanity with the hope that we might have the opportunity of firing at least one volley into the savages,” recalled one participant, “who only eighteen months prior . . . had murdered settlers and mutilated bodies in the most horrible manner conceivable.” Vengeance was not to be had on this occasion, however. The Sioux, no doubt sensing what the soldiers were about, quickly dispersed as they advanced.⁹⁶

As the Dakotans’ attitude suggests, volunteers were not above dispensing their own brand of justice when the opportunity presented. They need only wait for – or manufacture – an appropriate cover. Though soldiers knew they were completely justified in shooting a captive, the “Indian sympathizers” back home might not be as understanding. Killing an Indian during a riot, however, would have seemed a perfectly legitimate response. Few questions would have been asked. Another, more common cover was to report an Indian shot while trying to “escape.” For those needing to maintain a façade of morality, it seemed the perfect crime. A soldier in the 2nd California reported on one such incident in November 1865. Awakened by a succession of gunshots, his company braced for an attack that never came. The next morning they discovered the body of an Apache chief sprawled in front of the guardhouse. The man had been in custody for some time, watched closely and kept in chains. He was accused of perpetrating attacks against emigrants, though no solid evidence could be gotten. “The manner of his death is not clearly known,” recorded the Californian. “One report is that he was shot endeavoring to escape from the sentinel in charge. Another report current in camp and the one most generally believed is that he was shot by order of the Commanding Officer.” Though he harbored no doubts of the Apache’s guilt, this volunteer did not approve of his officer’s methods. “It was rather clandestinely done and is not very satisfactory to the soldiers. They vastly preferred seeing him executed publicly, black criminal that he was, to his being assassinated thus.”⁹⁷

One of the most infamous examples of this tactic involved the Apache chief Mangas Coloradas. An imposing figure well over six feet tall, the nearly seventy year old Mangas joined forces with Cochise after the murder of the latter’s family by the

⁹⁶ English, 271-272.

⁹⁷ Bushnell Diary, 11 November 1865. Exactly which chief this soldier was referring to is unclear. The incident is very similar to the one involving the Mimbrenño chief Mangas Coloradas killed in January 1863. They appear to be separate altercations.

military in 1861. Together they pledged to drive all Anglos from what is now southwestern New Mexico, and their combined attacks had left the area nearly depopulated by 1863. General James H. Carleton, in charge of the district and engaged in an ongoing war with the Apache as he tried to relocate them to the reservation at Bosque Redondo, had previously ordered hard measures against the Mescaleros. In October 1862 he instructed Colonel Joseph R. West on how to conduct a campaign against them. “There is to be no council held with the Indians nor any talks. The men are to be slain whenever and wherever they can be found. . . .I trust that these . . . demonstrations will give those Indians a wholesome lesson. They have robbed and murdered the people with impunity too long already.”⁹⁸ With the Mescalero threat neutralized, Carleton turned his attention to Mangas Coloradas. In January 1863 he ordered West, now a general, to undertake the same kind of campaign against the Mimbrenos. With detachments of the 1st California Cavalry and 5th California Infantry under his command, West set out for abandoned Fort McLane on the Mimbres River. Along the route, scouts from the main column ran into a party of miners led by Joseph Walker attempting to bypass Mangas’s camp in search of gold farther west. What transpired between the two groups is uncertain, but Walker devised a bold plan to capture the Mimbreno chief and force him to let the miners pass in safety. Possibly accompanied by some of West’s men, he approached the camp bearing a white flag, lured the chief into a parley, and then seized him at gunpoint. The group returned to Fort McLane with their prize, where General West transferred the captive to his own camp.

Because Mangas Coloradas had “voluntarily” surrendered, according to West, “the circumstances . . . would not permit the taking of his life as some retribution for his murders of our people” He did make it clear to his prisoner, however, that he would spend the rest of his days incarcerated; any attempt to escape and his life would be forfeit. By 1 o’clock that morning the once powerful chief was dead. “A sergeant and three privates of Company A, Fifth Infantry California Volunteers, became his guard at midnight,” the general explained. “Within the succeeding hour he made three efforts to escape, and was shot on the third attempt.”⁹⁹ The story was convincing enough, if not for

⁹⁸ *OR*, Ser. 1, Vol. 15, 580.

⁹⁹ *OR*, Ser. 1, Vol. 50, pt. 2, 296-297.

the witnesses who testified to a different version of events. One of the California soldiers later insisted that he overheard West telling the guards, “I want him dead or alive tomorrow morning, do you understand? I want him dead.” They understood completely, and later applied red-hot bayonets heated in a campfire to his bare feet and palms. As the chief writhed in agony and tried to “escape” his tormentors, they gunned him down. The sorry episode did not end there. The next morning, one of the volunteers scalped the body. West finally ordered the corpse buried, but it was exhumed several days later by the detachment’s surgeon. He cut off the head, boiling it to remove the flesh, and studied the skull. Later, he sent it back East to a famed phrenologist – none other than Orson Squire Fowler – who kept it on display at his New York office.¹⁰⁰

As with the dissection of Sioux corpses in Minnesota, nary a word of protest was lodged over the dismemberment of Mangas Coloradas – at least among Anglos. To the Apaches, the entire incident from capture to execution was but another example of white treachery. The activity of the surgeons in these cases is particularly troubling. They mutilated bodies not in battle-charged frenzies, but after the fact with cold “scientific” detachment. In some instances, as the example of Surgeon Sheardown indicates, they abandoned all pretense of science and delighted in vengeance-driven postmortem butchery. None were called to account. It is difficult to imagine any group aside from Indians being treated in a similar manner. Though rumors abounded of Confederate dead from Camp Douglas prison in Chicago being sold for medical research, no concrete evidence of the trade ever surfaced. More importantly, rumors alone had been enough to create public outrage. When it came to Native Americans, men of science prominently advertised and displayed their findings without fear of repercussions. The practice continued throughout the Indian wars. In May 1863, a volunteer at Fort Ridgely observed a returning patrol which had engaged three Indians. The men had shot one of them, and like a prize deer brought him back to camp slung over a horse. “Doc dissecting him for anatomy,” he laconically reported.¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ For an account of the capture and death of Mangas Coloradas, see Edwin R. Sweeney, *Mangas Coloradas: Chief of the Chiricahua Apaches*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998), 441-465. Quote by General West is from page 455.

¹⁰¹ Though medical professionals regularly dissected Indian corpses, there is at least one recorded incident of the body of an African-American soldier being shamefully abused by a Union surgeon. The soldier had died unexpectedly and the surgeon, in what may have begun as a routine autopsy, maliciously mutilated the

As for the actions of the California volunteers, the affair highlighted the propensity of soldiers to follow orders when it suited them. They certainly demonstrated their willingness to rebel over less repugnant issues. Not only did they willingly comply with West's command, their application of torture before the murder shows they did so with a degree of enthusiasm. And why not? A taste of his own medicine was no more than the fellow deserved, so they reasoned, especially considering the possible alternative: a life lounging in prison growing fat on government rations. Such a punishment did not fit his crimes. And what if he escaped or, worse yet, was eventually released? Those were chances they were not willing to take. Soldiers looked upon Native Americans as stateless terrorists waging an illegal war. Because they answered to no legitimate authority higher than themselves, treaties were pointless. They would continue to fight until the white man had been driven from the country. Consequently, Indians could only be dealt with in one of two ways: indefinite imprisonment (via the reservation) or death. Since no amount of reform or rehabilitation could domesticate a wolf, it seemed safer and wiser to destroy the animal rather than keep it caged. "The General had cherished the hope that these pestilent savages could be won over by kindness and firmness; but I am inclined to believe that his views are undergoing a radical change," remarked a Californian of the Apaches. "What can we expect of a people whose earliest education inculcates . . . stealing as the most cardinal of virtues?"¹⁰²

That Native Americans had no organized government capable of meaningful negotiations also meant they had no means of "effective" retaliation. Hence, while Union authorities were able to curb Confederate abuse of black soldiers by threats of retaliation against the thousands of rebels held in Northern prisons, a similar option was not available to Native Americans. They could not provide for large numbers of prisoners,

body. After removing all the internal organs, he cut off the head and replaced it with a bottle wrapped with rags. Retiring for the night, he placed the head in a sack and, within the privacy of his tent, attempted to remove the brain. The regiment's commander halted the "autopsy" when he learned of it. Citing the surgeon's activities as a threat to the enlisted men's morale, the commander had him dismissed. See Joseph Glatthaar, *Forged in Battle: The Civil War Alliance of Black Soldiers and White Officers*, (New York: The Free Press, 1990), 192. For further information on rumors of body snatching at Camp Douglas see, George Levy, *To Die in Chicago: Confederate Prisoners at Camp Douglas, 1862-1865*, (Gretna, LA: Pelican Publishing, 1999). "The Doud Diary," *South Dakota Historical Collections*, Vol. 9, (1918), 472-473.

¹⁰² San Francisco *Alta*, 23 July 1862, published in Andrew E. Masich, *The Civil War in Arizona*, 215.

and therefore rarely had much with which to bargain. Occasionally they might hold a few captives to entice the military to release some of their own, but negotiations were complicated and often ended with the deaths of one or both party's captives before an exchange could be completed.¹⁰³ Furthermore, the rules of war applied only to organized nation-states, not criminals and bandits. Unless a prisoner possessed vital information or knew the whereabouts of white hostages, there was nothing to prevent his murder. As Indian prisoners were indiscriminately executed, their comrades lashed out in what they felt to be the only appropriate response – indiscriminate retaliation against all whites. Military reprisals followed quickly, resulting in a horrendous cycle of violence.

Though West insisted the “good faith” of the military had not been compromised by the death of Mangas Coloradas, his attempts to conceal the truth suggested otherwise.¹⁰⁴ The regular shooting of “escaping” prisoners might eventually raise eyebrows. To prevent a scandal, a more efficacious method of disposing of Native Americans was needed – one at which the men of the 6th Iowa had grown adept. Carrying dispatches to Fort Rice in the summer of 1865, a small party of the troopers came upon a lone Indian on the plains. The boy, probably Sioux, spoke some English and explained to the men that he and a companion had escaped from the Fort's guardhouse the day before and were trying to return to their families. No one bothered to ask why he had been imprisoned, and most seemed content to let him pass, anxious to be on their way. Their captain demurred, ordering his men to take the boy with them. The troopers rode on toward the fort, their captive walking behind. Eventually he collapsed on the ground, exhausted. They placed him on one of the horses and continued. “Private Moan was the only one who remained with the Indian,” recorded one of the troopers, “the

¹⁰³ The 1861 “Bascomb Affair,” for instance, stands as a prime example of the difficulties involved. In late 1860, Coyotero Apaches raided the ranch of John Ward in the Sonoita Valley of Arizona, running off stock and kidnapping the rancher's six-year-old son. Ward blamed Chiricahua followers of the famous Cochise for the depredations and reported the incident to the commander of the U.S. 7th Infantry. Foreshadowing the foolish tactics of the volunteers, he sent Lieutenant George N. Bascomb to apprehend the guilty. On February 4, 1861, Bascomb's small party overtook Cochise and members of his family. The Apache leader denied all charges, and a firefight ensued when Bascomb seized Cochise's relatives as hostages. Cochise himself escaped. Incensed, he seized several white captives in an attempt to force an exchange. Bascomb, however, refused to negotiate unless Ward's son was returned. In turn, Cochise tied his hostages to the wheels of a wagon and set it aflame. Following the discovery of their charred remains, the military hanged their Apache hostages. Americans had enjoyed a relatively stable relationship with the Chiricahuas, but the affair touched off twenty-five years of unrelenting hostility. Utley, *Frontiersmen in Blue*, 161-163.

¹⁰⁴ *OR*, Ser. 1, Vol. 50, pt. 2, 296-297.

rest moving on.” The boy fussed with the saddle, obviously stalling, as the distance between he and the squad continued to widen. Surely they knew what he was up to. A moment later, the “wily red” put whip to horse and made a dash for freedom. He almost succeeded. “Moan drew a bead on him and shot him dead on the fly. As we had nothing but case knives to dig a grave with his carcass was left on the prairie, as food for the coyotes.”¹⁰⁵ The scenario was simple, quick, and most importantly low-profile. No long-term imprisonment. No witnesses. No questions asked.

¹⁰⁵ Myers, 47-48.

5.5 Victory and Vengeance: Battle at Last

5.5.1 Massacre at Bear River

Since their arrival in Utah in the fall of 1862, Colonel Patrick Conner and his California Volunteers had kept watch over both Mormons and Shoshoni: the former because of suspected disloyalty, and the latter because of reprisal raids against Church settlers. Mormon emigrants had continually encroached on Shoshoni lands, depriving them of the grass seed that served as a primary source of food and forcing them to steal livestock in order to survive. Though sporadic skirmishing occurred between the groups Brigham Young, thinking it more efficient to feed rather than fight their “red brethren,” encouraged a policy of tolerance among his followers. Some westerners, however, noted with disapproval the occasional sale of arms to the Indians so they could hunt. As emigration increased, so too did attacks on settlers. The Church had a rocky relationship with the Federal government, so Young’s followers noted with ambivalence the arrival of Conner’s men. Though relieved at the prospect of protection from Shoshoni raids, they detected ulterior motives in his presence. Regardless, Young himself acknowledged that Connor kept strict discipline over his men and did not allow them to harass citizens.

Meanwhile, the plight of the Northwestern Shoshoni had become dire. In December 1861 a mail agent reported hundreds of Indians at several stations, all clamoring for food. “They must steal or starve,” he wired, “will they starve?”¹ James Doty, Superintendent of Indian Affairs for Utah, noted in March the following year that the situation had not improved. Unless the government dispatched funds forthwith for their care, the Indians would begin to raid for survival. They were engaged in exactly that when Conner’s volunteers arrived. On December 4, 1862 Connor dispatched Major Edward McGarry with one hundred troopers to Bear River Crossing north of Great Salt Lake to recover stolen cattle from a Shoshoni camp. The Indians discovered the movement, however, and moved north after cutting the ferry rope over the river. McGarry’s men managed to cross, minus their horses, and took captive four men who wandered into their lines. The major sent word that unless the stock was returned, he

¹ Quoted in Brigham Madsen, *Glory Hunter: A Biography of Patrick Edward Connor*, (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1990), 76.

would kill the hostages. His threat did not elicit the desired response; the Shoshoni camp moved off without replying. In turn, McGarry ordered the prisoners tied to the ferry rope and executed – shot a total of fifty-one times and left in the river. Shoshoni leaders swore revenge.

In early January, raids against overland traffic heading for gold strikes in Montana left ten miners and two mail carriers dead. Survivors reported that members of Bear Hunter's band of Northwestern Shoshoni were determined to kill every white person north of the Bear River until the murders of their people had been avenged. Connor, with the support of Mormon leadership, decided on a punitive campaign to neutralize the threat once and for all. When the territorial marshal offered to accompany him, Connor replied "that it was not my intention to take any prisoners"² In late January he started for the Shoshoni encampment at Bear River, Idaho, about 100 miles north of Salt Lake City, with elements of the 3rd California Infantry and the 2nd California Cavalry. Hoping to take the camp unaware, he ordered his cavalry to move only at night. Each man had been supplied with forty rounds of carbine ammunition and thirty rounds of pistol ammunition – by one estimate that meant a total of 16,000 rounds for the cavalry alone. They endured subzero temperatures and lost seventy-five men to frostbite before they neared their target. The infantry rendezvoused with the cavalry on the night of January 28 at Franklin, just miles from the Shoshoni camp. Despite the treacherous conditions, the men were excited about the prospect of killing Indians. Chiefs Bear Hunter and Sagwitch were aware of Connor's presence, and their camp was imposingly fortified along the river and its Battle Creek tributary. Partially encircled by a 200 foot bluff and fronted by a ravine that presented a clear line of fire, they felt secure against any assault. With little more than 200 men, Connor finally reached the village on the icy morning of January 29, 1863. 450 Indians, perhaps 200 of which were warriors, resided within the camp.

At 6:00 A.M. Chief Sagwitch, after observing the approaching troopers, awakened his people and calmly told them not to fire. He assumed Connor had come for those responsible for the recent raids and would leave once they had been apprehended.

² Madsen, *Glory Hunter*, 79.

It immediately became clear that the colonel was interested in no such diplomacy. He ordered McGarry and the cavalry to cross the river and surround the encampment before any could escape. As his men drew up on the plains before the ravine, scores of warriors emerged to oppose and even taunt them: “Come on, you California sons of b____s,” they reportedly cried.³ The Californians obliged. Charging the ravine, the troopers met a withering fire that killed a number of them and forced the rest to dismount and seek cover. Despite this setback, Connor’s force eventually encircled the village. By 8:00 A.M. the Shoshoni warriors were running out of ammunition, reduced to throwing pots and pans at their attackers. In the hand-to-hand fighting that raged for the next two hours, cooking implements proved no match for revolvers. As groups of Indians attempted to flee the oncoming soldiers, the battle became a massacre. The imposing terrain that promised security now ensured their destruction. Dozens of warriors were shot down in the ravine. Others jumped into the river or scrambled up the bluffs. They were picked off by the volunteers with ease. “You would have laughed to have seen an Indian run up the mountain side and before he reached ground there were fourteen bullets in his back,” recalled one civilian witness.⁴ Only twenty men, among them Chief Sagwitch, managed to survive the slaughter.

The results of the “battle” were stunning: at least 250 Shoshoni – 90 of them women and children killed “accidentally” in the crossfire – lay dead or dying. Connor’s casualties amounted to 23 killed and 41 wounded. “In all my experiences in the Western wilds I never saw such a slaughtering as there,” testified a former scout who accompanied the Californians. “Men, women and children were actually lying in heaps, and I think all that got away were a few that hid among the logs and brush.”⁵ Shot while supposedly molding bullets at a campfire, Bear Hunter had tumbled into the flames but was still alive when several Californians discovered him. They beat him mercilessly, finally killing him by driving a heated bayonet through his head. The spoils from the fight were substantial. Connor’s men took approximately 160 women and children

³ Brigham Madsen, *The Shoshoni Frontier and the Bear River Massacre*, (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1985), 186.

⁴ *Utah Monthly Magazine*, December 1892, “The Battle of Bear River,” by Harmon Zufelt, found in Newell Hart, *The Bear River Massacre*, 205.

⁵ William F. Drannan. *Thirty-One Years on the Plains and in the Mountains, or The Last Voice from the Plains*. (Chicago: Rhodes and McClure Publishing Company, 1906), found in Newell Hart, *The Bear River Massacre*, 206.

captive, destroyed 70 lodges, confiscated 1,000 bushels of wheat and flour along with quantities of meat and potatoes, and seized 175 horses. They also helped themselves to whatever trinkets and trophies they could find.

While some men busied themselves destroying the village and the tribe's winter supplies, the massacre that began during the battle continued in its aftermath. Volunteers armed with axes scoured the camp, butchering many of the wounded Shoshoni left behind. Some played dead while the soldiers went about their work, escaping under cover of night. Other soldiers took advantage of the post-battle confusion to indulge in even sketchier activities. They raped an unknown number of women, including some who had been mortally wounded, and shot those who resisted. Though Connor's wounded and dead were quickly evacuated, Indian casualties were left on the field – "food for the coyotes," some might have said. The 160 captives were given a few army rations and abandoned. The next morning, a soldier discovered a woman killed in the previous day's fight. In her arms was an infant who had somehow survived the frigid temperatures, crying out in hunger. He called out to his comrades, and they looked on somberly at the pitiful sight. Out of "mercy," they killed the babe.⁶

On March 29, General-in-Chief Henry W. Halleck promoted Colonel Connor to Brigadier General for his "brilliant victory" against the Shoshoni.⁷

The massacre at Bear River (formerly known as a battle) was once forgotten by history, eclipsed by the Civil War. In recent decades, however, much scholarship has again brought the event to light. Though the details vary, it is now generally accepted that atrocities occurred during and after Connor's engagement with the Shoshoni. Brigham Madsen, the foremost authority on Connor and the massacre, lays the blame squarely on the commanding officer. Conspicuously guiding his men during the battle, he was just as conspicuously absent afterward. Madsen insists that Connor had warned his troops against shooting women and children (say nothing of rape), but the colonel had also made plain beforehand that he intended to take no prisoners.⁸ Exactly what he

⁶ J.H. Martineau, "Military History of the Cache Valley," found in Newell Hart, *The Bear River Massacre*, 197.

⁷ *OR*, Ser. 1, Vol. 50, pt. 1, 187.

⁸ See Madsen, *Glory Hunter*, 84-85.

communicated to his troops is unclear, but despite the ambiguity they obviously cannot be absolved from blame. Whatever Connor's orders, he turned his back after the fight. Therefore, he could not have forced his men to rape and murder – they did that willingly. In perspective, their actions make the any breakdown of discipline among Sherman's troops seem trivial, the "suffering" of Southern civilians trite, and the idea that the American version of "total war" originated with the March to the Sea exceedingly doubtful.

The story of Bear River is told here not to rehash an increasingly known atrocity, but to demonstrate its typicality during the 1860s. As the greatest massacre of Indians during the Civil War, it was simply the standard treatment writ large and could only have occurred against an enemy that had been totally dehumanized. Like all Indian battles during the Civil War, it was relatively small compared to the great clashes in the East and was, therefore, quickly forgotten if noted at all by people outside of the area. Absent the post-battle rape, which was less common than a straightforward massacre, the tactics used at Bear River bore a remarkable similarity to those that marked the campaigns against the Sioux, Navajo, Apache and others. The Sand Creek massacre was exceptional for several reasons: the underlying duplicity of attacking Indians who had been explicitly promised protection, the innocence of the tribes concerned (Bear Hunter's band of Shoshoni had at least been guilty of cattle theft), and the publicity it received. What brought Sand Creek to public attention, however, was not the slaughter and rape of innocent Arapaho and Cheyenne but a determined smear campaign by enemies of Colorado Governor John Evans and Colonel John Chivington who hoped to prevent them from politically capitalizing on the "victory." Bringing the atrocity to light served ulterior motives. Without the politically motivated connivance of these men, it is very likely Sand Creek would have faded into obscurity just as the events at Bear River did.

Tactically, Bear River demonstrates at least four characteristics common among other major encounters: 1.) the effectiveness of the winter campaign and dawn attack; 2.) the desirability of attacking warriors while encumbered by women and children, making their deaths not incidental but *integral* to victory; 3.) the complete destruction of the village and supplies, rendering its occupants destitute and starving, as an example to

others; and 4.) the extent that volunteers were willing to forgo the rules of war in order to achieve total victory, namely, by regularly murdering noncombatants, refusing to accept prisoners and, on a lesser scale, implementing terror techniques such as torture and rape. Sherman and Sheridan, in their campaigns against the Indians, did not simply continue and extend the tactics used against white noncombatants in the South, as some have suggested.⁹ Had they done so, the Indian wars might not have been as brutal as they were. Instead, they adopted the unique tactics already in use by volunteers in the West.

The discovery of the utility of winter attacks against Native Americans has generally been attributed to two officers: General George Crook in his campaign against the Indians in Oregon in 1866-1867 and General Philip Sheridan during the Winter Campaign of 1868-1869 against the Cheyenne, Kiowa and Comanche. The advantages of this tactic were clear. The Indians were concentrated, and because of the weather escape would be difficult. Furthermore, the onset of winter assured that the Indians would not be able to replace supplies destroyed by the army. They faced a choice between starvation and subjugation. There was really nothing new about the concept, however. Regular officers had sporadically employed the tactic before the Civil War. The volunteers were able to experiment with and refine the method, and found it quite useful.¹⁰

By attacking Native Americans during their most vulnerable period, not just the during the warm campaign season, the army could keep them off balance and show the

⁹ See Lance Janda, "Shutting the Gates of Mercy: The American Origins of Total War, 1860-1880," *The Journal of Military History*, Vol. 59, No. 1 (January 1995), 7-26; and Robert Utley's *Frontiersmen in Blue: The United States Army and the Indian, 1848-1865*, (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1967) and *Frontier Regulars: The United States Army and the Indian, 1866-1891*, (Macmillan, 1973). Both authors understandably, but erroneously, see a connection between the "total war" waged against the South by Sherman and Sheridan and the later "total war" implemented against Native Americans by those same commanders. According to Utley, "Sherman and Sheridan, who applied the technique [of total war] in Georgia and Virginia during the Civil War, would give it further significance in the postwar years." (*Frontier Regulars*, 346) Janda makes the connection more directly: "A doctrine [of total war] that was anathema in 1860 emerged from the Civil War as the weapon of choice on the frontier The battlefields of the Civil War were classrooms in which American officers learned the tactics they would apply with devastating effect against Native Americans." (8,26) Because "total war" against the Confederacy never entailed the killing of women and children, however, it is a mistake to view it as the origin of the tactics used against Indians. Utley's assertion is especially perplexing, as he documents many of the dubious activities of western volunteers between 1861 and 1865 that clearly were not part of the repertoire of easterners. More accurately, there existed two sets of tactics that arose independently of one another for use against two different sets of people. Only one of those wars might qualify as "total."

¹⁰ Utley, *Frontier Regulars*, 144-145, 178-181

recalcitrant they had no where to hide. Captain George Currey of the 1st Oregon Infantry proposed such a campaign against the Snakes in November 1864. “I am well convinced that . . . I can find and whip the Indians,” he informed his commanding officer. “They will be forced to winter [around Harney Lake], and to find them in their winter camp is equivalent to destroying them.”¹¹ General James Carleton adopted the technique in his campaign against the Navajo in January 1864. Men under Kit Carson invaded the natural fortress of Canyon de Chelly, killed a score of warriors, and destroyed much of the tribe’s crops, orchards and livestock. Though relatively bloodless, Carleton’s campaign impressed upon the Navajos the futility of resistance. They surrendered by the thousands and were transported to the reservation at Bosque Redondo. In October, the general reiterated the importance of the winter attack: “No peace should be made with them until they are soundly whipped. The winter time is the time to make war upon them. They are then in large villages, obliged to keep on streams where grass and timber can be found, and being embarrassed by their families and by their stores of food, are easily overtaken.” The Indians understood their weakness, Carleton insisted, and as a result were asking for peace in Denver (these were undoubtedly the same Indians slaughtered a month later by Chivington).¹²

As Carleton’s doctrine suggests, surprise was fundamental to victory. In the summer months, Indian scouts could warn their village of approaching dangers. By the time the army arrived the camp was usually well out of harm’s way. A winter campaign was more likely to catch the Indians off guard. Beyond that, the season was a secondary consideration. Though difficult, it was possible to achieve surprise during the warmer months, which the Dakota campaigns clearly demonstrated. Since Native Americans were not generally in the habit of posting pickets, a dawn attack would likely catch a village unaware. “The kind of style is to find their village and let into it about daylight some morning when they don’t look for anything in that line,” asserted a trooper from the 11th Ohio, “then there is prospect of some fun.”¹³ It also helped if the tribe in question did not realize the intentions of an approaching army. At Bear River, Chief Sagwitch expected negotiations. At Sand Creek, Black Kettle expected protection. In the 1863

¹¹ *OR*, Ser. 1, Vol. 50, pt 2, 1049-1050.

¹² *OR*, Ser. 1, Vol. 41, pt. 3, 743-744.

¹³ Unrau, 199.

Dakota Campaign, the Sissetons and Wapetons attacked by Sibley probably did not know what to expect. They had not participated in the uprising of '62, and therefore had no reason to flee.

When an army overtook a tribe in their village, the killing of noncombatants was virtually guaranteed. Numbers of soldiers commented on this unfortunate "side effect" of Indian warfare. One of the few enlisted men to record the events at Bear River estimated that 400 warriors had been killed, "say nothing about the squaws and young bucks that got in the way."¹⁴ Some troopers from the 3rd Colorado professed a similar story after Sand Creek. Though providing a plausible screen for a massacre, countless women and children were also killed in what were genuinely considered to be "accidents." When Sully's men attacked their village at Whitestone Hill, many of the Sioux scrambled for cover within a ravine. Troopers overran the position near sunset, firing away blindly into the night. Morning revealed that the shelter had become a tomb. "Dead and crippled ponies, squaws, papooses and Indians lay in confusion, and blood scattered on all sides," reported a trooper in 7th Iowa. The area outside of the ravine presented a spectacle no less grim. "We saw a little Indian boy on the field, naked and crying; no one paid any attention to him. . . .At one place there lay two papooses; one of them four or five years old, the other only a few months. A dead squaw, probably their mother, lay by them Another one was crying 'Mamma! mamma!' as pitifully as any white child could."¹⁵ No battle during the Dakota Wars has ever been labeled as a massacre.

Before the battle at Tongue River, the climax of Connor's Powder River Expedition against the Plains tribes in 1865, volunteers were supposedly ordered to avoid killing women and children "as much as possible."¹⁶ When they attacked an Arapaho village in the early morning hours, however, confusion reigned supreme. Vicious hand-to-hand fighting ensued, with noncombatants caught up in the middle of it all. "Our men had no time to direct their aim," recorded a former captain in the 11th Kansas Cavalry. "Squaws and children, as well as warriors, fell among the dead and wounded. The scene was indescribable. There was not much of the military in our movements, each man

¹⁴ Hiram Tuttle Reminiscence, found in Newell Hart, *The Bear River Massacre*, (Preston, ID: Cache Valley Newsletter Publishing Company, 1982), 129.

¹⁵ Letter from Corwin Lee, 7th Iowa Cavalry, in *Iowa City Republican*, 18 November 1863. Found in Throne, 171.

¹⁶ Adams, 16.

seemed an army by himself.”¹⁷ The swiftness of events impressed even veterans. “We went into that village as I have never seen cavalry go before or since,” remembered one, “and the fight was something terrific.” As mobs of warriors, women and children tried to escape, howitzers – not particularly precise weapons, especially when firing canister and shell – rained iron terror on all alike. So rapidly did the gunners go about their work, the pieces quickly overheated and became useless. Omaha scouts accompanying Connor’s force also joined the fray, “showing their savage instincts by killing everyone they met . . .” During the rout, soldiers shot a warrior fleeing on horseback with two children. He fell to the ground dead, leaving the children trapped between the lines. After a few minutes they were both killed “unintentionally” in the crossfire. “It was a sad sight,” the veteran concluded, “but one of the unavoidable incidents of this kind of warfare.”¹⁸

There was nothing incidental about their deaths, however. As General Carleton had so thoroughly elaborated, the entire point of surprising a village was not to catch warriors off guard, but to catch them off guard while “embarrassed by their families” so that they could not run. The presence of women and children were integral to an army’s success; their deaths a direct result of intentional tactics. Though soldiers might rationalize their deaths as an “unavoidable” means to an end, and though they might deplore them, their actions during battle bring into question how carefully they tried to prevent noncombatant casualties. The use of a howitzer against a village, by its very nature an indiscriminate weapon, suggests they were none too worried about the matter. Ironically, the men condemned as “savage” the Indian scouts who also killed indiscriminately. Did it matter if women and children were killed by warriors rather than artillery? In the case of Tongue River some of the volunteers evidently thought it did, and a few even rescued children who otherwise would have been butchered. Their actions mystified the Omahas. “It was not right to let them go as they would produce

¹⁷ Capt. H.E. Palmer’s Account of the Connor Expedition, *Powder River Campaigns and Sawyers Expedition of 1865*, 131.

¹⁸ Captain J. Lee Humfreville’s Reminiscent Account, *Powder River Campaigns and Sawyers Expedition of 1865*, 367-369.

more bad Indians,” they supposedly replied.¹⁹ Their confusion was understandable. “Nits make lice.”

Regardless of how many children they might have saved, the fact that volunteers intentionally used noncombatants as a means to reach their goal made their actions morally indefensible – even if they avoided killing them “as much as possible.” As one historian has aptly pointed out, the principle of “double effect” is instructive in understanding the military strategy of attacking Indian villages and how it differed from the “sieges” of Southern cities such as Vicksburg and Atlanta. In essence, the concept of double effect acknowledges that an action will have both a positive and negative outcome. It distinguishes between the causing of harm as an unintended, but sometimes unavoidable, *side effect* of reaching a good end, and the intentional causing of harm as a *means* of reaching a good end. The first is morally acceptable, the second is not. The siege of Atlanta, for instance, is most notable for the actions Sherman did not take. He did not surprise the city at dawn, nor did his men rush pell-mell through the streets during the battle shooting down soldier and civilian indiscriminately. *That* would have made him the monster the South claimed he was. Instead, there was nothing surprising about his arrival at the gates of Atlanta; civilian and military officials both knew his destination weeks beforehand, and many residents chose to leave. Nor did his men storm the city itself. There was no need. Their target was the Confederate army entrenched on the outskirts, not the relatively few citizens still left who easily dodged the infrequent mortar rounds that came their way. Should any of them have been killed, their deaths really would have been incidental. Placing noncombatants in danger was not a means to an end, but a side effect. The rebel army and the manufacturing capabilities of Atlanta always remained the primary targets.

In the attacks at Bear River, Sand Creek, Whitestone Hill and others, surprise was paramount in order to guarantee that noncombatants would not only be in close proximity to the fighting, but directly in harm’s way. Their presence was not merely incidental, but fundamental to military victory. Without them, the army might not be able to bring the

¹⁹ Capt. H.E. Palmer’s Account of the Connor Expedition, *Powder River Campaigns and Sawyers Expedition of 1865*, 136; Finn Burnett’s Account, *Powder River Campaigns and Sawyers Expedition of 1865*, 213.

elusive warriors to bear. Indian noncombatants were, unfortunately, a means to an end that otherwise might not have been possible. As the political scientist Michael Walzer explains in his study of double effect in warfare, there are indeed moral guidelines that regulate the actions of combatants which volunteers clearly violated: “A soldier must take careful aim *at* his target and *away from* nonmilitary targets. He can shoot only if he has a reasonably clear shot; he can attack only if a direct attack is possible. He can risk incidental deaths, but he cannot kill civilians simply because he finds them between himself and his enemies.” But the volunteers did more than simply “find” civilians between themselves and their enemies. They had in many instances gone to great lengths to ensure that they were there.²⁰

No doubt many soldiers would have scoffed at such moralistic “nonsense.” Their foes were dangerous animals, not human beings. Ethics, morality, and Lieber’s Code had their place in the East; in the West they seemed positively quaint. If the killing of innocents was what victory required, so be it. In all fairness, preventing unnecessary noncombatant casualties would have compelled commanders to take what seemed extraordinary risks with their own forces. The simplest method of minimizing noncombatant deaths – surrounding a village, giving warriors a chance to surrender, and allowing women and children safe passage – was also fraught with difficulties. Rarely did armies have enough men to completely encircle a village, and even if they did such a large force increased the odds of detection. If alerted warriors slipped away to attack from a covered position, the casualty list could mount quickly. Furthermore, with a village surrounded, there was always the danger of soldiers killing each other in the crossfire. Such, in fact, had occurred at Sand Creek. At Whitestone Hill, the danger of inadvertently firing upon each other prevented Sully’s men from completely carrying the field. The drawbacks of ethical behavior left commanders with the only option they believed feasible: a swift and unannounced attack on the entire camp.

Drawing noncombatants into the fight not only resulted in their “unavoidable” deaths, but sometimes forced them to act as combatants. That a woman might pick up a

²⁰ Grimsley, “‘Rebels’ and ‘Redskins,’” 141-143; Michael Walzer. *Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument with Historical Illustrations*. (New York: Basic Books, 1977), 151-159, 174; See also Walzer’s “Double Effect” in *The Doctrine of Double Effect: Philosophers Debate a Controversial Moral Principle*, P.A. Woodward, ed., (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001).

musket or a hatchet to prevent her family from being slaughtered is understandable, but her actions made it that much easier to rationalize killing her. Years after the fight at Bear River, for instance, a veteran of the 2nd California continued to insist that he had been shot by a woman. “The fighting was fast,” he recounted. “Men and women was shooting guns and every other thing they could get their hands on. . . I always thought it was a squaw that shot me.”²¹ After Connor’s men drove the Arapaho from their village at Tongue River, warriors mounted an unexpected counterattack from the cover of brush along the creek. As the volunteers attempted to drive them out, two women emerged from the growth and approached the major in command. It appeared as if they wished to surrender but one of them, unbeknownst to the major, held a hatchet. According to one “witness,” a teamster who accompanied the column, a soldier spotted the weapon and yelled out as she hurled it at the commander. He dodged just in time, the blade grazing his head. Without blinking, he fired his revolver and dropped her to the ground. “He had the pistol in his hand and shot before he thought,” insisted the teamster. “When he realized what he had done he was sorry and said: ‘Great God, boys, don’t ever tell that I killed a squaw.’”²² How often women took up arms against their attackers cannot be known with any certainty, but as the above examples suggest volunteers did not hesitate to use force against them. More important is the suspiciously contrived feel of the scenarios. Though the presence of women and children resulted in a variety of problems, fabricating a story to justify their deaths was not one of them.

Under the guise of military necessity, soldiers could also kill women and children even when they did not pose a “threat.” In the confusion of battle, when every man acted as an army unto himself, too much discretion was left with the private soldier as to what constituted a “legitimate” target and what did not. A definite lack of accountability pervaded the ranks. When a trooper had a woman or child in his sights, he need not worry about punishment if he decided to pull the trigger. It was understood that those sort of things happened in this kind of warfare. With the absence of legal sanctions (or rather the unlikelihood of them being enforced), the decision to kill a noncombatant ultimately boiled down to the individual and his subjective beliefs of guilt and innocence.

²¹ John S. Lee account of Bear River found in Newell Hart, *The Bear River Massacre*, 130.

²² Finn Burnett’s Account, *Powder River Campaigns and Sawyers Expedition of 1865*, 213-214.

Did this woman or child deserve to die? Should they be held accountable for depredations committed by a portion of the tribe? It was easy to answer in the affirmative; easier still to carry the sentence out. During the fight at Killdeer Mountain in July 1864, some of Sully's men took note of a large hill on the left-front of their line. As they drew closer, pushing Sioux warriors before them, they found it covered with women and children who had paused in their flight to gaze upon the battle. They posed no threat, and having separated themselves from the fighting might have been safely ignored. Instead, artillerymen made a point of training their cannon on the hill. "The first shell exploded before reaching the butte," recalled a volunteer who watched the spectacle, "but the second one exploded on top of it. In a very short time the Indians were scattered in all directions."²³ Another trooper estimated that the cannonade killed at least twenty-five of the hapless spectators and a number of horses.²⁴ Had Sherman's artillerymen adopted the same tactic against the Southern ladies who watched the fighting from atop Kennesaw Mountain in Georgia, one can only wonder about the response.

In the hours after the battle, when volunteers went about the task of destroying the village, some of them came across an infant left on the field. "The papoose was shot," wrote a lieutenant in the 8th Minnesota, "by or possibly without an order, but it could not be helped."²⁵ Why, exactly, it could not be helped was left unanswered, but the reflections of a Minnesota cavalryman offer some illumination. After the rout, Sully's army continued its pursuit of the Sioux. Days into the march, the trooper discovered the body of a Sioux boy, perhaps five or six years old, wrapped in a buffalo robe and left by the wayside. The bullet wound in his head left little doubt that he had been killed by a soldier's rifle during the recent battle. He pitied the child, but only for a moment. Images of the 1862 massacre crushed all compassion. "None but the most heathen and savage minds could have thought up such heart rending and soul sickening crimes as they perpetrated upon poor defenseless females," he remarked. "When I would get to thinking of these things my blood would boil and I would almost ache to send a bullet through

²³ Myers, 15.

²⁴ Scott, 10-11.

²⁵ Kingsbury, 456.

their hearts.”²⁶ A battle, in effect, was little more than government sanctioned vigilantism. The volunteers, however, did not believe they acted immorally; they simply operated under a different set of moral assumptions peculiar to the Indian wars. Shooting down noncombatants was not criminal, but a way to protect or avenge loved ones and comrades.

Even with a limited number of troops, there were still other choices available that may have lessened the toll on women and children, but how effective (or moral) they may have been is debatable. At first glance, General Carleton’s plan of treating all Indians as hostile appears unnecessarily harsh, but it had its advantages and served a purpose greater than simple destruction. The commander of the California Column could be pompous, overbearing and arrogant, but he was no advocate of extermination. On the contrary, he believed his ruthless methods would eventually save more Indians than they killed. The reservation he created for the Apaches and Navajos at Bosque Redondo, inappropriately characterized as a “concentration camp” by some scholars, more resembled the “strategic hamlet” of a later war. It acted as a clearing station of sorts. Well in advance of his campaigns, Carleton informed tribal leaders of his intentions. There would be no negotiations. They would surrender or perish. If his men captured individuals, they sometimes released them with instructions for their tribesmen: go to the Bosque Redondo. By waging unremitting war against the Indians, refusing to negotiate, and accepting nothing less than their unconditional surrender and internment, Carleton rather arbitrarily managed to separate “friendly” from “hostile.” Thousands of warriors, believing internment better than extermination, sought refuge at the camp with their families.

Though he was a proponent and practitioner of the dubious use of noncombatants to ensure victory on the field Carleton, unlike many of his colleagues, did not destroy villages as an end in itself. Despite his brutality, the general had more in common with Eastern humanitarians than many of them cared to admit. At Bosque Redondo, he hoped to acculturate the Indians through religious and agricultural instruction under the watchful eyes of the United States military. Ultimately, his reservation experiment

²⁶ John E. Robinson to “Dear Libbie,” 11 October 1864, Dakota Conflict of 1862 Manuscripts Collection, MHS.

proved a dismal failure. The general's heavy-handed tactics alienated many of the Indians he hoped to coax on to the reservation, and those interred suffered dreadfully from malnutrition and disease. Approximately one-quarter of the nearly 10,000 Apaches and Navajos who were sent there between 1863 and 1868 died. The idea itself had been sound, however, and a less autocratic officer may have achieved more favorable results. By giving them the opportunity to surrender and a theoretical safe-haven, a place where warriors as well as their families could be protected, Carleton had at least offered the Indians an alternative to death. General Sibley, by comparison, harbored no such "magnanimity." After driving the Sioux from eastern Dakota in the summer of 1863 and destroying their villages and winter stores, he could only hope that it would cause "many, perhaps most of them, to perish miserably in their utter destitution during the coming fall and winter."²⁷

Another possibility, though probably even less practical from a soldier's standpoint, also existed. When blue-coated troopers unexpectedly arrived at the perimeter of a village, warriors routinely began to remove women and children from danger – provided they were given enough time to do so. When detachments of the 6th Iowa, acting as scouts for Sully's army, happened upon a Sioux village of several thousand at Whitestone Hill in September 1863, scores of warriors immediately surrounded them. Instead of attacking, however, they began a parley with the troops. The Indians insisted they were friendly and were simply gathering provisions for the winter. While the negotiations went on, women in camp began to tear down lodges in preparation to move. Certainly they had heard by then what had happened to the Sissetons and Wapahetons at the hands of General Sibley a month before, so one cannot wonder at their desire to keep clear of the army now before them. Noticing their activity, the commander of the detachment correctly surmised that the chiefs were stalling for time. He demanded the surrender of the entire village, warning them that Sully's army was on its way and they would be punished. The chiefs refused and, according to one

²⁷ Lynn Bailey's *Bosque Redondo: An American Concentration Camp*, (Pasadena, CA: Socio-Technical Books, 1970) espouses the "concentration camp" view. In contrast to the extreme images associated with such a label, the Navajo and Apache interred at the reservation regularly left its confines to steal livestock from neighboring ranches and to hunt. A more objective appraisal of the Bosque Redondo and its myriad problems can be found in Gerald Thompson's, *The Army and the Navajo*, (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1976), which also discusses Carleton's personality and flaws; Elwyn B. Robinson, *History of North Dakota*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966), 100.

volunteer, told him “to just wait until they got their squaws and papooses out of the way, and they would attend to him.” Still they did not attack the isolated troopers. An uncomfortable standoff between the groups ensued, each silently eyeing the other – until the arrival of the 2nd Nebraska Cavalry.²⁸ A guide had managed to slip past the cordon of warriors and warn Sully of the Iowans' predicament. The Nebraskans came at the double quick from eight miles out. When they arrived at the scene they slowed not at all, charging past the Sixth and into the Sioux camp, shooting at everything in sight. “Infants & innocent children & women alike shared the fate of their guilty fathers,” confided one. “There must have been 5000 indians on the field including their families, but they reeled before our fire like trees before the gale.”²⁹

Had the troopers not interrupted, undoubtedly the women and children would have continued the exodus. Of course, many of the warriors might also have escaped, but the chiefs had already explicitly announced their desire to do battle. Allowing noncombatants to leave beforehand, however, would have required some restraint and discretion on the part of the soldiers. As the overriding goal of the volunteers was not to prevent noncombatant casualties, but to limit their own while punishing the Indians, restraint in combat was highly unlikely. Nor, from their point of view, was it practical. Since they could not possibly battle every tribe scattered across the West, they believed their best option lay in making an example of those they could catch in the hope of cowing the others. Proving the dominance of the military and the futility of resistance could not be accomplished with a partial victory. The defeat had to be total, the destruction complete, and the methods ruthless. When neighboring tribes learned of the decimation wrought by the army, they could not be allowed to doubt for an instant that a similar fate awaited them unless they capitulated. Annihilation, then, conveniently served both rational (victory) and irrational (vengeance) ends.

And decimate the army did, “dealing death on every hand,” as one volunteer so fittingly described it.³⁰ In contemplating the destruction of an Indian village, the absolute

²⁸ Letter from Corwin Lee, 7th Iowa Cavalry, *Iowa City Republican*, 18 November 1863, found in Throne, 169.

²⁹ Rowen, *Diary of Henry W. Pierce*, 46-47.

³⁰ Captain J. Lee Humfreville's *Reminiscent Account, Powder River Campaigns and Sawyers Expedition of 1865*, 367. Captain used this phrase to describe his men's actions as they attacked the Arapaho village at Tongue River – though they had supposedly been ordered to avoid killing women and children.

totality of the event must be acknowledged. As a point of comparison, one can look to the “destruction” of towns and cities during the Civil War. The burning of Atlanta, Columbia and countless smaller communities throughout the Confederacy was genuinely traumatic for the citizens who lived there. Chambersburg, Pennsylvania, intentionally and maliciously set aflame by vengeful Confederates under General Jubal Early was perhaps even more so. While the suffering of civilians North and South should not be trivialized or belittled, it should also be kept in perspective. Though Sherman and his men were content to watch Columbia burn, it was not their intent to raze the city – nor did they. General Early, if his intent was total destruction, also failed. Maybe one-third of Columbia fell to the flames; Chambersburg, owing to its smaller size and the work of highly motivated rebels-turned-arsonists, suffered heavier damage. Three-quarters of its central business district, encompassing approximately twelve blocks, disappeared and 3,000 were left homeless. In both events, very few civilian casualties occurred.³¹

The pattern held true for smaller towns encountered by Sherman’s men. Few, if any, civilian casualties were reported. Smoke houses and gardens were plundered, but as a rule the men left families enough food to prevent starvation. Barns, out-buildings, warehouses and plantations were destroyed, but private dwellings were usually spared if they were occupied. The most crucial aspect to remember about Sherman’s March, one that is too readily forgotten, was the rarity of physical attacks on civilians themselves. Union bummers mangled railroads, not people. Sherman and his men understood that the errant citizens were still Americans, still part of the same “community,” even if temporarily estranged from it. They would eventually return to that community after they had been properly convinced of the foolishness of their actions. As such, they needed to be punished, but not destroyed. That sense of community saved them from a much worse fate.

How volunteers handled enemies whom they did not consider part of or capable of joining their community is horrifically illuminated by their actions against Native Americans and their villages. After routing a tribe, “disposing” of any wounded, and

³¹ Marion Brunson Lucas’s, *Sherman and the Burning of Columbia*, (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1976), remains one of the best and most objective studies of the event. The chaos of the destruction is also dramatically captured in Charles Royster’s, *The Destructive War*. A discussion of the burning of Chambersburg can be found in Everard H. Smith’s, “Chambersburg: Anatomy of a Confederate Reprisal,” *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 96, No. 2 (April 1991), 432-455.

rounding up prisoners – should they decide to take any – their work was still only partially complete. A frenzy of intentional destruction always followed an attack, and the entire village was left in flames. At Whitestone Hill, the Sioux lost over 400,000 pounds of buffalo meat along with all their lodges, ponies, cooking implements and whatever else they had not managed to carry off in the final desperate moments before the soldiers overran them. “To show the extent of their loss in a measure I will just say that it took a party of 100 men two days to gather up the stuff and burn it,” recorded one trooper. “This was considered the best part of the victory because it took away all their winter supplies”³² Those not charged with burning property were allowed to rummage through the camp and loot as they pleased. “We busied ourselves today in strolling about the field & picking up whatever we wanted,” wrote a Nebraskan on the first night after the battle. “Many of us before night had made leggings, made saddle robes & . . . trimmed our bridles with indians fixings, replenished our outfit of cooking utensils, cups, plates, knives, spoons, camp kettles, till you could not rest, & as our own kettles were nearly worn out these came into play. We used their tepee poles for wood” The fires burned well into following day “as incense of our fury & their sin,” he concluded. “I don’t think there ever had been a battle so fierce & destructive to any one tribe as this” Tanning tools, beads, paints and anything else the men had no use for or could not carry were thrown into the flames – even the bodies of their dead comrades which they hoped to save from retaliatory desecration. Nothing was allowed to escape. Squads of men spent the day shooting scores of dogs left behind by the Sioux.³³

A comparable loss occurred a year later at Killdeer Mountain. “The destruction of this camp and its supplies was a greater blow to the Indians than the loss of the braves who were killed,” thought an officer in the 8th Minnesota Infantry. “The amount of supplies, including pemmican, jerked buffalo meat, dried berries, and buffalo robes, that was burned could not be estimated, – it was immense.” The men took for themselves whatever they could carry, and then burned the rest.³⁴ “one regiment was sent to burn their Property late in the afternoon 4 Companies more were sent for the same purpose while others were on Guard or Shooting the Dogs,” wrote another. “the Property is

³² Drips, 45-46.

³³ Rowen, Diary of Henry W. Pierce, 47-49.

³⁴ Kingsbury, 456.

immense . . . it will take a great [number of] years for them to gather together again as much as we have destroyed[.]”³⁵ They destroyed not only foodstuffs and clothing but seemingly worthless pots, pans and camp kettles: “All the little conveniences of the women, their toilet bags – cooking utensils – were piled and burned – it was a wholesale destruction of property – entailing a loss to the Indians great as would be the burning of a city after the inhabitants had been driven from its portals, they had nothing left.”³⁶ Though destruction of these domestic items might hinder the ability of warriors to continue their resistance, it ensured the suffering of the entire tribe. The indiscriminate war waged by the army did not stop just because the battle had ended, nor was it limited to the Sioux. Lest one think that wrathful Minnesotans held a monopoly on destructive tendencies it should be noted that Apache, Navajo, Cheyenne, Arapaho and Snake villages met the same fate at the hands of Californians, New Mexicans, Coloradoans, Ohioans and Oregonians.³⁷ Even the peaceful Winnebagos of Minnesota did not escape. Despite their refusal to join with the Santee under Little Crow, citizens would not tolerate their presence in the state. Though they pleaded to remain on their lands, volunteers nevertheless forced them from their village in May 1863. Their encampment was subsequently put to the torch and left, as one trooper uttered, “a flaming witness to the advantage of strength over weakness.”³⁸

5.5.2 Dissent at Sand Creek

Captain Silas Soule was just twenty-six years old in November 1864. Born into an abolitionist family from Maine, the principled young man had traveled to Kansas with his parents as part of the Emigrant Aid Society in 1854. At seventeen, he was helping

³⁵ John Henry Strong Diary, 29 July 1864, Dakota Conflict of 1862 Manuscripts Collection, MHS.

³⁶ Benjamin W. Brunson Reminiscence (Major in 8th Minnesota Infantry), n.d., Dakota Conflict of 1862 Manuscripts Collection, MHS.

³⁷ See Unrau, *Tending the Talking Wire*, 156 and Knuth, “Cavalry in the Indian Country, 1864,” 37. Hervey Johnson of the 11th Ohio Cavalry recorded in his diary on July 26, 1864 a fight between a band of Indians and troopers of his regiment near Platte River Bridge. “Our boys destroyed all the lodges and every thing the indians had,” he wrote with some satisfaction to his sister. “You may think they are receiving rough treatment from us, but it is nothing compared with what is their due.” Captain John M. Drake of the 1st Oregon Cavalry helped destroy a Snake village led by the chief Paulina in May 1864. “The hostile camp was found upon examination to be well stored with provisions of all kinds and a large quantity of plunder that they must have been a long time in accumulating,” he recorded in his journal. “Their camp was fired and everything burned.”

³⁸ Glanville, 100-103.

Missouri slaves escape through the Underground Railroad and soon after became embroiled in the Border Wars between Jayhawkers and Ruffians. He supported John Brown, a family friend, and was determined to rescue him from execution following his failed attempt to instigate a slave uprising at Harper's Ferry, Virginia in 1859. Soule, posing as a drunk, got himself arrested and placed in the same jail. Though he convinced a guard to let him speak with Brown, the doomed man refused his overtures. He would serve his cause as a martyr, not a fugitive.

Two years later, Soule enlisted in the 1st Colorado Volunteers. He served honorably with Chivington at Glorietta, "the Gettysburg of the West," and helped turn back the Confederate invasion of New Mexico. By 1864, he was in command of his own company in the 1st Colorado Cavalry and again enmeshed in controversy. While stationed at Fort Lyon in Colorado Territory, Soule, along with his superior Major Edward Wynkoop, helped negotiate a peace settlement with Black Kettle's band of Cheyenne and Arapaho who subsequently camped along Sand Creek. Over the previous year, tensions between Colorado citizens and neighboring Indians had increased dramatically. Alarmed by the 1862 Sioux uprising, Coloradoans assumed that "their" Indians would likely follow suit. Prodded by the delusions of Governor John Evans and Denver *Rocky Mountain News* editor William Byers, an aura of impending Armageddon pervaded the land. Terrified of an Indian war, their hysterics helped bring about the very thing they most feared.

Colonel John M. Chivington took command of the District of Colorado in 1863, and wasted little time in alienating the Cheyenne and Arapaho. Acting on spurious reports of Indian threats, his lieutenants indiscriminately attacked two villages of unoffending Cheyenne. When the Arapaho peace chief Left Hand tried to assist the commander of Fort Larned in recovering a herd of horses stolen by Kiowas, the garrison fired on his band. Retaliatory raids on the outlying settlements naturally followed, and many ranchers fled their homes. General Samuel R. Curtis, commander at Fort Leavenworth in Kansas and himself no friend of the Indian, sent a subordinate to investigate the situation. His report was not optimistic: "If great caution is not exercised on our part, there will be a bloody war. It should be our policy to try and conciliate [the Indians], guard our mails and trains well to prevent theft, and stop these scouting parties .

. . . that are roaming over the country, who do not know one tribe from another and who will kill anything in the shape of an Indian.” He concluded with a dire warning: “It will require only a few more murders on the part of our troops to unite all these warlike tribes.”³⁹

The damage had already been accomplished. Throughout the summer of 1864, bands of Cheyenne and Arapaho raided along the Platte River, closing the trails leading to Denver for six weeks. Dozens of emigrants and settlers were killed. In June, a small party of Arapahos or Cheyenne Dog Soldiers (the identity of the killers remains uncertain) brutally murdered rancher Ward Hungate and his family, tossing the bodies into a well. The corpses were later recovered and displayed in the streets of Denver, driving the populace into a wild rage. Governor Evans frantically wired General Curtis for reinforcements. He could spare none, but he authorized the mustering of a hundred day regiment, the 3rd Colorado Cavalry, for the purpose of territorial defense.

Much has been said and written about the composition of the Third Cavalry: its members enthusiastically enlisted to kill Indians; they were inexperienced, ill-equipped and poorly officered; they were the dregs and toughs of Denver society, recruited from the saloons and bawdy houses. There is some truth to these claims. As for the arms provided to the regiment, they were certainly less than desirable; the best weapons had been distributed to Colorado regiments already in the field. Though at least half of the officers had seen some form of military service, there can be no doubt that the men were largely inexperienced. Though this fact has often been cited as a liability and used to explain the atrocities they would later commit, it makes little sense to attribute their crimes to a simple problem of discipline. After all, the Union army at Bull Run in 1861 was also comprised of undisciplined ninety day volunteers. There are no credible accounts of any of them overrunning Virginia towns and slaughtering Southern civilians. In bucking orders, they preferred the much more benign activity of unauthorized blackberry picking.

As for the men themselves, their answer to the territory’s call was far from “enthusiastic.” Recruiting proceeded so slowly that in mid-August Chivington found it

³⁹ Quoted in William M. Osborn, *The Wild Frontier: Atrocities during the American-Indian War from Jamestown Colony to Wounded Knee*, (New York: Random House, 2000), 211.

necessary to declare martial law to speed up enlistments. Men who had avoided military duty since 1861 or had been discharged from the service did not look keenly upon the interruption of their livelihoods. Of the 1,149 who eventually entered the ranks, the personal backgrounds of 800 are known. The majority, unsurprisingly, reported their occupations as miners or farmers. Two hundred others variously described themselves as laborers, clerks, teamsters, carpenters, mechanics, engineers, merchants, and printers (including an editor from the *Rocky Mountain News*). The Third might have been classified as a “blue-collar” regiment, but the United States in the 1860s was a blue-collar society. The make-up of the regiment did not significantly deviate from other volunteer units or from the country at large, and though enlistee views on Indians might not have been representative of all Americans, they certainly reflected those of Westerners.⁴⁰

Because of its later actions, the Third has been severely criticized as nothing more than a rag-tag militia unworthy of United States service. Posterity has taken some comfort in dismissing its members as louts and drunkards, hooligans and hoodlums gleaned from the Denver gutters. Indeed, there has been a conscious effort to separate them from the more “respectable” regulars and volunteers who patrolled the Plains or fought in the Civil War.⁴¹ Such despicable deeds, after all, could only have been undertaken by despicable men. Coloradoans, however, held a decidedly different view of them in 1864. They were the saviors of the city, and avengers of the fallen. Even the editors of the Black Hawk *Daily Mining Journal*, rivals of Byers and his *Rocky Mountain News* and bitter critics of both Evans and Chivington, spoke of the regiment with admiration. “The men are a magnificent set,” wrote editor Ovando Hollister after watching the Third on parade, “and as well-drilled and soldierly as could be expected under the circumstances.”⁴² However difficult it is to accept, the soldiers that would perpetrate one of the greatest massacres of Indians in American history were not social deviants – unless, of course, we are to consider all of Western society deviant.

As plans for the territory’s defense continued, Governor Evans felt compelled to take action. On June 27, he issued a proclamation calling for all Indians along the

⁴⁰ See Raymond G. Carey’s, “The ‘Bloodless Third’ Regiment, Colorado Volunteer Cavalry,” in *Colorado Magazine*, Vol. 38, (October, 1961), 275-300.

⁴¹ See Utley, *Frontiersmen in Blue*, 293; and Josephy, *The Civil War in the American West*, 306.

⁴² Black Hawk *Daily Mining Journal*, 26 September 1864.

Arkansas River who professed to be peaceful to distance themselves from those who would wage war and seek shelter at nearby Fort Lyon. “The object of this,” he declared, “is to prevent friendly Indians from being killed through mistake.” Two weeks later, on August 11, he issued yet another statement that in effect declared open season on all “hostile” Indians. He authorized “all citizens of Colorado . . . to go in pursuit of all hostile Indians on the plains” Though he insisted that would-be Indian hunters should “scrupulously” avoid attacking any who had heeded his earlier call to surrender, he also promised that citizens would be allowed to keep for themselves all plunder seized during the campaign. The *Rocky Mountain News* enthusiastically endorsed the Governor’s position. “Eastern humanitarians who believe in the superiority of the Indian race will raise a terrible howl over this policy,” reported the paper, but self preservation demanded drastic action. “A few months of active extermination against the red devils will bring quiet, and nothing else will.” The *Daily Mining Journal* followed soon after: “If there be one idea that should become an axiom in American politics it is THAT THE RED MAN SHOULD BE DESTROYED.”⁴³

By the end of August, Evans exhibited signs of full-fledged panic. He reported to Washington that roving bands of Indians were threatening the lines of communication to the east and preventing the gathering of crops in outlying areas. Starvation loomed over a besieged Denver. “It is impossible to exaggerate our danger,” he wired Secretary of War Edwin Stanton. “We are doing all we can for our defence.”⁴⁴ He believed, erroneously, that the Plains tribes had united for the purpose of driving all whites from the territory. In early September, however, an incident occurred which should have allayed his fears. Southeast of Denver, emissaries from the Cheyenne chief Black Kettle had contacted the commander of Fort Lyon, Major Edward Wynkoop of the 1st Colorado, expressing a desire for peace. Skeptical of their overtures, he struck out toward their village with a small detachment of 120 men. The gamble paid off: after surrendering four white captives, Black Kettle and six other Cheyenne and Arapaho chiefs agreed to accompany

⁴³ Proclamations of Governor Evans, 27 June 1864 and 11 August 1864, quoted in *Sand Creek Papers; Testimonies and statements reflecting facts concerning the killing of Cheyenne and Arapaho Indians on November 29, 1864 by the Third Colorado Volunteers*, (Black Forest, Colorado: Black Forest Bookman, 1959), 6-7, 8; *Rocky Mountain News*, 10 August 1864. A complete archive of the *Rocky Mountain News* is available on the web courtesy of the Colorado Historical Society. *Black Hawk Daily Mining Journal*, 30 August 1864.

⁴⁴ John Evans to Edwin M. Stanton, 18 August 1864, *Sand Creek Papers*, 59.

Wynkoop and his lieutenants to Denver, where they hoped to take advantage of Evans's earlier promise of protection.

Their arrival caused considerable excitement among the population, and greatly embarrassed the governor. After all his skittish pronouncements, such an effortless procurement of peace would reflect badly on his judgment. Consequently, the governor at first refused to even speak with them. They had already declared war on the whites, he lamely told Wynkoop, and vaguely implied that by doing so had somehow forfeited the right to surrender. More importantly, he reminded the major, the Third Colorado had been mustered for the purpose of killing Indians, "and they must kill Indians."⁴⁵ Still, despite their irritation over Wynkoop's actions, both Evans and Chivington agreed to meet with the chiefs at Camp Weld on September 28. Members of the sedentary Third Colorado – increasingly and derisively referred to by citizens as the "Bloodless Third" – reacted with outrage. Taunted by the public for their inaction and anxious to strike before the expiration of their enlistments, they nearly mutinied when word of the peace talks reached them.

It was a tense council. Evans took the position that he could no longer treat with the Cheyenne and Arapaho because they were in a state of war. After questioning the chiefs as to the location of various tribes, he declared the situation a military matter and turned the meeting over to Colonel Chivington. No less evasive than the governor, the commander of the Colorado military district proclaimed that when the Indians were ready to surrender, they should report to Major Wynkoop at Fort Lyon (significantly, the fort sat within the Department of Kansas under the jurisdiction of General Curtis). This they had already done, and they left the council to gather their people under the reasonable assumption that a peace arrangement had been secured. Chivington thought differently. A politically ambitious Indian-hater vested with military authority, he hoped to capitalize on the fame a victory over the Indians would bring. Before the council began, he sent a message to General Curtis informing him of the situation, and the reply came shortly after the talks concluded. Upset that his subordinate, Major Wynkoop, had traveled outside of his district to negotiate an unauthorized treaty with Black Kettle and his followers, he made clear to Chivington his intentions: "I want no peace till the Indians

⁴⁵ Quoted in Osborn, 213.

suffer more. . . .No peace must be made without my directions.”⁴⁶ No one bothered to inform Wynkoop or the hapless tribes at Fort Lyon of this missive.

A confusing train of events quickly followed. By mid-October, hundreds of Arapahos under Little Raven were camped outside of Fort Lyon. In accordance with the Camp Weld agreements, Wynkoop accepted their surrender and provided them with food and supplies. Anonymously, someone informed Curtis of his actions. On November 4, he relieved Wynkoop of command for violating his wishes not to treat with the Indians and recalled him to Kansas to account for his actions. The new post commander, Major Scott Anthony of the 1st Colorado, indecisively disarmed the Arapaho before returning their weapons and ordering them away from the fort. As they encamped along the mouth of Sand Creek, Anthony halted the disbursement of rations and waited for approval from Curtis. Black Kettle arrived two days later, informing the major that his tribe was encamped some forty miles away along the upper part of Sand Creek. He ordered the chief and his people – 500 Southern Cheyenne and fifty Arapaho – to remain there until he received word from his superior.

While the oblivious Indians camped outside of Fort Lyon, Chivington issued marching orders to the restless soldiers of the “Bloodless Third.” The sudden movement raised hopes within the ranks. During the night of November 28 Chivington, with a combined force of the Third Colorado, elements of the First and a battalion of New Mexicans, arrived unannounced at the fort after a secretive march. He intended to attack the peaceful Cheyenne under Black Kettle, still technically considered hostile until Curtis ordered Anthony to receive their surrender. Captain Silas Soule and other junior officers from the 1st Colorado were appalled, but their protests that Black Kettle’s band was peaceful and entitled to protection from the government only enraged Chivington. The assault would commence at dawn. “Any man that was in sympathy with Indians,” he warned, “had better get out of the United States service.”⁴⁷ To prevent Soule or any other would-be sympathizers from warning the village, the colonel had the fort surrounded at gunpoint.

⁴⁶ Major General S.R. Curtis to Colonel John M. Chivington, 28 September, 1864, *OR*, Ser. 1, Vol. 41, pt. 3, 462.

⁴⁷ Quoted in Josephy, *The Civil War in the American West*, 308.

As promised, the “battle” began at sunrise. Chivington’s exact exhortations to his men are lost to history, but all versions are similar in substance: “I don’t tell you to kill all ages and sex,” he reportedly declared, “[but] remember our slaughtered women and children.”⁴⁸ The troopers thundered toward the village, many of the Indians mistaking the pounding hooves of the cavalry for a herd of buffalo. The swift appearance of blue coats and horses threw them into a panic. A confused Black Kettle futilely attempted to calm his people, assuring them that the soldiers would not attack. He hoisted both a white and American flag above his lodge – troopers later claimed to have seen neither. Chivington’s men, including many of the First Colorado who must have been aware of the peace arrangement, charged over the creek and fired wildly into the village. Women and children desperately clawed into the banks trying to shelter themselves from the hail of bullets. Chief White Antelope, resigned to death and determined to show his peaceful intent, stood in front of the camp with arms crossed as the soldiers attacked. They shot him down and cut off his ears, nose and testicles.

Now it came to Captain Soule and his company of men from the First Cavalry. Chivington ordered them into the slaughter, but Soule refused to obey. He ordered his men to stay their arms as the Third went about their work of mutilation and rape. Chivington made note of his subordinate’s “misconduct” in his after-action account: “I cannot conclude this report without saying that the conduct of Capt. Silas S. Soule . . . was at least ill-advised, he saying that he thanked God that he had killed no Indians, and like expressions, proving him more in sympathy with those Indians than with the whites.”⁴⁹

As Soule and his men retired from the field other troopers swarmed over the village. For the next four hours, an American pogrom in its fullest sense raged unimpeded by mercy. Succumbing to fear and racial hatred, whipped into a murderous frenzy by ignorance and reports of atrocities, and excited by the prospect of killing without consequence and the promise of plunder, the Colorado volunteers at Sand Creek committed an Indian massacre *par excellence*. All order disappeared as men fanned out

⁴⁸ Quoted in Lonnie J. White, *Hostiles and Horse Soldiers: Indian Battles and Campaigns in the West*, (Boulder, Colorado: Pruett Publishing Company, 1972), 27.

⁴⁹ Colonel John M. Chivington to Major General S.R. Curtis, 16 December 1864, *OR*, Ser. 1, Vol. 41, pt. 1, 950.

on the hunt. They “flushed out” the Cheyenne and Arapaho who had sought shelter along the river bank, systematically shooting those they discovered. Five women sent out a little girl with a white rag – she was promptly killed, the women massacred. Another squad found a five-year-old hiding in the sand. They pulled the screaming child out by the arm and shot her. Major Anthony witnessed three men target-shooting at an abandoned toddler. “The little fellow was perfectly naked traveling on the sand,” he later testified. “I saw one man get off his horse, at a distance of about seventy-five yards, and draw up his rifle and fire – he missed the child. Another man came up and said, ‘Let me try the son of a bitch; I can hit him.’ He got down off his horse, kneeled down and fired at the little child, but he missed him. A third man came up and made a similar remark, and fired, and the little fellow dropped” Anthony made no attempt to stop them.⁵⁰

Prior to the fight, Chivington supposedly remarked that he longed “to be wading in gore.”⁵¹ The scene now before him provided ample opportunity for swimming. Soldiers cut off fingers to get at rings. They argued over rights to scalps. An old woman stumbled about blindly – someone had scalped her and the skin from her forehead had fallen over her eyes. One trooper strolled around with a heart on the end of stick. Some sexually mutilated their victims. The breasts of one woman had been sliced off. A soldier stretched one over his saddle bow; another wore one for a cap. “I did not see a body of a man, woman, or child but was scalped,” reported a lieutenant in the 1st New Mexico, “and in many instances their bodies were mutilated in the most horrible manner – men, women, and children’s privates cut out”⁵² Some volunteers took prisoners, though many of their captives did not survive long. As one squad conducted three women and five children toward the rear, a lieutenant in the 3rd Colorado approached and shot all eight in turn, taking their scalps as the remainder watched in horror and begged for their lives. The guards shrank back, dumbstruck by his brazenness. Others would not allow themselves to be captured. Rather than letting her two children fall into the hands of the Coloradoans, a mortally wounded woman instead cut their throats and then turned the blade on herself.

⁵⁰ Testimony of Major Scott J. Anthony before the Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War, 14 March 1865, *Sand Creek Papers*, 42.

⁵¹ Quoted in Osborn, 215.

⁵² Testimony of James D. Cannon, 1st Lieutenant, 1st New Mexico Volunteers, 16 January 1865, found in Stan Hoig, *The Sand Creek Massacre*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1961), 179-180.

The men slept on their arms that night, and random “skirmishing” continued throughout the next day. On the afternoon of November 30, they burned the entire village. To enhance his own reputation, Chivington immediately reported that his force had killed as many as 600 warriors with a loss of only nine dead and thirty-eight wounded. As it turned out, quite a few of these had been shot by their own comrades during the confusion of battle. The actual number of Indian casualties will never be known, as hundreds managed to flee into the hills. The best estimates place the total dead between 150 and 200, most of them women and children. Black Kettle survived, but other chiefs were not as fortunate. Besides a dismembered White Antelope, Chivington’s men left at least four others dead on the field. If the colonel had had his way, the bloodshed would have continued. On December 1, he set out for a village of Sioux reportedly camped eighty miles away. His actual target was Little Raven’s band of Arapaho. His tactics against Black Kettle had worked so well he hoped to repeat his success against another unsuspecting band. Little Raven and his followers had fled, however, and after several days of marching Chivington turned his command back toward Fort Lyon.

News of the great “victory” reached Denver on December 7, 1864. The people were ecstatic. The *Rocky Mountain News* reported the reception given to the boys of the “Bloody Third” as they marched through the streets of the city two weeks later: “The sidewalks and the corner stands were thronged with citizens saluting their old friends and the fair sex took the advantage of the opportunity . . . of expressing their admiration for the gallant boys who donned the regimentals for the purpose of protecting the women of the country, by ridding it of redskins.”⁵³ They proudly displayed their battle trophies – trinkets, blankets, rings, scalps, ears, bits of skin – throughout the hotels and saloons. They were treated as heroes, despite their ghastly souvenirs, as if nothing out of the ordinary had occurred. It was, as Major Anthony testified before a Congressional inquiry, simply business as usual. “It is the general impression among the people . . . that the only way to fight Indians is to fight them as they fight us; if they scalp and mutilate the bodies we must do the same, kill their women and children and kill them.” Perhaps

⁵³ *Rocky Mountain News*, 22 December, 1864.

realizing that his “eastern” audience might not be as understanding, he quickly qualified his statement: “At the same time, of course, we consider it a barbarous practice.”⁵⁴

What is most striking about the affair at Sand Creek, however, is not the mutilation and rape that occurred but the sense of inevitability that preceded it. Fearful Coloradoans needed little excuse to kill Indians, and the agitation of Governor Evans and his cronies set in motion a process that was difficult to turn back. People expected, even wanted, an Indian war and it seemed any Indian would do. The Third Colorado had been mustered to kill Indians, “and they must kill Indians.” It did not matter that the Cheyenne had surrendered; they had to “suffer more.” Unlike in Minnesota, no board of inquiry, however perfunctory, was ever convened to separate the innocent from the guilty. Indeed all were judged guilty – of being Indians. Their crime would be punished accordingly – with gunpowder and lead. As one scholar has noted with considerable understatement of the massacre itself, “Even had Chivington tried to stop the carnage . . . it is doubtful that he would have been successful, for the record indicates that western volunteers were not inclined to show mercy to Indians in any instance.”⁵⁵

Not all agreed with the policy, as Captain Soule’s actions during the affair indicate. His position was an extraordinarily difficult one, and anyone who might feel justified in condemning him for not doing more to prevent the massacre does not fully appreciate the gravity of the situation. The citizens of Denver, Governor John Evans among them, were nearly hysterical with fright, certain that an alliance of Indians was ready to wipe their settlement off the map. Colonel Chivington, a respected officer and the hero of Glorietta, had been sent to eradicate the menace. He was also a physically imposing man with a violent temper and a knack for intimidating subordinates. Though Soule’s decision was morally sound and would eventually be vindicated, he had taken a substantial risk by disobeying a direct order in the face of the “enemy.” He might have been shot on the spot. To have attempted anything more, such as the use of force against Chivington and the Third, was probably unrealistic.⁵⁶ But Soule would have his day.

⁵⁴ Testimony of Major Scott J. Anthony before the Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War, 14 March 1865, *Sand Creek Papers*, 41.

⁵⁵ Lonnie J. White, *Hostiles and Horse Soldiers*, 28.

⁵⁶ But not impossible. Sand Creek is frequently compared with the massacre at My Lai on March 16, 1968. In that incident, American soldiers systematically murdered over 300 Vietnamese civilians. Warrant Officer Hugh Thompson, watching the scene from his helicopter, threatened to have his machine gunners

Soon after, Colonel Samuel Tappan of the First Colorado – a man with powerful connections – convened a board of inquiry to investigate the happenings at Sand Creek. He asked the captain to testify as his first witness. Many Denverites expressed outrage at the proceedings, considering them a political vendetta to smear Chivington’s good name and prevent him from capitalizing on his “victory.” They were right. The Colonel was a polarizing man with more than his share of political enemies – but that does not alter the truth of what actually occurred at Sand Creek. At considerable personal risk, Soule brought to light the horrors of the massacre. His was by no means a popular position. Chivington ran his own smear campaign against the captain, attempting to discredit his testimony by accusing him of cowardice. He received death threats and found himself isolated within the city. On April 23, 1865, a trooper in the Second Colorado shot him in the head not far from his home in Denver. If Silas Soule had ever felt disappointment or regret over his failure to achieve martyrdom during the massacre at Sand Creek, his later testimony finally allowed him to emulate his old hero, John Brown.⁵⁷

open fire on the soldiers if the killing did not stop. Could or should Soule have acted similarly? Given that the men of the First Colorado were outnumbered by the Third and a contingent of New Mexicans, lacked machine guns, and had no air support, such a maneuver would have been tantamount to suicide. Many likely would have shared the fate of the Cheyenne and Arapaho, their deaths covered up as “battle casualties.” Also to be dealt with was the enormous public and military pressure to punish the Indians. The rampant hatred against them would have made Soule’s firing on fellow soldiers to prevent their deaths extremely difficult to explain. This is all speculation, of course.

⁵⁷ The literature on Sand Creek is vast and spans more than a century. Because of the publicity it received, controversy ensued almost immediately after the event. It remains a heated topic even now. One of the earliest “studies” of the event was offered by Chivington himself in June 1865. In an open letter addressed “to the people of Colorado,” he laid out his version of the battle. Unsurprisingly, he insisted on the hostility of Black Kettle’s Cheyenne and denied that his men had committed atrocities. In her 1881 work, *A Century of Dishonor* (New York: Harper & Bros.), Helen Hunt Jackson scathingly condemned those responsible for the massacre. The insistence that the “battle” was actually a massacre has remained strong, but certainly not unanimous. Reginald S. Craig’s, *The Fighting Parson* (Los Angeles: Westernlore Press, 1959), and William R. Dunn’s, *“I Stand by Sand Creek”: A Defense of Colonel John M. Chivington and the Third Colorado Cavalry* (Fort Collins: Old Army Press, 1985), are both highly critical of the charge that Chivington acted inappropriately. The authors are, in fact, Chivington apologists. Two of the best studies include Stan Hoig’s, *The Sand Creek Massacre* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1961), and David Svaldi’s, *Sand Creek and the Rhetoric of Extermination: A Case Study in Indian-White Relations* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1989). Despite the passage of nearly half a century, Hoig’s work probably remains the most balanced, thoroughly researched work on the subject. Few authors have attempted to dispute his findings, and recent works have instead incorporated the massacre at Sand Creek into the broader context of white violence against Indians, in general. Some have been used in this essay, including *Hostiles and Horse Soldiers* (1972), by Lonnie J. White and William M. Osborn’s, *The Wild Frontier* (2000). The massacre has also been depicted in movies, most notably in the 1970 film *Soldier Blue*, as well as in historical fiction. Michael Straight’s, *A Very Small Remnant* (New York: Knopf, 1963), accurately and stirringly recounts the events surrounding the massacre and offers believable interpretations of some of the major characters involved including Chivington, Wynkoop and Soule. The

Soule was a member of a small minority in uniform who openly questioned the tactics being used against Native Americans. Sand Creek, the most blatant example of abuse, drew its share of criticism from other military men. Kit Carson, who had dutifully carried out General Carleton's orders against the Apache and Navajo, looked upon the Third Colorado with contempt and reportedly referred to the commander as "that dog Chivington." Even before Sand Creek, however, others had begun to question the justness of the military's methods. Unlike Carson and Soule, most of these men dared not speak publicly. "I believe there is something terribly wrong in this war," wrote a private in the 25th Wisconsin to his mother after the defeat of the Santee Sioux in November 1862. "I know the Indians have been wronged and mistreated. But what can a fellow like me do? I could not eat supper to-night and I dared not tell the boys what I was thinking about. I knew they would joke me and make fun of me. . . . I seem to think different from any of them. I may not be right but I can't help it."⁵⁸ These were extraordinarily rare sentiments, as the author acknowledges. Most of those who raised concerns did not doubt the justness of their cause, but the methods it entailed. A trooper in the 6th Iowa, queried by his family as to a "battle" that had occurred near Fort Randall in June 1863, tried to set the record straight. "The shooting of seven indians by a party of soldiers at fort Randall is what that story of a battle started from, I guess," he explained. "I suppose the cowardly wretches who committed that cold blooded murder feel a little uneasy and so try to give the affair the appearance of a battle. The truth, as near as we can get at it puts the conduct of our men in rather bad light." The execution of the Sioux by men under the command of Colonel Samuel Pollock, previously mentioned, did not sit well with all. For this trooper, at least, there were rules to be followed – no matter the race or "savage" disposition of the enemy. "I do not blame them much for killing a white

evidence of atrocity and criminality on the part of Chivington and his men is overwhelming, but Sand Creek long ago moved beyond a simple issue of facts and has since entered the realm of the ideological. There remains today a dedicated group of Chivington supporters convinced of the colonel's innocence. See Gregory F. Michno's, "Sand Creek Massacre: The Real Villains," in the December 2003 issue of *Wild West* (available online at www.historynet.com).

⁵⁸ Cooke, 15.

man occasionally,” he concluded. “They have had provocation enough for a few months past to make much milder tempered people than they are think of murder.”⁵⁹

Why, exactly, did these men demur when so many others were satisfied to condone atrocity if not commit it themselves? Determining motivation, especially in such a morally-charged subject as human behavior in war, is an extraordinarily complicated and necessarily imprecise endeavor. Unquestionably, Eastern troops in general possessed a more benign view of Native Americans and behaved with more restraint than did Westerners. Men from the other side of the Mississippi, simply enough, did not possess a history of “personal” grievances when it came to Indians. There are, however, enough examples of humaneness among Westerners (and brutality among Easterners) to defy easy characterization. At Bear River, a Californian discovered the young son of Chief Sagwitch playing dead, hoping to escape the slaughter. He refused to shoot him. Several days after Sully’s men had routed the Sioux at Whitestone Hill troopers from the 6th Iowa, escorting the captured women and children, noticed dogs fitted with travois following them. They investigated, and found two infants attached to the canines. One had broken loose from the restraints, and the rocky ground had left the child’s head, in the words of one of the rescuers, “an unrecognizable mass.” The other, still alive, was returned to a grateful mother. At Tongue River, as well, several soldiers were credited with saving children.⁶⁰ Though such gestures might seem trivial against the violence that preceded them, they clearly demonstrate that some volunteers, for whatever reasons, were able to empathize with their enemy.

Others, who like Kit Carson had lived and worked among the Indians, came to understand and respect them as human beings. As a quintessential “frontiersman” and General Carleton’s primary lieutenant, Carson’s decidedly enlightened opinion of Native Americans is both surprising and instructive. Following the massacre at Sand Creek, Congress dispatched an investigative committee headed by Senator James Doolittle of Wisconsin to determine the state of Indian affairs in the West. In July 1865, Doolittle and his aides sought out Carson at his home in New Mexico, where they interviewed him at length. The former trapper had a long list of complaints and observations. He derided

⁵⁹ Goodwin, “The Letters of Private Milton Spencer,” 245-248, 256.

⁶⁰ Brigham Madsen, *The Shoshoni Frontier and the Bear River Massacre*, (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1985), 190; Judd, *Campaigning against the Sioux*, 36.

volunteers and their officers, believing regular forces less likely to foment a conflict. He also carefully differentiated between a multitude of tribes and the various problems concerning each of them. Taking a rather balanced view of the overall situation, he admitted that some tribes, such as the Navajos, deserved their share of blame for instigating unrest. Most of the trouble, however, could be reduced to one issue: "I think, as a general thing, the difficulties arise from aggressions on the part of the whites. From what I have heard, the whites are always cursing the Indians, and are not willing to do them justice." With the discovery of gold wrecking the idea of a permanent Indian country, Carson thought reservations the only means to protect them from ruthless settlers and "outlaws." Otherwise, they would surely be exterminated. "That it would be accomplished is certain, but humanity shudders at the picture of the extermination of thousands of human beings until every means is tried and found useless for their redemption"

In his response to Doolittle's inquiries, the illiterate and rustic Carson obviously received help from a scribe. Though the wording could not have been his own, they accurately reflected his feelings on the matter. As for Carson's thoughts on Chivington and his crimes, one of his early biographers, a fellow officer, attempted to capture more accurately his distinctive vernacular: "Jist to think of that dog Chivington, and his dirty hounds, up thar at Sand Creek! Whoever heerd of sich doings 'mong Christians!" His outrage intensified as he recounted the deed. "They'd been out several days huntin Hostiles, and couldn't find none nowhar, and if they had, they'd have skedaddled from 'em, you bet! So they jist lit upon these Friendlies, and massacred 'em" Chivington had broken an unwritten code by violating the truce honored by Black Kettle's Cheyenne, and for that Carson rightly condemned him. Worse, he had intentionally attacked women and children. "That thar durned miscreant and his men shot down squaws, and blew the brains out of little innocent children I tell you what, friends; I don't like a hostile Red Skin any more than you do. And when they are hostile, I've fit 'em – fout 'em – and expect to fight 'em – hard as any man. That's my business. But I never yit drew a bead on a squaw or a papoose, and I despise the man who would. 'Taint nateral for men to kill women and pore little children, and no one but a coward or a dog would do it."

Assuming the accuracy of his statement, it is possible Carson was being disingenuous when he claimed to have never drawn a “bead” on women and children. During his campaigns against the Navajos and a subsequent battle against a combined force of Kiowas, Comanches, and Cheyennes in northwest Texas in 1864, Carson’s command had not strayed from the practice of surprise offensives, a strategy that virtually assured noncombatant deaths. For Carson, however, these “inadvertent” deaths were not comparable to the intentional killing undertaken by Chivington’s men. Whether he was trying to ease his own conscience will never be known, but his indignation was most likely genuine. Though Carson has had his share of detractors, his disposition toward Native Americans and his conduct in war distinguishes him as one of the more humane Indian fighters. Considering the alternatives, and the likelihood of continuing white intransigence, the best that probably could have been hoped for was that more volunteers would emulate his behavior.⁶¹

Understanding the Indian and disdaining wanton violence against him did not, however, require the knowledge and experience of a famed frontier trapper. A measure of objectivity and a willingness to fairly evaluate the situation served just as well, though both were too often in short supply. Three years after the conclusion of the Civil War, a veteran of Carleton’s California Column reflected on his encounters with the Apache and their continuing war against Americans: “Tales of violence and wrong, of outrage and devilish malignity, committed by Indians are rife all along our frontiers; but who ever hears the other side? Who chronicles the inciting causes, the long, unbroken series of injuries perpetrated by the semi-civilized white savages who, like Cain, fled from the retributive justice of outraged humanity and sought refuge among the copper-colored

⁶¹ See Tom Dunlay, *Kit Carson & the Indians*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000). Quotes are from pages 347, 351, 391-392. Dunlay’s historiographical essay “Will the Real Kit Carson Please Stand Up?” is particularly informative and a wonderful guide for anyone interested in untangling the maze of literature surrounding Carson. A legend in his time, the first Carson biography appeared in 1858, ten years before his death. Once a dime-novel hero, he increasingly fell out of popular favor beginning in the 1960s and 1970s. His campaign against the Navajos has even resulted in charges of terrorism and genocide. Clifford E. Trafzer’s, *The Kit Carson Campaign: The Last Great Navajo War* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1982), is highly critical of the man. Because of Carson’s controversial actions, many opinions border on the polemical. Of late, historians have moved away from the simplistic portrayal of him as a single-minded Indian killer. See R.C. Gordon-McCutchan, ed., *Kit Carson: Indian Fighter or Indian Killer?* (Niwot: University Press of Colorado, 1996).

savages of the woods and the plains?”⁶² Like Carson, this soldier-turned-journalist attributed most problems not to the Indian character, but to the selfish ends of white “outlaws.” Though the “lower sorts” were certainly hostile to the Indians and willing to take action against them, it does not follow that their views necessarily differed from more “respectable” farmers, ranchers, entrepreneurs or professionals. In August 1864 during the height of the Indian hysteria in Denver, a visiting Brown University chemistry professor admitted as much in a letter to his wife. “There is no sentimentality here on the frontier respecting Indians,” he reported. “Cooper and Longfellow are regarded with disgust. Indians are all the same, a treacherous and villanous set. I would rejoice, as would every man in Colorado, to see them exterminated.”⁶³ Clearly, Indian-hating was not just the pastime of dirt farmers and outlaws. It was, however, this class of whites who received the majority of blame and were consistently singled out for condemnation, and not without justification. As the lowest rung on the social and economic ladder, it was they who had the most to lose from competition with Native Americans over land and resources. In the South, poor whites who would likely never own a slave zealously supported the slave system as way to retain their position, however tenuously, within the “master race.” Regardless of their condition, they could at least claim the status of free white men. Similar racial and economic philosophies underlined the relationship between Western whites and Indians, with one major caveat: a viable system of Indian slavery was never successfully implemented. Without such a method of control, whites resorted to more brutal means of subjugation.

In northern California, where hardy backwoodsmen had waged an exterminationist war against Native Americans in the 1850s, relations with Indians remained particularly strained. California volunteers, when not part of the problem, were often ensnared in the same awkward situation that had entrapped the regulars before them: a hostile white population forced them to act as mediators between Native Americans and genocidal citizens. Due to a state law that allowed for the “indenture” of unemployed Indians, a system of de facto slavery came into existence. Gangs of whites

⁶² John C. Cremony, “The Apache Race,” in *The Overland Monthly*, (September 1868), printed in *Eyewitnesses to the Indian Wars, 1865-1890: The Struggle for Apacheria*, Peter Cozzens, ed., (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2001), 8.

⁶³ “Nathaniel P. Hill Inspects Colorado: Letters Written in 1864,” *The Colorado Magazine*, Vol. 34, (January 1957), 35-36.

raided villages, carrying off women and children and selling them to ranchers and farmers. When the legislature repealed the law in 1863, it ended the slave trade but not the too common Indian hunts. As white settlers encroached on Indian food sources, the tribes retaliated by killing livestock. Farmers and ranchers retaliated in turn by killing Indians.⁶⁴ As a despairing infantry lieutenant in the 2nd California described the situation in June 1862, men murdered Indians “with as little compunction as they would rid themselves of a dog” So aggressive was the white population, he thought the situation nearly hopeless. “Human life is of no value in this valley If the Indians are hostile they will always be so until some stringent measures are taken to protect them, and to wipe out the perpetrators of these most horrible crimes against humanity.”⁶⁵

Soldiers were not the only ones to raise questions concerning the military’s role in the Indian conflicts. A number of government officials, some of them high ranking, also expressed concern. Though Lincoln has been roundly chastised by some for his failures to rein in corrupt Indian agents, he managed to check the worst of the Minnesotans’ vengeance against the Sioux.⁶⁶ After listening to Bishop Henry Whipple’s account of the evils of the Indian system and pleas for clemency for those Santee sentenced to death, he became convinced of the “rascality of this Indian business until I felt it down in my boots.”⁶⁷ Despite the burden of civil war, Lincoln painstakingly reviewed each conviction and pardoned hundreds. President Jefferson Davis, too, felt it necessary to stem the excesses of his people. When word of Arizona Governor John Baylor’s order to exterminate the Apaches reached Richmond, Davis revoked his authority to raise a brigade for the purpose and demanded an explanation. Others wanted more immediate punishment. “The President suggests that nothing be done until the Governor *be heard in his own* defense,” wrote a war department clerk in November 1862. “It was diabolical!

⁶⁴ Richard White, “*It’s Your Misfortune and None of My Own*,” 337-340; Tomas Almaguer, *Racial Fault Lines: The Historical Origins of White Supremacy in California*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 107-130.

⁶⁵ Lieutenant Charles G. Hubbard to Colonel Francis J. Lippitt, 20 June 1862, *OR*, Ser. 1, Vol. 50, pt. 1, 74.

⁶⁶ See David A. Nichols, *Lincoln and the Indians: Civil War Policy and Politics*, (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1978).

⁶⁷ Quoted in Josephy, *The Civil War in the American West*, 137.

If it had been consummated, it would have affixed the stigma of infamy to the government in all future time, and might have doomed us to merited subjugation.”⁶⁸

The most vocal protests came from abolitionists and religious groups, particularly the Society of Friends. It is probably not coincidental that these organizations, united in their opposition to slavery, also spoke out against the oppression of Native Americans.⁶⁹ Sometimes, a soldier’s abolitionist or religious background mitigated his opinions of Native Americans – or at least prevented him from being completely blinded by raw hatred. Silas Soule, as noted, came from an anti-slavery family. The connection between faith or opposition to slavery and the espousal of humane treatment of Native Americans is not as strong as one might expect, however. Chivington, a former Methodist preacher who had railed against the evils of slavery, apparently expended all his sympathy in that worthy cause. There are also examples of Quakers who joined the military only to warmly endorse the campaigns against the Indians. “We go to battle feeling that right and justice are on our side,” wrote one before Killdeer Mountain, “and we are resolved to conquer or die.”⁷⁰ A Friend in the 11th Ohio Cavalry was even more pronounced. “Nothing but a war of extermination will ever rid the country of their depredations,” he wrote from western Dakota. “[T]hey pay no regard to treaties, and as their disease is severe, the remedy should be in proportion.”⁷¹ It should also be remembered that the very concept of Manifest Destiny was based on the assumption of a “God-given” right of Anglo expansion.

⁶⁸ *OR*, Ser. 1, Vol. 15, 857; John Beauchamp Jones. *A Rebel War Clerk’s Diary at the Confederate States Capital*. (Philadelphia: Lippincott & Co., 1866), 182-183.

⁶⁹ Though many reformers did not come to champion Indian rights until after the conclusion of the Civil War and the abolition of slavery, viewing it as a natural extension of their earlier work, others thought both causes intimately connected. William Lloyd Garrison, Episcopalian Bishop Henry Whipple and John Beeson, for example, passionately argued for the humane treatment of Native Americans before and during the Civil War. Beeson, an advocate from Oregon, insisted that shoddy treatment of Indians had conditioned the country for the acceptance of slavery, and believed that securing justice for the Native Americans outweighed the commitment to eradicating the “peculiar institution.” See Robert Winston Mardock, *The Reformers and the American Indian*, (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1971); Francis Paul Prucha, *American Indian Policy in Crisis: Christian Reformers and the Indian, 1865-1900*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1976); and Clyde A. Milner and Floyd A. O’Neil, *Churchmen and the Western Indians, 1820-1920*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1985). For a discussion of reformers in Oregon see Terence O’Donnell, *An Arrow in the Earth: General Joel Palmer and the Indians of Oregon*. (Portland: Oregon Historical Society Press, 1991).

⁷⁰ Scott, 9.

⁷¹ Unrau, 210.

The arguments of “eastern humanitarians,” abolitionists, and religious organizations struck a nerve among many volunteers. As their protests against slavery had elicited a reaction among Southerners out of all proportion to their numbers, so too their advocacy of Indian rights rankled frontier troops. In response, the Sand Creekers naturally did their best to justify or cover up their horrendous actions. Detailed as a hospital steward in Denver, a trooper in the 1st Colorado marveled over the conversations he had with members of the “Bloody Third” wounded at Sand Creek. “I have pretty spirited arguments with these third reg’t ducks sometimes about the barbarity of indiscriminately murdering defenseless women and children of the Indians at sand creek,” he noted in his diary. “Some of them deny that any thing of the kind was done except in the general action when there was no telling the difference; and some acknowledge that there were women and children killed after the general action was over; but argue that it was right because Indians have done the same[.]”⁷² Others, however, truly believed that such harsh measures were warranted. They would not apologize for their actions, and proudly reported their activities to anyone who might listen. “Now I do not want you to think that we Californians are so inhumane but we think different about Indians out here,” wrote a volunteer in New Mexico to his sister. “[We] went down on the Gila and came upon a Ranchore or town of the Apaches and killed every one of them, men women and children, and burned everything they had The Indians don’t call us soldiers but Mountain Devils.”⁷³

Most soldiers, though, did not believe themselves cut from that cloth. They did not rape women and scalp children. In fact, they selflessly volunteered to fight for the Union. Denied that opportunity, they stayed on to protect (white) women and children from a fate worse than death at the hands of savages. They were, as a chaplain in the 8th Minnesota thought, “men with families, respectable mechanics and farmers, industrious men of good principle, who feel that they have a character to sustain, and who enlisted from a conviction that it was a duty which they owed to this country, in this time of national peril.” Though he cringed at their excessive, almost artful use of profanity and feared that they imbibed too freely of whiskey, he gave no indication that his flock had

⁷² Malkoski, 77-78.

⁷³ Marchand, 40-41.

suffered anything like a moral breakdown – even after a year of hard service on the Plains.⁷⁴

There is no reason to doubt the chaplain's claim. For the most part, the volunteers *were* decent, honorable, moral men. Still, they *acted* immorally every time they overran a village filled with women and children. Intentionally or not, noncombatants killed in a crossfire were just as dead as the Cheyenne at Sand Creek. The immorality of their actions was difficult to reconcile with the moral image they held of themselves, and they struggled with the dilemma. The nature of their enemy, so they believed, forced them to act as they did. They were not brutes, but dutiful soldiers, faithful husbands, and loving fathers and sons doing what was necessary to protect home and country. As such, volunteers greatly resented accusations that their actions were unethical. As far as the volunteers were concerned (even those who hailed from east of the Mississippi), "Easterners" who did not approve of their methods lacked credibility. They could not possibly understand the perils they faced. How dare they insinuate, from the comforts of civilization, no less, that they had somehow acted immorally? Who were they to criticize men who risked life and limb to defend the nation, or to speak out in support of its enemies? "I wish I could talk about half a day to the quakers of Penn. who ask the President to pardon these vermin," ranted the surgeon of the 10th Minnesota. "Would to God they could have them for neighbors awhile."⁷⁵ An Iowa officer was similarly perplexed at the "many erroneous ideas entertained by almost all eastern people who cry out against every attempt to chastise these vagrants as their past conduct merits. I think if some of them could visit this country and eat hard bread and bacon and lay out on these broad prairies without a tent . . . when the mercury was from 22 to 36 degrees below zero, as I have done, they would cease their senseless sympathy and cease their cry about Mr. Lo, the poor Indian."⁷⁶ An Ohio trooper enthusiastically concurred with these sentiments:

I would like for some of our philanthropists to come out here, I mean some of those who sympathise with the indian in his benighted condition,

⁷⁴ Lauren Armsby, "Report of the chaplain of the 8th Regt. Minnesota Vols., for the month of May 1864," 3 May 1864, Dakota Conflict of 1862 Manuscripts Collection, MHS.

⁷⁵ Samuel B. Sheardown to "Dear Brother and Sister," 2 January 1863, Dakota Conflict of 1862 Manuscripts Collection, MHS.

⁷⁶ Pattee, 338.

some of those who sit there at Washington and howl and want the authorities to deal leniently with the *poor* indian, I say I would like for these men to try it awhile among the objects of thier misplaced sympathy, and then I think they would find it vastly different and considerably more unhealthy than it is sitting at ease and howling about the condition of the *poor indian*. They would get their minds enlightened in a little less than no time to the fact that the only medicine needed for the indians is plenty of powder and lead and good strong wills to use it.⁷⁷

Those at home were simply ignorant of the situation. Unfortunately, most would never truly understand the depth of evil embodied in the Indian. That did not prevent men from trying to explain it, however. “Poor dear creatures!” expounded one. “As though Indians possessed the attributes of humanity or the affectionate instinct of the higher order of brutes! As though their fiendish hearts were susceptible of one spark of the anguish they so gloatingly inflict upon others! They are devoid of every embling [sic] emotion of the human heart, instinctively brutal, preternaturally degraded, essentially heartless, vindictive and remorseless. Their stately pride and nobility of character exists only in the ideal fancies of imaginative flash novel writers. The chivalrous knighterrant and romantic Hebs of the Indian race are Myths of the past.”⁷⁸ Governor Baylor would have agreed. At last responding to Jefferson Davis’s request to explain his extermination order, he proved more adept at killing Indians than playing politics. The President, he condescendingly implied, was just another easterner who could not possibly understand the barbaric Apache. “I have lived from childhood on the frontier . . . and am familiar with Indians and their habits, both in war and peace,” he began. “I have witnessed repeated outrages and barbarities almost beyond conception committed by the various savage tribes upon the frontier people of this State. Such scenes of horror and revolting cruelty were well calculated to make any man act . . . in a manner that may seem strange to those who have no conception of the Indian character except from the vary imperfect delineations of it by novelists[.]” His superior, Major General John Magruder, included an endorsement of the letter. The Indians targeted by Baylor, he insisted, were “not better than wild beasts and totally unworthy of

⁷⁷ Unrau, 281.

⁷⁸ *Frontier Scout*, 8 August 1865, found in Drips, *Three Years Among the Indians in Dakota*, 112.

sympathy.”⁷⁹ Davis, a former regular army officer who had seen frontier service, knew more than Baylor supposed. Citing his letter as “an avowal of an infamous crime,” he stripped him of his command and his governorship.⁸⁰

⁷⁹ John Baylor to J.B. Magruder, 29 December 1862; and Magruder to Secretary of J.A. Seddon, 6 February 1863, *OR*, Ser. 1, Vol. 15, 914, 918.

⁸⁰ Jefferson Davis to Secretary of War J.A. Seddon, 29 March 1863, *OR*, Ser. 1, Vol. 15, 919. See also, Jerry D. Thompson, *Colonel John Robert Baylor: Texas Indian Fighter and Confederate Soldier*, (Hillsboro, TX: Hill Junior College Press, 1971).

5.6 Conclusion: The Savagism of Civilization

5.6.1 The Ideology of Race and Failure of Restraint

There is no simple explanation as to why volunteers in the West, similar in many ways and in some cases identical to the volunteers in the East, acted as they did. Nor is it easy to account for the range of behavior found within the western armies that also exhibited regional variations. Exterminationist massacres, that is, those that took place after a battle as compared to the “ordinary” massacres that happened during battle, did not occur in Minnesota or Dakota. This is surprising, given the hostility of the population and the fact that soldiers had ample opportunity to implement such an action. Clearly, individual killings and rapes occurred, but nothing that matched the violence that characterized events farther west. There, exterminationist massacres occurred with some frequency. What accounts for the discrepancy?

Also, despite the extent of the carnage at Sand Creek, it likely has a commonality with the actions in Dakota. One suspects, though it cannot be proven, that those who carried out the worst atrocities – the murder of children, rape and sexual mutilation – never constituted more than a minority of the troops involved. This may be wishful thinking in the case of the Coloradoans, and small consolation to those affected, but logistically it seems a reasonable assumption. Chivington had under his command over 700 troops, minus Soule’s small company which refused to participate. The estimates of Indian dead vary, but a maximum of 200 has been given perhaps half of which consisted of women and children, and surely many of these had been killed in the initial onslaught before troopers entered the village. Afterwards, significant numbers of soldiers would have been occupied in duties other than butchery, such as tending to wounded comrades, caring for the horses or, most likely, looting the camp and chasing down those Indians who had managed to escape. Even so, the limited number of soldiers with the freedom to rape and kill would still have significantly outnumbered their imminent victims. There simply were not enough women and children left alive for the majority of soldiers to be involved in murder and rape. Those who participated, however, were a special bunch. In the free for all that followed the rout, they *chose* to rape and murder rather than to take

part in the relatively innocuous looting. This significant and determined minority, judging by the actions of a group of soldiers who took turns “profaning” a dead woman, would have done much more had circumstances allowed it.¹

Even though a minority of men were responsible for the worst atrocities in both instances (and certainly the minority was much larger at Sand Creek), the conclusion that most men did not participate still leaves us with little comfort. If Sand Creek is any indication, there exists the sinister possibility that numbers of soldiers were prevented from acting on darker impulses only because they lacked opportunity. The gang-rape of dead women could not have been common. How many volunteers, arriving late on the scene and seeing no one left to kill, simply moved on to other less heinous activities? Since this can never be known with any accuracy, we can only start with the fact that most men did not take part in the activities and assume that most did not desire to do so. In this regard, the spectacular results of the few obscures a dismal truth concerning the rest: if the majority of men never murdered, butchered or raped Indians neither did they emulate Captain Soule and refuse to partake in the battles that killed far more. If they disdained “savage” violence against women and children, they had fewer qualms about killing them in a more “civilized” manner from a distance with rifles and artillery. The majority of men may have never harbored the exterminationist attitude and personal antipathy embodied in “soldiers” like John Baylor, but although they did not celebrate the deaths of noncombatants, neither did they demonstrate much concern over their demise.

Any theory on the behavior of the volunteers must account for this rampant indifference, for massacre was just its extreme manifestation brought on more by situational factors than established policy. Certainly, the actions of the minority cannot be dismissed; they were a fundamental characteristic of the Indian wars. But the deaths caused by their actions constituted far less than those that resulted from the clearly established policy of attack which consistently placed noncombatants in harm’s way. If the Dakota conflicts are accepted as the standard tactical approach to fighting Native Americans, the battle that preceded the atrocities at Sand Creek did not deviate from this pattern. Without a doubt, there was a connection between the devaluing of human life implied by such a policy and the massacre that occurred. We should, therefore, be just as

¹ Osborn, *The Wild Frontier*, 217.

concerned with that common standard, and why a dubious military expedient that ensured the deaths of noncombatants could ever be viewed as morally acceptable, as we are with determining why massacres occurred in some instances and not others.

As it has often been proposed of men at war, there was a measure of brutalization that occurred among the troops. But one must carefully define what is meant by that term and what ultimately causes it. It does not necessarily follow that all wars are inherently brutalizing; at the very least, if the process is indeed inevitable, it seems to happen more slowly in certain kinds of conflicts than others. After three years of war, Union and Confederate soldiers in the East had witnessed horror on a grand scale. Any compunction about killing the enemy in combat generally fell by the wayside – men did what duty required. They inevitably became coarsened (but never completely desensitized) to the sights, sounds and smells of war. Numerous soldiers commented on their utter indifference to bloating corpses, which they looked upon as they would a dead hog. They could forage, loot and burn with glee despite pleas from agonized civilians. The process of coarsening was undoubtedly the root cause of the burning of Columbia, an incident that was hardly conceivable by most just a few years earlier. It was a necessary means of survival, as the psychological costs of contemplating the destruction would have overwhelmed them.²

It is a truism that all wars increase in severity over time, and the American Civil War was no exception to the rule. Yet most soldiers at the end of the conflict cannot accurately be described as “brutalized,” especially if by that definition we are implying a complete abandonment of peacetime morals and values. To the very end, soldiers accepted the surrender of combatants, avoided injuring civilians and, for the most, continued to be driven by high ideals. One example will suffice to show the extent and limits of the hardening that all soldiers underwent which, in its ghoulishness, perhaps

² For a particularly sensitive and insightful studies of the effects of war on combat soldiers see Paul Fussell's, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), J. Glenn Gray's, *The Warriors: Reflections on Men in Battle*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998, 1959), and Gerald Linderman's, *The World Within War: America's Combat Experience in WWII*, (New York: The Free Press, 1997). Charles Royster's, *The Destructive War: William Tecumseh Sherman, Stonewall Jackson, and the Americans*, (New York: Knopf, 1991), describes the horrifyingly destructive tendencies of American troops in the Civil War. See also Mark Gimsley's essay, "'Rebels' and 'Redskins': U.S. Military Conduct toward White Southerners and Native Americans in Comparative Perspective," in *Civilians in the Path of War*, Mark Grimsley and Clifford J. Rogers, eds. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), 137-161

outstrips even the burning of Columbia. As Sherman's army marched toward Washington following the surrender of the last major Confederate force in the east, the men had opportunity to look over the Virginia battlefields where soldiers under Lee and Grant had slaughtered each other with frightful efficiency. The Wilderness, in particular, presented a grisly scene. In the dense undergrowth, thousands had been killed the year before, and unknown numbers of wounded had burned alive when the tangled forest exploded into an artillery-induced inferno. The area was strewn with skeletons, stark reminders of the battle. As the men marched by, they noticed a group of women watching them from a lone house in the middle of the field. One of the men broke ranks, picked up a skull, and sauntered over to the spectators. He greeted them, according to a comrade, and asked "Did you have any friends in this fight?" One answered that her brother had been killed there. "Here is his head," he responded, and tossed the skull through the doorway.³

Had the war gone on longer than it did soldiers may well have crossed the threshold, but by 1865 they had not yet done so. If after three years they had not succumbed to the brutalization of war, how can we account for the brutal acts of volunteers in the West that often occurred within a much shorter span of time? Part of the answer must lie in the guerrilla nature of the war they fought. The frustrations of navigating difficult terrain, the anxieties caused by an elusive enemy, and the inability to distinguish friend from foe undoubtedly pushed some men beyond their psychological limits. The fact that Native Americans also committed atrocities only exacerbated the issue and made it that much more likely that volunteers would retaliate in kind. The Indian wars little resembled the rules-governed conflict in the East, but did have much in common with the guerrilla wars. Again, however, the comparison can only be taken so far. In the latter conflicts, one is hard-pressed to find instances of mass rape, dissection of enemy dead (though mutilations did occur on the field), or child-murder undertaken in the name of "mercy" or because "it couldn't be helped." Reprisals instead usually came in the form of executions of military-age males which, though brutal, still signaled a

³ Ashley Halsey, ed. *A Yankee Private's Civil War by Robert Hale Strong*. (Chicago: 1961), 205. In his work, *The Hard Hand of War: Union Military Policy toward Southern Civilians, 1861-1865*, (Cambridge, 1995), historian Mark Grimsley has convincingly documented the persistence of restraint among Northern soldiers throughout the war.

degree of restraint. What at first seems like a promising explanation for brutality, then, especially for those volunteers from the East whose attitudes toward Native Americans changed drastically over time, only raises more questions when put into comparative perspective. Specifically, why did one extraordinarily violent guerrilla war result in atrocities that were absent in another that was equally violent?

The theory also does not account for another troubling fact. Assuming that brutalization in war is a process that takes time before it is evidenced through action, what is one to make of the massacre of Indians by volunteers who had only recently enlisted? Connor's Californians had been in service for only a few months before the massacre at Bear River, and that engagement was their first major Indian encounter. The Coloradoans responsible for Sand Creek were "hundred dazers," three-month volunteers mobilized for a specific purpose and then quickly mustered out. It is difficult to fathom how the vicissitudes of war could possibly have affected these men, as they had not yet experienced them. One must also consider the actions of regiments – predominantly those from Minnesota – ordered to the Southern theater after serving on the frontier. Despite the fears of some officers that savage warfare would lead to savage soldiers, most of the volunteers transitioned easily into the regular war – indeed, most were happy to go. If they had forgotten the humanities of civilization, they rather quickly came to their senses when they encountered rebel soldiers and civilians. The "brutalization" caused by the Indian wars, it seems, was of limited duration, specific to a time and place, and purposeful. That the stress of war – and all wars, by definition, are stressful events – could result in differing levels of violence, the worst of which was able to be turned on and off like a switch, is puzzling. Whether war in general is inherently brutalizing is open to debate, and surely some veterans of the Indian wars succumbed to the horrors of their experiences. One can say with a degree of certainty, however, that in the mid-1860s the worst atrocities committed by volunteers against Native Americans cannot generally be attributed to it. Something more fundamental influenced their behavior.

The role of leadership, too, must be taken into consideration. The task of instilling discipline within the volunteer, who always considered himself a citizen first with all the rights that position entailed, was a notoriously difficult process. Many officers never managed the feat, and soldiers usually found a way to circumvent what

they considered onerous or restrictive orders. Hence, a general unruliness and aversion to military protocol pervaded the ranks. In the East, a clear progression from minor subversions of military authority to the destruction of noncombatant property despite orders is plainly detectable. In the West, the “progression” ended not only in the destruction of property, but of noncombatants as well.⁴ Were the officers simply of a better quality in the East, and more capable of controlling the excesses of their men? That explanation seems doubtful. The difference in prohibitive orders is instructive in this matter. Officers in the regular war attempted to prevent their men from unnecessary and wanton destruction of property, and issued declarations to that effect. They did not declare that soldiers should refrain from taking scalps or avoid killing women and children. Such an order would have been unwarranted and indeed would have sounded absurd. Men burned and looted, but did not mutilate and murder. To the frontier veteran such an order would have seemed equally absurd, not because it never happened but because they believed circumstances warranted those actions. Here is the issue of central importance. Of all things, the Civil War volunteer believed in a just society and was governed by a moral code that had little to do with professional military indoctrination.⁵ When Union soldiers destroyed civilian property, they did so because they believed in its appropriateness. Treason required punishment. A similar motivation underscored the actions of Sibley’s men when they continued to take scalps despite his orders against it,

⁴ In fact, there seems to have been no progression at all. From their initial arrival, volunteers committed atrocities which continued for the duration of their enlistments.

⁵ Bell Irvin Wiley’s monumental works, *The Life of Johnny Reb* (1943) and *The Life of Billy Yank* (1953) are essential reading for anyone wishing to understand the Civil War soldier. Later studies have built upon and modified these standard histories, with important revisions. Taking his cue from twentieth century conflicts, Wiley concluded that soldiers were motivated less by ideology, and more by a desire for adventure. Peer pressure, rather than ideals, kept them in the ranks. Recent works, however, have determined that soldiers were driven by a mixture of genuine patriotism, notions of duty and honor, and religion as well as group pressure. They sincerely believed in the rightness of their cause and rarely, unlike in modern wars, expressed disillusionment. See Reid Mitchell’s, *Civil War Soldiers*, (Viking, 1988) and *The Vacant Chair: The Northern Soldier Leaves Home*, (Oxford, 1993). Mark Grimsley also discusses the moral world of the combatants in *The Hard Hand of War*. Other notable works include James McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades: Why Men Fought in the Civil War*, (Oxford, 1997) and Earl J. Hess, *The Union Soldier in Battle: Enduring the Ordeal of Combat*, (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1997). The impetus for many of these studies was Gerald Linderman’s, *Embattled Courage: The Experience of Combat in the American Civil War*, (New York: Free Press, 1987). Courage, argues Linderman, was the idealized virtue of Victorian manhood. When soldiers discovered that personal courage as they defined it was not always enough to carry the day, they became extraordinarily disillusioned. Because he based his study primarily on the post-war recollections of white officers, however, his argument has elicited criticism. See Michael C.C. Adams, “White Volunteer Soldiers in the American Civil War,” *Reviews in American History*, Vol. 16, No. 2 (June 1988), 222-226.

as it did the behavior of men from the 11th Ohio Cavalry. Their commander, Colonel William Collins, had a reputation for evenhandedness and restraint in his dealings with the plains tribes. Some of his men mistook his impartiality for cowardice and continued to act as they saw fit.⁶ In each instance, volunteers felt they knew what victory required – who should be punished and to what extent – and acted on those beliefs. Given a choice between acting “justly” and obeying orders, they tended to choose the former.

When it came to issues of morality, then, officers hoping for control were at the mercy of their men. They could teach them the manual of arms and how to march in cadence, but they did not alter the morals and values the men carried with them. Civil War volunteers lacked the formal indoctrination that characterizes modern armed forces. Though officers might inhibit their actions, they could never effectively stop them from meting out “appropriate” punishment or retribution. It was not that leadership was absent or incompetent – though examples of both are plentiful. Even the best leaders were bound to be frustrated by the determined insistence of their men to act as judge, jury and executioner. The consequences of this fact were compounded when officers actively encouraged soldiers in the behavior, an all too common occurrence. Even in these circumstances, however, when men were implicitly or explicitly given a free hand to deal with noncombatants as they saw fit, there were notable differences in the results. When Union troops under Colonel Ivan Vasilyevich Turchaninov, a former Russian officer known by his Anglicized name of John B. Turchin, reoccupied the town of Athens, Alabama on May 2, 1862 they were in a decidedly foul mood. For weeks they had suffered from incessant guerrilla attacks, yet were constrained in their response by the orders of General Don Carlos Buell, a regular army officer who insisted on a policy of conciliation with Southerners. On April 29, the 18th Ohio Infantry had “liberated” Athens, camping on the courthouse lawn and the local fairgrounds. The citizenry seemed friendly enough, but their disposition changed dramatically when a rebel force counterattacked on May 1. As the regiment beat a disorderly withdrawal, the townspeople (according to the Ohio men) began to taunt them. Men called them “sons of

⁶ Unrau, 136. When he learned that Colonel Collins refused to send a military escort with an emigrant train because he could not spare the manpower, trooper Hervey Johnson responded with disgust: “My idea is that he was afraid of the natives,” he wrote. “If we were to get into skirmish with them he would run and hide and tell us to let them alone they are too strong for us, or give them some bacon and flour.”

bitches” and women supposedly spit on their guns. Rumors persisted that some people had even shot at them. To the men of Turchin’s command, this was all the proof they needed that conciliation was pointless – there was no one to conciliate. Citizens enthusiastically supported Confederate rule, and no amount of coddling would coax them back into the Union. General Ormsby Mitchel, Turchin’s superior, reacted with outrage. At Huntsville, he shouted out orders to “leave not a grease spot” in the town. Informed that two members of the 18th Ohio had been killed, his anger boiled over. “I will build a monument to these two men on the site of Athens. I have dealt gently long enough with those people.” The volunteers, according to an Ohio captain, believed that “Athens was to be sacked and burned on our arrival there.”

Several regiments, including the 18th Ohio, marched into the town on the morning of May 2. In the courthouse square, Turchin supposedly uttered to his subordinates, “I see nothing for two hours.” It is unlikely he actually said any such thing, but he did little to stop the plundering and vandalism that commenced thereafter. Soldiers searched homes for contraband and weapons, insulted citizens, and raided stores. They broke into homes, smashed possessions, destroyed books, and paraded around in stolen clothes. “Colonel Turchin allowed us to take our revenge, which we were not slow in doing,” recorded a participant, “although it was not his orders, still he winked at our proceedings.” Yet despite being given free reign, the men did not seize or injure any civilians, nor did they actually burn anything. One rape was reported, that of a slave girl on a plantation outside of town, but the culprit was immediately placed in the stockade when the slave’s owner complained several days later. Significantly, white women, those who had allegedly spat on the retreating soldiers, were left unharmed. Afterwards, many Southerners and a number of Northerners accused Turchin of barbarism for introducing into an American war the European custom of the “right of sack.” Though cashiered from the service by General Buell, the Senate upheld his nomination for Brigadier General and assigned him another command. His methods became commonplace in the years that followed.⁷

⁷ George C. Bradley and Richard I. Dahlen, *From Conciliation to Conquest: The Sack of Athens and the Court-Martial of Colonel John B. Turchin*, (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2006). Quotes are from pages 107, 108, 114.

Colonel Conner, it will be remembered, also “winked” at his men at Bear River. If Turchin had sanctioned a supposedly European custom, the custom sanctioned by Connor was decidedly American. Clearly, both officers acted irresponsibly despite overwhelming popular support for their actions. They understood the desire of their men to be cut loose from restrictions and were, officially at least, accountable for their behavior. Turchin could not have known for certain how far his men might have carried the destruction, and Connor, conversely, knew exactly how far his men would go. Given the anger of the soldiers, it is probably true they would not have been able to restrain them in any event, but this does not absolve them from making the attempt. They were not, however, guilty of poor leadership in the traditional sense. One should not mistake the latitude they granted their men as an acknowledgement of their inability to control them. The volunteers had, after all, performed precisely as their commanders wished. The problem stemmed from their inability to rise above the passions of their men. Unlike the social and educational chasm that often divided the regular soldier from the regular officer, volunteer soldiers and officers operated within a more symbiotic relationship. Though clear, usually class-based hierarchical delineations existed between the two, they often shared the same frame of mind because they hailed from a common region, or even the same town. Consequently, officers tended to reflect rather than direct the attitudes of their men toward noncombatants, much to the consternation of regulars like Don Carlos Buell. It is not at all surprising that two of the worst massacres that occurred between 1861 and 1865 were perpetrated by western volunteers under the command of western volunteer officers. As such, too much blame can be placed on commanders and not enough on those actually carrying out the deeds. Because they operated in tandem, with officers and enlisted men rarely proceeding in a manner that the other might find morally objectionable, blame can be equally shared.

It is important to see, also, that these actions were not exactly crimes of obedience. Neither commander *forced* their men to do anything. Junior officers did not shadow soldiers with drawn pistols, forcing them to loot or rape. They did not execute those who failed to partake in the destruction. In short, both occasions were marked by a distinct lack of direction that presented soldiers with options. Left to their own devices, volunteers reacted with a level of violence they deemed appropriate to the enemy they

faced. In the one instance it resulted in general vandalism, in the other mass rape and murder. The orders had been intentionally ambiguous, but in each circumstance men knew exactly what was expected of them and how far they could go. Morality, rather than orders, governed their actions. The soldiers that pillaged Athens refrained from raping (white) women not because they feared punishment – no directive against doing so was given nor necessary – but because they considered it reprehensible. The commands given by Connor were equally ambiguous, but he certainly did not order his men to rape (though it was also fairly certain they would not be punished for it). That they did so suggests that they, too, felt they were acting appropriately if not morally.

When an officer gave an implicit or explicit order concerning noncombatants, men complied not because of the officer or the order, but because they felt the officer issued a *just* order that coincided with firmly held beliefs. Had Sherman issued a command tantamount to “kill everything,” his most hardened veteran would have revolted at the thought. Yet the “Bloodless Thirdsters” at Sand Creek carried out that very order with gusto. Even leaving massacre aside, soldiers routinely obeyed direct orders to fire upon villages filled with noncombatants without much complaint. If justness was a prerequisite for obedience, however, the question remains as to why soldiers thought the order just to begin with. Closely connected is the issue of why officers felt they could rightly give, or imply, such orders with the expectation they would be obeyed. Connor was no rogue officer operating on his own accord, his methods abhorred by all. On the contrary, others emulated or hoped to emulate his actions, some even the more atrocious aspects of it. He, like Turchin, was promoted for his service – a clear signal of approval from an audience wider than his immediate command. Though his superiors in Washington likely never learned of the more lurid details of his victory, they clearly supported the final result. If his methods were “unsound,” so to speak, they cannot be attributed to personal idiosyncrasy.

All this is not to say that officers were irrelevant, even if their ability or desire to restrain their men was uncertain. The importance of the vested authority of their position cannot be dismissed. Though soldiers were all too willing to take matters into their own hands, official approval, even if given tacitly, provided soldiers with a sense of legitimacy that allowed them to operate unimpeded by the weight of moral doubt. With

responsibility for their actions removed they could perform more recklessly than if the guilt was theirs alone, a key component of a massacre. There are numerous examples to suggest that proper control and clear orders against the harming of noncombatants would have significantly curtailed – but not totally prevented – post-battle atrocities. Major General John Pope, a regular army officer and commander of the Department of the Northwest which encompassed Minnesota and Dakota, had not assumed that post with much enthusiasm. Following a spectacular defeat by Lee’s forces in Virginia in August 1862, he was demoted from his eastern command and sent west to help quell the Sioux uprising. On September 28, five days after the defeat of Little Crow and his followers at Wood Lake, he announced his imminent arrival with a startling message to Sibley: “It is my purpose utterly to exterminate the Sioux Destroy everything belonging to them and force them out to the plains, unless, as I suggest, you can capture them. They are to be treated as maniacs or wild beasts, and by no means as people with whom treaties or compromises can be made.”⁸ Despite his harsh threat of extermination, Pope made clear that this entailed more their physical removal or capture than actual eradication. Over the course of the next year, he softened his position dramatically. As an outsider, he was able to view the overall situation with a fair amount of objectivity. His dealings with Minnesotans and others convinced him of the corruption of the Indian system. Though he diligently argued for reform, most of his calls went unheeded by a government preoccupied by civil war.⁹

General Sibley, though a lifelong resident of Minnesota, did not share the general hatred toward Native Americans evident among a substantial portion of the population. His involvement with the fur trade business had required close relationships with various tribes and he learned to differentiate between them. As an officer, he understood that not all Sioux had been involved with the uprising, and attempted to punish only the guilty. Though he failed miserably at this noble goal when he unknowingly attacked innocent bands in 1863, he continued to exhort his men to behave with restraint toward the enemy. Sibley condemned the practice of scalping, encouraged his men to ascertain the identity of Indians before launching an attack, and consistently warned them to avoid injuring

⁸ John Pope to H.H. Sibley, 28 September 1862, *OR*, Ser. 1, Vol. 13, 685-686.

⁹ John Pope to Ulysses S. Grant, 23 May 1865, *OR*, Ser. 1, Vol. 48. pt. 2, 565-568.

women and children. As late as June 1865, he was still instructing new arrivals in these fundamentals. To the colonel of the 3rd Illinois Cavalry, whose regiment he directed to patrol the area between Devil's Lake in Dakota and the Canadian border, he offered a virtual instruction manual on how to properly counter Native American tactics: do not camp in an area that would allow the enemy to attack from the cover of trees or ravines; corral the wagons at night and carefully post sentinels; do not permit straggling. More importantly, he explicitly informed the colonel to avoid indiscriminately killing women and children. "As a matter of policy, no less than of humanity, these savages should be taught that the troops of the Great Father are as merciful to the helpless and unresisting as they are formidable to an armed foe."¹⁰

General Carleton, too, despite treating all Native American men as hostile, explicitly ordered against the harming of women and children and did not sanction murder. As a military martinet, the intent of his orders should be accepted at face value, and not mistaken for mere disingenuousness. Upon learning that a scouting party under Captain William Graydon had allegedly lured a band of Apache into the open through peace overtures (despite Carleton's clear orders that no officer had authority to treat with the Apache), then gunned down twelve of them, including a woman, he immediately ordered an investigation. If the fight proved to be "not fair and open," he instructed Kit Carson, Graydon was to be placed under arrest and the stock taken from the Apaches during the operation returned at once.¹¹ Though the reputation of the armies in Dakota and the southwest were far from admirable and their actions replete with atrocities, no large-scale massacre on the level of Sand Creek ever occurred. The role of officers in preventing their occurrence must be given serious consideration.

Preempting atrocity required not only judicious commanders but also close supervision of subordinates. Though rare, this is exactly what happened before the 1865 Powder River expedition when General Pope's command was extended to include Connor's District of the Plains. On July 4, as Connor prepared for the campaign, he instructed his officers on the rules of engagement: "You will not receive overtures of peace or submission from the Indians, but will attack and kill every male Indian over

¹⁰ Mark Grimsley, "Race in the Civil War," *North & South Magazine*, Vol. 4, No. 3 (March 2001), 45; Henry Sibley to R.H. Carnahan, 28 June 1865, *OR*, Ser. 1, Vol. 48, pt. 2, 1022.

¹¹ Quoted in Utley, *Frontiersmen in Blue*, 236, f.n. 12.

twelve years of age.” These instructions posed several problems, the least of which that they were not forwarded to Pope until three weeks later. Though he obviously meant to neutralize anyone old enough to act as a combatant, such indiscriminate warfare had proven counterproductive to securing peace. Furthermore, his directive was a recipe for massacre, as troops had shown themselves incapable of distinguishing male from female at that age. Finally, the arbitrary age limit set by Connor, itself perilously close to a legitimization of child murder, guaranteed that even younger would be killed. In the midst of battle it is highly doubtful soldiers would be willing or capable to verify age. Pope, when he finally received a copy of the order, reacted with outrage. “These instructions are atrocious, and are in direct violation of my repeated orders,” he wrote to Major General Grenville Dodge. “You will please take immediate steps to countermand such orders.” He then threatened the ultimate penalty: dismissal from service. “If any such orders as General Connor’s are carried out it will be disgraceful to the government, and will cost his commission, if not worse. Have it rectified without delay.” Connor replied on August 20, declaring that the instructions would be “implicitly obeyed” and expressing a desire to explain his actions upon return from the field. A week later, he was engaged in battle at Tongue River. Aside from the usual chaos that attended an attack on a village, there were no reports of “indiscretions” other than those committed by the Indian scouts.¹²

Officers willing to enforce these policies and punish transgressors, however, were few in number and often hundreds of miles distant. That an eastern officer such as Pope came to wield power over Connor and, more importantly, was willing to use it to temper his behavior was anomalous. As the confusion of battle allowed men to escape the oversight of officers, so the great distances involved in the hierarchy of command usually allowed officers to escape eastern oversight. The detachment from eastern supervision and direction allowed officers, in effect, to operate within their own fiefdoms and govern as they deemed appropriate. This explains why Californians under Carleton could act

¹² Patrick Connor to Colonel Nelson Cole, 4 July 1865, *OR*, Ser. 1, Vol. 48, pt. 2, 1048-1049; In March 1866 a soldier in the 2nd California Infantry stationed in Arizona reported on a disconcerting incident. “[An] escort brought in a captive that they picked up on the way, a youth of 9 or 10 years, supposed to be a boy but evidenced being adduced to the contrary SHE was set at liberty,” *Bushnell Diary*, 5 March 1866; John Pope to Grenville Dodge, 11 August 1865, *OR*, Ser. 1, Vol. 48, pt. 1, 356; Connor to Dodge, 20 August 1865, *OR*, Ser. 1, Vol. 48, pt. 1, 356-357.

with comparative restraint as compared to Californians under Connor or Coloradoans under Chivington. Distant departmental commanders usually learned of heavy-handed tactics only after atrocities came to light, and as the source of the information was likely to be second-hand those responsible were free to deny that anything inappropriate had occurred. Any punishment more than a reprimand or warning, therefore, was unlikely.

Nor was this systemic lack of accountability limited to departmental commanders and their immediate subordinates. In more remote areas, it also extended to the regimental level. In the Pacific Northwest, for example, a few regiments of Washingtonians, Oregonians, and Californians patrolled an impossibly large territory. Giving at least the appearance of security to the population required that each regiment operate at the company level, with various companies stationed at considerable distances from one another. Early on, Colonel Reuben F. Maury of the 1st Oregon Cavalry had made known his distaste for the methods entailed in civilian Indian hunts. In August 1864, after setting out from Fort Boise on a fruitless search for a band of Snakes accused of murdering a white person, he returned to the nearby town of Boonville only to discover that a mob had succeeded where his command had failed. The warriors involved in the initial attack had fled, leaving behind their women and children perhaps in the belief they would not be harmed. The Indian hunters fell on the encampment and killed thirty-five people, all but two of them women and children. They met the colonel and his command in town, proudly displaying scalps and recounting their actions. “Infants were thrown against rocks and killed,” he reported with disgust. “The circumstances of our difficulties with these savages are no doubt very aggravating, but their conduct is no palliation for brutalizing our own race.”¹³

Despite the commander’s misgivings, the brutalization of the white race continued unabated in Oregon, and he remained as helpless to control the actions of his scattered companies as he did the citizen Indian hunters who often accompanied them. On March 17, 1865 a lieutenant in Company G had the “honor” to report that a party of twenty-four citizens managed to kill twelve warriors and two women as well as wounding four children in an altercation near Cottonwood, Oregon. The leaders of the expedition had lured a band of twenty-eight into their camp with promises of fair

¹³ *OR*, Ser. 1, Vol. 50, pt. 1, 381-385.

treatment, and then fired on them.¹⁴ A year later, a combined force of Oregon infantry, cavalry and civilian volunteers under the command of Captain J.H. Walker wiped out a Snake village of some thirty inhabitants seventy-five miles west of Fort Boise. On the afternoon of March 23, troopers in advance of the straggling column discovered the encampment situated on the edge of a steep-banked creek and immediately attacked, driving the occupants into the ravine. The men crept to the edge of the cliff and poured down a murderous fire as the Indians hopelessly scrambled for cover among the rocks. Captain Walker, gingerly reaching over the embankment and firing his revolver, ordered his men to “spare nothing.” They obeyed. A woman was the first to fall – her body later scalped by three soldiers who each claimed the honor of killing her. Others attempted to ward off the bullets by holding large, flat rocks scavenged from the creek bed over their heads while warriors, armed with bows and a few rifles, desperately tried to stem the attack. Howitzer fire finally forced them to retreat, leaving the wounded and helpless to the mercy of the soldiers. One cavalryman took several shots at a wandering toddler with his revolver, but could not seem to hit his target. “Hell,” he was heard to mutter. “What is the use to waste ammunition[.]” He pulled his knife and slashed its throat, instead. A civilian, discovering what he surmised to be the body of a chief, took the scalp and ears as trophies. Only three people escaped. Eighteen warriors, six women and at least two children had been killed. The volunteers took no prisoners. The fight ended before the entire column was able to come up, but the recent arrivals helped to destroy the village in the aftermath. “The Indians fought with desperation,” Walker reported afterwards, “asking no quarter.”¹⁵

Given these considerations, poor leadership and the stress of combat begin to sound more like excuses rather than explanations for atrocity. It was not the type of war or orders that determined the actions of soldiers, but the enemy they faced – or rather the image of that enemy – and an unofficial atmosphere that condoned the behavior. Race obviously played a central role in determining the image assigned. It allowed for the dehumanization of all, including noncombatants, and contributed greatly to the persistence of abstract over concrete images of the enemy. “Abstract hatred,” according

¹⁴ *OR*, Ser. 1, Vol. 50, pt. 1, 399.

¹⁵ Nelson and Onstad, *A Webfoot Volunteer*, Appendix (Note on the Walker Expedition), 220-222.

to philosopher J. Glenn Gray, “arises from concentrating on one trait of a person or group while disregarding other features Hence, “the enemy is not an individual man or woman, but a hostile power intent upon destroying our people and our lives.” To think concretely about the enemy, to examine him in his entirety and grant him the status of an individual, would undoubtedly have mitigated some of the violence. Abstract hatred of the enemy is a common trait of a people at war, but can also divide them. The front line soldier is often forced to abandon abstract notions of the enemy because of his proximity to him. Compelled to see the enemy as a human being, perhaps one not unlike himself simply trying to survive, he may come to sympathize more with the soldier in the other trench than with the war-rabid civilian at home.¹⁶ Examples of such a dichotomy are abundant in the Civil War. Consider the informal picket meetings between “Johnny Reb” and “Billy Yank” who, regardless of orders, regularly met to swap tobacco for coffee, exchange newspapers, or generally while away the time. Good natured taunting sometimes marked these occasions, but to have shot each other during the encounter would have been thought treacherous, even murderous. “We stand guard on the river and have some long talks with secesh guards,” wrote a trooper in the 2nd Ohio Cavalry from Somerset, Kentucky. “we will shoot at one another awhile then agree to stop and have a talk. both sides live up to what we agree to. I have no more fear going across among them after they say they will not shoot.”¹⁷

Compare these sentiments with those of Southern women who were, if one is to believe the accounts of Union soldiers, fanatical in their hatred of the Yankees. The Northern response to these “she-devils” is interesting. As the undermining of civilian morale became a primary goal, soldiers began to specifically target Southern women. These blood-thirsty belles, so they believed, encouraged Southern men to fight. Only with their ultra-patriotic support could the rebellion continue. As such, they came to be viewed not just as neutral civilians, but increasingly as the “enemy.” Though volunteers often fantasized about killing them, and less so about raping them, they rarely did either. The same rules that governed the relationship between combatants held true for the

¹⁶ J. Glenn Gray, *The Warriors*. Of particular relevance is the chapter, “Images of the Enemy,” 131-169. Quote is from 134-135.

¹⁷ Samuel Trescott to “Remembered Friend,” 30 May 1863, Samuel Trescott Papers, Ohio Historical Society.

relationship between soldiers and civilians. From a distance, men could think about Southern women in the abstract. But, presented with an individual, they were forced to deal with her in the concrete. Many soldiers willing to condone harsh measures against women in general were reluctant to impose those measures on individuals. “These men,” asserts Reid Mitchell, “could countenance violence against women in a way that they would not have before the war. . . .But while they found themselves able to condone making women suffer, their participation in the process – and the participation of most northern soldiers – remained a step removed. . . .They did not want to be personally involved in the direct application of violence against women.” Unable to view the women before them as anything other than human beings, soldiers were subject to deeply embedded cultural norms that restricted their actions. The image of domesticity that the female represented made it exceedingly distasteful to attack women directly. Further mitigating their response was the ideal of self-control. “True manhood,” states Mitchell, “was characterized by sexual restraint not sexual assertion; even mutually agreeable intercourse would have threatened masculine identity. Letting anger toward women break out in unsanctioned violence against women would have been unmanly.” What allowed men to move beyond the abstract and ensured that manly restraint would prevail, however, was the existence of racial affinities. Without that connection, and without the recognition of women as women and not something less, societal restraint failed.¹⁸

There was no comparable concretizing of the enemy in the Indian wars, and those few soldiers capable of viewing their adversary in humanistic terms were left deeply troubled by the conflict and terribly isolated from their companions. No picket line exchanges or witty banter between the lines drew the combatants together. On the contrary, picket duty led only to overwhelming fear. Battle, too, failed to alter the opinions of most men. Soldiers did not, as Union and Confederate volunteers did, chat idly with prisoners about their families and reasons for fighting because they did not usually take prisoners at all. At the most, many volunteers grudgingly admitted after a battle that Native Americans were anything but cowards, but such an acknowledgement

¹⁸ Reid Mitchell, *Civil War Soldiers*, 89 -113. Quotes are from pages 102 and 106. See also Joseph T. Glatthaar's, *The March to the Sea and Beyond: Sherman's Troops in the Savannah and Carolinas Campaigns*, (New York: New York University Press, 1985). Professor Glatthaar has also noted that though Sherman's men tended to negatively generalize Southern women, they often reacted with compassion when they encountered them as individuals.

did not exactly equate with respect for them as human beings (is not a wolf also a fierce fighter?). Paradoxically, too, hatred for the enemy among soldiers and civilians tended to *decrease* among those removed from the theater of war. It was not that Easterners viewed Indians any less abstractly; their personal unfamiliarity with them all but ruled out a concrete image. Rather, hate did not serve as a foundation for their abstract conceptions.

On the other hand, Western society, which supplied the greatest number of soldiers to the frontier, tended to generalize Native Americans as a monolithic menace. The citizens of rough-and-tumble frontier or mining towns had early on learned to expect little protection from the undermanned regular army. When Indians threatened their communities or stood in the way of profits, they did not hesitate to take action. Bands of hastily organized militia units roamed the countryside, doling out “justice” through bloody reprisals. These “Indian hunts” led to the deaths of thousands of Native Americans long before the volunteers arrived. As they had under Mexican rule, New Mexicans continued to battle with Apaches and Navajos in what was likely one of the longest running guerrilla wars in North America. The art of butchery and the selling of captives into slavery had by 1860 become a way of life for Mexican and Indian alike. In California and Oregon, as well, the passions of the citizenry went unchecked. General George Crook, a young lieutenant in the 1850s, later recalled the hostility of northern Californians toward the native people: “It was of no infrequent occurrence for an Indian to be shot down in cold blood, or a squaw to be raped by some brute. Such a thing as a white man being punished for outraging an Indian was unheard of.” Though the Federal government may have vacillated when it came to establishing an explicit policy of extermination, the state of California did not. In his first annual message to the legislature in 1851, Governor Peter H. Burnett made clear the character of the coming conflict: “A war of extermination will continue to be waged between the two races until the Indian race becomes extinct . . . while we cannot anticipate this result with but painful regret, the inevitable destiny of the [white] race is beyond the power and wisdom of man to avert.” Less apologetically, the Portland *Oregonian* marked the beginning of the 1855 Rogue River War with an unsubtle suggestion to the militias then being organized: “These inhuman butchers and bloody fiends must be met and conquered, vanquished –

yes, EXTERMINATED.” The paper’s war cry was not mere rhetoric. The conflict, insisted a regular army observer, quickly degenerated into “a contest of extermination by both whites and Indians.”¹⁹

As Crook’s observations suggest, an air of permissibility that condoned white on red violence pervaded Western society. Feared, hated and dehumanized, all Indians became viable targets. It is unlikely that murder and rape in any form ever became completely accepted, but against Native Americans it was considered a lesser crime. If sexual restraint toward women was the hallmark of true manliness, clearly the threat to masculinity was reduced if the victim of rape was not considered a true woman. Many Western volunteers never abandoned these sentiments; indeed, many Easterners assigned to the frontier fell in line with the prevailing culture, as well. When the Congressional Committee assigned to the Sand Creek investigation inquired of one Denver resident if there was a “general feeling” in the area in favor of extermination, their witness must have thought them extraordinarily naïve: “That feeling prevails in all new countries where the Indians have committed any depredations,” he responded.²⁰

In some cases, most visibly in Minnesota, hatred of Indians went far beyond the general antipathy that pervaded Western society. Traumatized by the loss of comrades or family members, vengeance-driven soldiers set out to retaliate – not just against those immediately responsible for the act, but against all Indians and out of all proportion to the original deed. “The soldier burning with vengeance feelings,” writes Gray, “has commonly made a vast extension of his personal hatred to all who speak the language and wear the uniform of the enemy. To him, they become all alike and to kill one is as good as to kill any other. Hence, he is not fighting men but embodiments of undifferentiated evil.” The retaliation-minded volunteer did not hold Cheyenne Dog Soldiers, Navajo ladrones or Santee Sioux responsible for the deaths of innocents, but all “Indians.” They became not just “the” enemy but “my” enemy. This tendency to generalize, coupled with blinding hatred, ensured that atrocity would not only be met by

¹⁹ Richard White, “*It’s Your Misfortune and None of My Own*,” 52, 337-340; George Crook, *General George Crook: His Autobiography*, Martin F. Schmitt, ed. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1946), 16. Governor Burnett quoted in Tomas Almaguer, *Racial Fault Lines*, 121; *Portland Oregonian* and Major General John E. Wool quoted in Utley, *Frontiersmen in Blue*, 182, 183.

²⁰ *Sand Creek Papers*, Excerpts from the testimony of Mr. A.C. Hunt before the Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War, 15 March 1865, 50.

retaliation, but indiscriminate retaliation. The absolutely arbitrary and disproportionate responses engendered by such a view distinguished the Indians wars from all others of the 1860s.²¹

The desire for vengeance afflicted many, as the language used by volunteers in the Dakota Wars suggests. But underneath this desire lay an image of the enemy that all could subscribe to, even those not personally touched by violence: that of the Indian as savage and subhuman beast. Originating from fear, the image consequently was an irrational one. Soldiers attributed to Native Americans, we have seen, any number of traits that prevented accurate appraisals of their true strengths or weaknesses. In some instances they were seen as almost mystically superhuman; in others cowardly and feminine. All exhibited animalistic behavior: cold, unfeeling, treacherous, wily and brutal. Battle, for the soldier who espoused this view, resembled more a desperate game – an “Indian hunt” – the prey a dangerous animal deserving of death. Because he was subhuman, and therefore incapable of understanding the rules of civilized war, the message behind a lesser punishment would be lost. Such reasoning also precluded the taking of prisoners, as capturing a foe unable to abide by the rules was a dangerous and ultimately pointless task. The image allowed volunteers to kill warriors without remorse and with a certain amount of satisfaction. They could shoot those trying to surrender, scalp and mutilate, and boast about it afterwards. Though the attitude undoubtedly made them more efficient killers, it also led to rapid brutalization. It is not surprising, given the relation and proximity of noncombatants to warriors, that they also suffered the consequences of dehumanization. It explains how soldiers could kill children and violate women with little remorse. They simply shared the fate of their “guilty fathers.”²²

²¹ Gray, *The Warriors*, 140

²² Gray, *The Warriors*, 148-153. Until the rise of American imperialism, there is little with which to compare the soldier experience in the Indian Wars. In later conflicts, when race again became an issue, it is evident that the military’s earlier experience with a “savage” enemy retained some influence among regulars and volunteers. The behavior and outlook of American soldiers in the Philippines, in the Pacific theatre during World War II, and in Vietnam are hauntingly similar to those of the frontier volunteers. In Vietnam, grunts commonly referred to areas controlled by the Viet Cong as “Indian Country.” In all cases, there is a discernable pattern of dehumanization. See Glenn Anthony May, “Was the Philippine-American War a ‘Total War’?” in *Anticipating Total War: The German and American Experiences, 1871-1914*, Manfred F. Boemeke, et al, eds., (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Paul A. Kramer, “Race-Making and Colonial Violence in the U.S. Empire: The Philippine-American War as Race War,” *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 30, No. 2 (April 2006), 169-210; John W. Dower, *War without Mercy: Race & Power in the Pacific War*, (New York: Pantheon, 1986). Richard Drinnon’s, *Facing West: The*

Here, the ultimate sources of brutalization and dehumanization need to be stressed. Throughout the conflicts of the 1860s, the pervasive Indian as subhuman image certainly expedited the brutalization of volunteers and their contempt for life, but that image did not originate with their experiences in the field. Nor can it be attributed to military indoctrination – though Western armies surely did little to dispel the notion. There was, in reality, no need for the military to encourage the dehumanization of the enemy, for society had already effectively accomplished that goal. Before men ever saw combat, they carried with them the idea of the Indian as a pest worthy of eradication. The traditional rhetorical rants against Native Americans had, in essence, brutalized them toward their enemy before they even shouldered a musket. Eastern volunteers, unexposed to the hate-filled rhetoric, quickly found themselves immersed in it. Many, including native Ohioan John Chivington, chose to follow the lead of their Western counterparts.

Though Chivington had lived west of the Mississippi since the 1840s, giving him decades to absorb the dominant racial view of Native Americans, his eastern background raises an important question: namely, exactly how “unexposed” were eastern soldiers to similar negative views before they departed for the West? As one historian who has studied the reporting of Indian conflicts in national newspapers suggests, they probably received a substantial dose of the “Indian as savage” stereotype from their own hometown papers. Because of the expense, eastern papers were unlikely to send their correspondents to investigate conflicts on the frontier. Consequently, the stories they did run were often copied verbatim from western papers which, unsurprisingly, reflected a distinct bias against the Indian. In the months before Sand Creek, for example, when conflict between settlers and Native Americans increased throughout Colorado, the Philadelphia *Inquirer* published a tirade from George H. Lane, the superintendent of the Denver mint. The Indians, he assured his readers, were “natural enemies to progress and improvement” and were at that very moment uniting in a war of extermination against all whites west of the Rocky Mountains. “Those who sympathize with the wronged Indian, had better cut their hair short before passing the Missouri river, as they are no respecter

Metaphysics of Indian-Hating and Empire-Building. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1980), offers an intriguing connection between the Indian Wars and Vietnam.

of persons or sex.” The editors of the Cincinnati *Gazette* felt obliged to run the same letter on August 18, 1864, adding a bit of their own commentary: “Lo, the poor Indians! This term will soon cease to have any force, and the red faces will be more likely to be cursed and exterminated than revered and protected. The news continues to come in of extensive depredations, and a general war with the savages seems inevitable. These proceedings take all the romance out of the Indian character, and make bare the brutal nature of the race.”²³ The effect of such reports on Eastern soldiers in the West, coming late as they did in 1864, was probably negligible and only confirmed what they already knew. Certainly, they influenced Eastern civilians to a much greater extent. But Indian news reported in Eastern papers before the Civil War was of similar quality: short, one-sided, western-oriented, and printed with an unquestioned assumption of Native American guilt. Whatever their influence, stories of “unprovoked” Indian massacres were heavily disseminated throughout the nation before the 1860s.²⁴

Despite widespread brutalization, the Indian wars were not without a moral component. Try as they might, volunteers never managed to reduce the conflicts to the

²³ John M. Coward, *The Newspaper Indian: Native American Identity in the Press, 1820-1890*, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 105-107. Quotes from the Philadelphia *Inquirer*, 23 August 1864, and the Cincinnati *Gazette*, 18 August 1864 are from page 107.

²⁴ On August 18, 1854 a Mormon emigrant arrived at Fort Laramie complaining that a Sioux warrior had stolen one of his cows. Lieutenant John Grattan, a recent West Point graduate and apparent glory-seeker, zealously pressed his commander to let him apprehend the culprit from the nearby Brule camp. Granted permission, Grattan and twenty-nine soldiers with two cannon in tow marched into Conquering Bear's village the next day. After a forty-five minute meeting, in which the chief offered to make restitution when the tribe's annuities arrived but refused to surrender the guilty party, Grattan lost patience. He ordered his men to open fire with rifles and artillery. Conquering Bear was killed, but the Brules did not run. With assistance from Oglalas, they ran down the now scattered contingent of soldiers and killed 29 of them, including Grattan. The sole survivor died from his wounds the next day. The “Grattan Massacre” made headlines. On September 12, 1854 the New York *Times* published a brief dispatch from the War Department which “fully confirms the recently published account of the massacre of Lieut. Grattan . . . and twenty privates, by the Sioux Indians, near Fort Laramie.” By October 24, more “facts” came to light: “Lieut. Grattan commenced a parley regarding the killing of a cow, when Big Bear, the chief, came up with a sort of lance and struck at and wounded him, calling him a squaw and a coward . . . Grattan drew his revolver, fired a number of times, wounding the chief, and then elevated his cannon and fired, intending to intimidate the Indians . . . without taking their lives.” By April 18, the *Times* had relented a bit, admitting that Grattan may have provoked the attack. Still, insisted the editors, “They must be made to know that if they have not the courage to seize and deliver the man that shoots the cow of the Mormon Emigrant Company, they must not in ‘self-defence’ massacre the party that fires at random into their ranks or turns a cannon upon them. They must be taught at all hazards, that to harm the hair of a head of an emigrant . . . is a mortal offence, or even to steal one of their cattle.” In response to Grattan's death, the Pierce Administration authorized a punitive expedition against the Brules. In September 1855 Colonel William Harney attacked the village at Ash Hollow, Nebraska killing 85 people including women and children. For a discussion of the Grattan Massacre and Ash Hollow, see Lloyd E. McCann, “The Grattan Massacre,” *Nebraska History*, 37 (1956), 1-26; and Utley, *Frontiersmen in Blue*, 113-118.

total amorality of an actual hunt. To be sure, men rarely expressed concern over the killing of a warrior, no matter how dubious the circumstances of his death. Though they concocted rather unimaginative “escape” stories to justify executions, this was more for the benefit of outside observers than as a salve for their own consciences. Women and children, however, were quite often taken prisoner and later released. Perhaps of greater interest were the responses of soldiers to their abuse and deaths. They sought moral justifications for otherwise unforgivable breeches of morality: women and children were killed “accidentally,” or they had fought alongside warriors thereby becoming legitimate targets, or – in the case of child murder and rape – that the actions of the soldiers were no worse than that of the Indians. All were relatively weak rationalizations, but rationalizations nonetheless. The murder and abuse of noncombatants, regardless of how one viewed the enemy, were never justified in their own right as they were against warriors. Soldiers rarely attempted that line of reasoning; to have done so would have branded them as moral monsters, which they were not.

Two possibilities present themselves. Clearly, some volunteers killed and raped with no remorse, so completely did they subscribe to the image of the savage Indian unworthy of life. Their rationalization in this instance (and one suspects that the rapists of Bear River and Sand Creek, if they rationalized at all, thought in this manner) resulted not from their compunction about killing and raping, but society’s aversion to it. Though Westerners were willing enough to close their eyes to abuse, this did not necessarily signify a ringing endorsement of wholesale torture and slaughter. Extermination, after all, is easy enough to countenance from a distance. The devil is in the details. The Cincinnati *Gazette*, which before Sand Creek had suggested extermination as a possible measure to deal with such a “brutal race,” changed its stance markedly after rumors of the massacre surfaced. “The ‘brilliant victory’ of Col. Chevington over the Indians in Colorado Territory . . . it is now reported was an atrocious massacre of unarmed men, women and children,” stated the editors on December 26, 1864. “For the credit of humanity we hope that this was not the case.”²⁵ The volunteers wanted to be recognized as saviors and avengers, their leaders as military heroes. They certainly did not desire to be branded as child murderers, even if their victims were Indians. Neither Chivington

²⁵ Cincinnati *Gazette*, 26 December 1864, found in Coward, *The Newspaper Indian*, 113.

nor Connor ever admitted that many of the casualties they inflicted consisted of women and children. Connor's biographer, in fact, has suggested that at Bear River the colonel deliberately failed to differentiate his count of Shoshone dead by sex or age to avoid being labeled as a "squaw killer."²⁶

One hesitates to believe that most volunteers rationalized noncombatant deaths simply to save their own reputations, however. It seems just as logical to assume, given their need to excuse the deaths of women and children, that at least some were genuinely uncomfortable with the prospect of killing them. As Kit Carson so efficiently explained, "Taint nateral for men to kill women and pore little children." If the testimony of Mr. A.C. Hunt, the marshal of Colorado territory, can be taken seriously it would appear that even a few members of the Third Cavalry managed to muster enough humanity to express remorse over their deeds. Questioned by the Congressional Joint Committee, he recounted his post-battle conversations with members of the regiment who had enlisted from the Arkansas River area in southeastern Colorado. "There is a general disposition, on the part of those who enlisted from that neighborhood, to cry down the whole transaction as being very badly managed, and very murderous," he maintained. "They made no secret of telling what had been done They said they were heartily ashamed of it."²⁷ When all the protests, rationalizations, excuses and instances of shame are taken into account, one is left with an inescapable conclusion: buried under the exterminationist rhetoric, there still existed a cultural taboo against killing women and children. A nagging shadow of restraint persisted. The presence of noncombatants on the field forced soldiers to grapple with this moral dilemma, and the fact that a struggle even occurred suggests that on some level they recognized the irrationality of the "Indian as beast" image. Judging by the disproportionate number of noncombatant deaths, however, it is clear which image held more sway.

Though the presence of racial differences contributed to the dehumanization of Native Americans, it cannot be said that all wars involving combatants of different races will necessarily degenerate into a race war. Nor will a common racial identity guarantee

²⁶ Madsen, *The Shoshoni Frontier*, 192.

²⁷ *Sand Creek Papers*, Excerpts from the testimony of Mr. A.C. Hunt before the Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War, 15 March 1865, 49.

that combatants will respect their enemies as human beings. At issue, then, is not so much the use of race as a means to marginalize the enemy, but the ultimate purpose of that marginalization. What did volunteers, and the society from which they came, chance to gain from it? What was at stake? No less than the future of American civilization. Few were willing to coexist with Indians because of what they represented: a way of life anathema to capitalism and democracy as nineteenth century Anglos understood those ideas. Race, therefore, symbolized not just physical but ideological differences. Because the ideologies were thought to be completely incompatible, the Indian as Indian had no future within the political system. In the East, humanitarians still hoped to assimilate Native Americans into white society – thereby destroying the unviable “Indian” but preserving the individual. For his own protection, he would have to be at least temporarily placed on a reservation. Westerners adopted a much less benevolent attitude, and presented the competing ideologies in the starkest terms possible. The conflict became a clash of civilizations or, more accurately, a clash between “savagism” and “civilization.” Assimilation was unthinkable; Indians were inherently savage and incapable of change. The Minnesota soldier who insisted that no Indian could pass through the state safely, “even if he had the stars and stripes wound around him,” represented the common Western sentiment that the native people could never be “Americanized.” The acceptance of that belief likewise left only two options: their death or permanent removal.²⁸

Though they differed in means, advocates of assimilation, extermination, and removal shared a common goal: the maintenance of white supremacy and Anglo culture. Whites were unwilling to accept any relationship with Native Americans short of total subjugation. Among westerners, in particular, any policy that might imply equality between the races proved unacceptable, even blasphemous. In response to the Sand

²⁸ On the issues of race as ideology and the construct of “whiteness,” see Winthrop Jordan, *White Over Black: American Attitudes toward the Negro, 1550-1812*, (Chapel Hill, 1968), Barbara Fields, “Ideology and Race in American History,” in *Region, Race, and Reconstruction: Essays in Honor of C. Vann Woodward*, J. Morgan Kousser and James M. McPherson, eds., (New York: Oxford, 1982), and Theodore W. Allen’s, *The Invention of the White Race*, 2 Vols., (New York: Verso, 1994, 1997). Tomas Almaguer’s, *Racial Fault Lines*, deals exclusively with the formation of whiteness among Westerners. On the long history of and debates surrounding the idea of Indian removal see James P. Ronda, “‘We Have a Country’: Race, Geography, and the Invention of Indian Territory,” *Journal of the Early Republic*, Vol. 19, No. 4, (Winter 1999), 739-755.

Creek inquiries, Governor Evans bristled with indignation that Easterners would presume to understand the nature of their savage enemy. He particularly resented the tone of the final report, which referred to a “hostile feeling” toward Indians “among the people inhabiting that region of the country.” He would have the nation to understand that Coloradoans would not tolerate such an insult: “*The people inhabiting that region of the country!*” A form of expression of frequent occurrence in the reports of exploring expeditions, when speaking of savages and unknown tribes, but scarcely a respectful mode of mention of the people of Colorado.” Colonel Chivington responded even more forcefully. He lashed out at the “unsophisticated” people of New England and the “billious old maids” in Congress for supposedly slandering soldiers while embracing a policy that coddled Indians. “It is not surprising that the Indian believes himself to be the white man’s superior,” he wrote. “White men of the frontiers, do you desire to become servile dogs of a brutal savage? If you do, this policy will suit you, though I thought differently and acted accordingly.” The bigotry and hate that filled the message barely masked the fear that lay beneath it. The specter of racial equality, of white men reduced to “servile dogs” at the feet of “brutal savages,” was an intolerable threat the realization of which would surely lead to disaster. Children would be at the mercy of monsters, women forced to submit to savage lusts. Like Rome before the barbarian hordes, American civilization would crumble before the red onslaught. Such beliefs were, suffice to say, preposterous and unreasonable, but fear is rarely conducive to rational thought. It is also, unfortunately, extremely contagious.²⁹

Chivington drew a clear line, beyond which no Indian could pass. In contrast, a member of the 8th Minnesota – who had helped lay waste to the Sioux village at Killdeer Mountain – looked upon Southerners in a much different light. When the Eighth was transferred to Murfreesboro, Tennessee in November 1864, its members witnessed first hand the devastation brought about by the war. Both armies had passed through the area, leaving behind a path of thorough devastation. Crops had been trampled under foot, orchards pillaged, and fences left crumbling. He did not pity the people; they had brought the situation upon themselves: “[They] have learned A lesson Which will not be

²⁹ “Reply of Governor Evans,” 6 August 1865; John Chivinton, “To the People of Colorado,” June 1865. Quotes from David A. White, ed., *News of the Plains and Rockies, 1803-1865*, Vol. 4, (Spokane: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1998), 274-279, 309.

forgotten very soon, and that is the Way of the transgressor is hard.” The Eighth had assisted in instructing the Dakota Indians in that same lesson just months earlier but in Tennessee, as in the rest of the South, an offer of redemption accompanied it. Slavery (rather than Southerners) had to be “blotted out of existence.” As the cause of war, the conflict could not end without its absolute eradication. Closely connected with the end of slavery was a call for fundamental political change. “the lords of this land will have to learn, to eat bread of their own raising,” insisted the Minnesotan, “or in other words they must learn that they were not born to rule this nation.” This was hardly a rallying cry for subjugation and retribution, even against the “lordly” planter class he clearly held responsible.

The leniency accorded Southerners – and given their crime of treason “lenient” is certainly an appropriate description – was a matter of practicality. Before the war, Southerners had been citizens of the United States; they were expected to resume that status after hostilities ended. Indeed, they were cordially invited, under certain non-negotiable conditions, to participate in the future development of the country as equals: “we are a Nation of Free People and we believe the Government is able to sustain itself *for we are all a part of it Free Citizens* [emphasis mine]. . . .The time will come when order will be brought out of Chaos, and we will see this Country in its Glory. Prosperity will bloom on every side for we as A Nation will Shine out brighter than ever.”³⁰ To have dealt harsher penalties would have hampered the ultimate goals of reunification and national prosperity. Indians, by comparison, were never seriously considered proper subjects for incorporation into the political community, as their very existence promised to impede the national development which repatriated Southerners, cleansed of the evils of slavery and aristocratic pretensions, would supposedly help bring about.

5.6.2 Mustered Out: The Volunteer Returns Home

The failure of Connor’s 1865 Powder River Expedition signaled the end of the military’s large scale offensive operations against Native Americans. The overflow of Civil War enlistments had nearly doubled the frontier army’s pre-war strength of a mere

³⁰ John Henry Strong Diary, 5 November 1864, 7 May 1865, Dakota Conflict of 1862 Manuscripts Collection, MHS.

18,000 men, and with the closing of the indecisive campaign the military forfeited its greatest opportunity to forcibly subdue its enemies. Soldiers clamored to return home, and protests mounted over the ineffective and often brutal tactics practiced by segments of the army. New strategies to deal with Native Americans would have to be formulated. In retrospect, some expressed disappointment that Connor's offensive was not allowed to proceed: "What a pity, what a misfortune that he did not [continue]," wrote a former teamster on the expedition. "If he had he would have ended the Sioux war . . . thousands of [white] lives would have been saved, and the settlement of the West could not have been retarded for years."³¹ Such an outcome was exceedingly unlikely. Where the regulars failed, the volunteers failed also – but not before they managed to incite substantial numbers of Native Americans into violence. Had the volunteers remained on the frontier, rather than relinquishing their duties to the regulars, one outcome was very likely: a continuing surge in racial violence. Robert Utley has passionately insisted that the army played only a small part in the ultimate subjugation of the Indian.³² Whatever the merits of this argument, the volunteers would have brutally ensured the army's primacy in the undertaking.

As they neared the end of their service on the frontier, the volunteers greeted the prospect of a return to "civilization" with overwhelming enthusiasm. If they felt any reluctance about leaving unresolved an Armageddon-like "clash of civilizations," they did not express it. The subjugation of the Indian and maintenance of the American way of life was now an issue for someone else. They left with few regrets and few ruminations of the "importance" of their contributions. They wanted out. After spending the summer of 1862 around Fort Scott, Kansas an Ohio cavalryman cursed the men responsible for his assignment. He suffered from cold and heat and interminable marches, "and all for nothing." He could only hope the rumors that his regiment would soon be sent to Kentucky to fight guerrillas was true: "Would to God it was so. I do not care where they put us if they will only take us out of this Department." A captain of Oregon Volunteers was similarly disgusted with his assignment. "I believe I am capable

³¹ Finn Burnett's Account, *Powder River Campaigns and Sawyers Expedition of 1865*, 216-217.

³² See Robert Utley's essay, "Total War on the American Indian Frontier," in Manfred F. Boemeke, et al., *Anticipating Total War: The German and American Experiences, 1871-1914*, (New York: Cambridge, 1999).

of better things than wearing out my life running over the mountain and desert, hunting down Snake Indians as one would wild beasts,” he wrote in August 1864. At the conclusion of the 1863 Sioux Campaign, one Minnesotan was happy enough to again see signs of civilization: “we passed ricks of hay, fields farms, houses and yards, domestic animals, and *white men* and *women*.” The thought of going home also dampened enthusiasm for violence. In May 1866, as Brule leaders assembled at Fort Laramie for peace talks, an inebriated officer suggested to one of his men that the garrison ought to wipe them out. “it is a game of their own,” the trooper recounted in a letter home, “one they have played frequently on the whites” The impending expiration of his enlistment made him think twice of its wisdom, however. “I would have gone in for something of that kind . . . when I had yet a year to serve in the army, but as I have but two months from today, I want as little to do with [Indians] as possible while I remain in this country.”³³

Reintegration into society quite often took some time. Many volunteers could have probably related to a soldier in 6th Iowa who, on leave in Sioux City, continued to sleep in a regimental supply wagon. Ordered by his Colonel to seek more “civilized” accommodations, he unwillingly complied – and spent the night tossing and turning. “I came to the conclusion that sheets are a great nuisance, beds quite a handy thing, but are not really necessary for ones comfort.”³⁴ Besides the hassle of reacquainting themselves with the amenities of civilization, there was another annoyance on which they may not have counted. Though volunteers consistently complained that their duty on the frontier was a thankless one, they expressed genuine irritation when citizens appeared to agree. Thankless or not, they were proud of their service, and expected appropriate recognition. In October of 1864, a Minnesotan fresh from the Dakota Plains thought it odd that the citizens of St. Paul paid little attention to his regiment when it marched through the city on its way South. As an added insult, he and his companions were forced to sleep in a warehouse. “this is treating men Called into the service of their Country more like

³³ James W. Earl to “Cousins and all,” 11 May 1862, James W. Earl Letters, Filson; Knuth, *Cavalry in the Indian Country*, 91; Thueson, *A Journal of Sibley’s Indian Expedition*, 62; Unrau, 332.

³⁴ Goodwin, *The Letters of Private Milton Spencer*, 263. This was a rather minor problem of readjustment. Though nearly impossible to determine, one wonders if any soldiers experienced protracted disabilities from their service. On the psychological costs of war on Civil War veterans see Eric T. Dean, *Shook Over Hell: Post-Traumatic Stress, Vietnam, and the Civil War*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997).

Hogs.” Across the country in Arizona, a California infantryman likewise blasted what he perceived as shoddy treatment. Men discharged from the service, he complained to the San Francisco *Alta*, were left to fend for themselves within the territory. The army provided no transportation home or protection from Indians, and as they were now considered civilians the quartermaster refused to sell them any supplies. Stranded veterans were simply given the “pitiful sum” of eighty dollars and forgotten. The situation demanded justice: “We are telling plain truths, for we are plain men, living in plain times, and unable to discover any line of demarkation between the welfare of the country and the welfare of its defenders.”³⁵

Only in later years, when the “uninhabitable wastes” described by the volunteers bustled with white industriousness, did they attach some philosophical importance to their service on the frontier. “We were making history,” an officer recalled of the Sioux Wars. “Then no white man’s eyes had seen the land we marched over” Though they could not appreciate it at the time, the volunteers later considered their service of inestimable value to the nation. They had helped clear the way for white settlement, and contributed to the realization of white America’s Manifest Destiny. “Some lived long enough to witness the marvelous changes which their bravery and hardships made possible,” wrote another. “Those of us still living see what the most visionary never dreamed of, a territory, which at that time contained a population of a few hundreds, now possessing several millions.”³⁶ Little thought was given to those displaced by the “marvelous changes.”

In the summer of 1865 Fort Snelling still held a number of Sioux prisoners, including the Mdewakanton chiefs Medicine Bottle and Shakopee. War leaders during the 1862 uprising, they had subsequently escaped to Canada only to be hunted down by American agents. Drugged, kidnapped and carried back to the United States despite the consternation of British authorities, they now awaited execution. The 1st U.S. Volunteers stood guard over the shackled prisoners, and officers served as tour guides for the

³⁵ John Henry Strong Diary, 26-27 October 1864, Dakota Conflict of 1862 Manuscripts Collection, MHS; San Francisco *Alta*, 17 October 1864, published in Andrew E. Masich, *The Civil War in Arizona*, 306-307.

³⁶ Collins, *The Expedition Against the Sioux Indians*, 22; *Minnesota in the Civil and Indian Wars*, vol. 1. (Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2005), Colonel M.J. Thomas quoted in the narrative of William H. Houlton, Eighth Minnesota Volunteers, 389; Kingsbury, 461-462.

curious. Among the visitors was a Southern belle dressed in black, mourning her soldier-husband and her nation, both killed by Yankees. Spared the same fate, she now freely traveled the reunited country. The woman stared at the prisoners for some time. With tears in her eyes, she turned to the captain who escorted her. "I know how to pity them," she remarked with apparent sincerity. "They are a conquered people."³⁷

On November 11, Shakopee's day finally arrived. As he mounted the gallows, so goes the story, a passing train drew his attention. "As the white man comes in, the Indian goes out," he was said to remark.³⁸

³⁷ Musgrove, 179.

³⁸ Carley, *The Sioux Uprising of 1862*, 67.

Section 6

Epilogue:

War Makes Brutes of (Some of)Us . . . Sometimes

In June 1868, Louisa May Alcott, a one-time Civil War nurse and aspiring author, published a short story in *Putnam's Magazine* which would soon be overshadowed by her bestselling *Little Women*. "The Blue and the Gray," set in the spring of 1864 in an overcrowded Union hospital ward somewhere in Virginia, recounted a remarkable exchange between two soldiers – one Union, one Confederate – wounded during the Wilderness Campaign.

The story opens with an irate nurse, Mercy Carrol, admonishing two stretcher-bearers for bringing her yet another wounded soldier – an amputee and a rebel, no less. There was no more room, she informed them, and he would have to be left on the floor in the hall. Together, they surveyed the ward, and noticed an inmate waving at them. In a far corner of the building lay Murry, his blue coat hanging next to his bed. He himself was sick with fever, brought on by the injuries received during a skirmish. Though his initial wound had not been life-threatening, while being transported by ambulance from the field a second bullet tore through the wagon, grievously injuring him. Now, pale and gaunt, he drifted in and out of consciousness. The doctor informed him he must die

The arrival of the rebel John Clay – minus his amputated leg – had, fortunately, occurred during one of Murry's more lucid moments. Seeing the exchange at the doorway, he determined not to be a party to such callousness, and beckoned for Mercy. "There's room here, if you turn my bed 'round, you see. Don't let them leave him in the hall," he implored. "It's like you to think of it," she responded, "but he's a rebel." The kind-hearted Murry was insistent. "So much more reason to take him in," he reasoned. "I don't mind having him here; but it will distress me dreadfully to know that any poor soul was turned away, from the comfort of this ward, especially." And so the two men became neighbors, though Clay evinced a notable hostility towards his new "friend," spending most of his time silently scowling at the ceiling and paying little heed to Murry's conciliatory overtures.

Little seemed to move or interest Clay: not Murry's imminent death, or his stoic embrace of it; not his gesture to share his water; not even his lamentations that "little

Mary” would soon be bereft of her brave and beloved sweetheart. He showed an unnatural interest, however, in a discussion of how Murry had received his wounds. Though neither spoke of it, both realized they had shot each other in the recent skirmish, and that it had been Clay who, furious at having been left on the field to die, shot Murry again as he was carried away in an ambulance. Now, Clay seethed in silent fury and hate, determined to finish the job. That night, as Murry slept, he slipped poison into the glass of water that rested on the stand between their beds.

The next day Murry, who had seemed to be recovering from his fever, took an unfortunate turn for the worse. Knowing death was upon him, he summoned for Miss Mercy and made for the necessary arrangements: he instructed that his clothes be given to a favorite ward assistant; a lock of hair to Mary; his ring to Mercy, herself. He then turned to Clay, who appeared to be asleep. “How could he do it, and I so helpless!” Troubled, she asked if he knew Clay. “I knew he was the man who shot me, when he came. I forgive him; but I wish he had spared me, for Mary’s sake.” Mercy was doubtful, and questioned if he could truly pardon him for his sins. “I can,” he assured her. “He will be sorry one day, perhaps; at any rate he did what he thought his duty; and war makes brutes of us all sometimes, I fear.” Clay, who had been listening to these words, was taken aback with regret for what he had done. In his final moments, Murry noticed on the wall their two coats – one blue, one gray. Someone had brushed against them, causing the sleeves to overlap, so that it appeared they were shaking hands in friendship. “It should be so – love our enemies; we should be brothers,” he whispered as the sun shone on his face. Gathering all his remaining strength, he reached out to the man who had killed him, but Clay, awash in remorse and shame, shrunk back and covered his face. When he finally dared to look out upon the world again, Murry was gone.

Clay was inconsolable as he contemplated the enormity of his deed. Soon, he too succumbed to fever. Hoping to be forgiven before he passed, he determined to right the situation as best he could. He called for Mercy, who waited unsympathetically for what he had to say as she removed the buttons from Murry’s coat to distribute to his friends. “I’ve a little property that I put into the care of a friend going North,” he explained, fidgeting with unease. “He’s kept it safe; and now, as I’ll never want it myself, I’d like to

leave it to – to little Mary.” Mercy was ecstatic at his apparent change of heart. “I wish I could tell you how glad I am for this! . . . I was sure you had both heart and conscience, and that you would repent before you died.” “Repent of what?” he asked, startled. “You mean that shot? But it was only fair, after all; we killed each other, and war is nothing but wholesale murder, anyway.” Mercy leaned in close, revealing a secret. “I mean the other murder, which you would have committed when you poisoned the cup of water he offered you, his enemy.”

Clay lay silent as Mercy explained how she had seen what he had done, and had stealthily replaced the poisoned water while both men slept. The revelation left him overjoyed. “Thank God, I didn’t kill him!” he blurted. “Now, dying isn’t so hard; now I can have a little peace.” Mercy held him as the light began to slip from his eyes, exhorting him to trust in the “eternal mercy” of God. “I will! I will!” he exclaimed, holding tightly to one of the buttons cut from Murry’s coat. Looking up at the blue and gray jackets, still hanging next to each other on the wall, he reached out for the empty bed beside him. “Forgive me, Murry, and let me say good-by!”¹

Written during the height of Reconstruction, Alcott’s fictional story of reconciliation and redemption through mutual suffering and forgiveness served an obvious purpose. Notably, there is little discussion of political or social issues, no mention of secession, states’ rights, slavery, or race. A reader unaware of the details of the Civil War might wonder precisely why the characters involved had been fighting. Clay and Murry are presented as timeless soldiers, their earthly disagreements irrelevant, subsumed by the redemptive power of Christ. The reconciliationist view of the Civil War presented by Alcott naturally lends itself to a romanticized vision of the conflict, a vision which was, ironically enough, often propagated by its participants. As Walt Whitman noted in the 1880s amidst an outpouring of sentimentalized literature, “the real war will never get in the books.” The romantic image of the Civil War – one which portrays the era as an age of chivalry – persists in popular culture even today, though not for any shortage of evidence to the contrary. Southerners, for instance, while romanticizing their

¹ Louisa May Alcott, “The Blue and the Gray: A Hospital Sketch,” in *Putnam’s Magazine: Original Papers on Literature, Science, Art, and National Interests*, Vol. 1, January-June 1868, (New York: G.P. Putnam & Son, 1868), 737-746.

own role in the war, had little use for Sherman and his bummers. Residents of Chambersburg, conversely, were surely not enraptured by visions of dashing cavaliers. One can only wonder how much glory the tens of thousands of displaced Missourians saw in the conflict.²

In the aftermath of the Second World War, historians began to seriously reconsider the nature of the conflict. The scale of military mobilization and fire bombings of cities had led to the widespread use of the term “total war” to describe the events of 1939-1945, and it was not long before historians of the Civil War began to view that conflict through the same lens. Total war, however, was a slippery, ill-defined concept. Some evoked it to describe the sweeping economic, political, and social changes wrought by the war. Others used it in reference to the unprecedented scale of destruction, with particular emphasis given to Sherman’s march as a “new” method of waging war. The Civil War, so went the conventional wisdom, could be viewed as the first of the “modern” wars, a harbinger of the conflicts of the twentieth century which witnessed so much civilian suffering. One of the more influential works in this mold was Charles Royster’s *The Destructive War*, which demonstrated that Americans went to war with apocalyptic visions of destruction and came very near to realizing them.³

Royster and those who would argue the war’s destructiveness were countered by several studies which questioned the applicability of the total war rubric. Mark Grimsley’s *The Hard Hand of War*, for instance, convincingly established that Union policy toward Southern civilians, though it increased in severity over the course of the war, was nonetheless a “directed severity.” Property, rather than lives, remained the primary target, and even here Union volunteers, guided by democratic civic-mindedness and a sense of moral reason, geared their destruction toward the guilty and away from the

² On the reconciliationist view of the Civil War and the subsequent marginalization of non-white participation, see David Blight’s *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001); Walt Whitman, “The Real War Will Never Get in the Books,” *Specimen Days*, (Philadelphia: David McKay, 1882), 80-81.

³ See John Bennett Walters, “General William T. Sherman and Total War,” *Journal of Southern History*, 14 (1948), 447-480; John Bennett Walters, *Merchant of Terror: General Sherman and Total War*, (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1973); James M. McPherson, “From Limited War to Total War in America,” in *On the Road to Total War: The American Civil War and the German Wars of Unification, 1861-1871*, Stig Förster and Jörg Nagler, eds., (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 295-309; and Charles Royster, *The Destructive War: William Tecumseh Sherman, Stonewall Jackson, and the Americans* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991).

innocent. Mark E. Neely's *The Civil War and the Limits of Destruction*, an extension of an earlier and much heralded essay, likewise took to task those historians who labeled the war as "total." Released while this study was in progress, his conclusions were both affirming and perplexing. The Civil War, he asserted, is notable for its "remarkable restraint," especially in comparison to other conflicts of the era, such as the American campaign against Native Americans and the French occupation of Mexico. Central to Neely's argument is the definition of "total war." Echoing a now common definition, he rightly concludes that the fundamental factor in determining the totality of any war is the degree to which civilians are targeted by combatants. Other factors, such as the extent of civilian and industrial mobilization, are all secondary considerations, at best. A true total war, then, equates to nothing less than genocide. With his litmus test established, Neely unsurprisingly concludes that the Civil War was far from total. What prevented it from turning into a nastier conflict? Whereas Grimsley credited the morality and civic-mindedness of the volunteers, Neely scoffs at this idea. It was first and foremost racial affinities, he argues, which preserved decorum and civility in the conflict, though he asserts this idea more than he explains it.⁴

The notion that the Civil War was a comparatively restrained affair is not without critics. Neely's work in particular has come under fire, for if Royster and those who emphasized the war's destructiveness tended to overlook the very real elements of restraint, Neely, in his zeal to debunk the idea of the Civil War as "total," goes too far in the other direction, leaving readers with the impression there was nothing especially destructive about it. In so doing, he comes dangerously close to espousing the old

⁴ Mark Grimsley, *The Hard Hand of War: Union Military Policy toward Southern Civilians, 1861-1865*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995). Mark E. Neely, Jr., "Was the Civil War a Total War?" *Civil War History*, Vol. 37, No. 1, (1991); Mark E. Neely, Jr., *The Civil War and the Limits of Destruction*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007). For a definition of total war, see Roger Chickering, "Total War: The Use and Abuse of a Concept," in Manfred F. Boemeke, et al, eds. *Anticipating Total War: The German and American Military Experiences, 1871-1914*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 13-28. In all fairness, Grimsley has written extensively on the connection between race and noncombatant immunity in a series of articles and book chapters which appeared before the publication of Neely's work. See Mark Grimsley, "Race in the Civil War," *North & South Magazine*, Vol. 4, No. 3 (March 2001); "'Rebels' and 'Redskins': U.S. Military Conduct toward White Southerners and Native Americans in Comparative Perspective," in *Civilians in the Path of War*, Mark Grimsley and Clifford J. Rogers, eds. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), 137-161; and "'A Very Long Shadow': Race, Atrocity, and the American Civil War," in *Black Flag Over Dixie: Racial Atrocities and Reprisals in the Civil War*, ed. Gregory J.W. Urwin, (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2004), 231-244.

romantic vision of the war as one of rules and chivalry. Denouncing what he describes as a fabricated “cult of violence,” he lambasts historians for propagating the idea of the war’s “bloodiness.” No doubt there is truth in the charge that the war has been prone to sensationalizing, though it would be more accurate to attribute the phenomenon to popular culture rather to academic studies. The noted Civil War historian and novelist Shelby Foote admitted as much years ago. “We think that we are a wholly superior people,” he observed of Americans. “If we’d been anything like as superior as we think we are, we would not have fought that war. But since we did fight it, we have to make it the greatest war of all times. And our generals were the greatest generals of all time. It’s very American to do that.”⁵

In striking down what is essentially a perverse form of American exceptionalism (or provincialism) and in building the case that the Civil War was anything but total, Neely makes some notable omissions. He makes no mention of Civil War actions in New Mexico, discusses Anglo treatment of Native Americans only as a foil to advance his general argument of restraint, and but briefly touches upon and promptly labels violence against African Americans as “exceptional” despite its glaring centrality to the war. Leaving aside these omissions for the moment, he repeats the same pattern in dealing with the war-proper. He views the guerrilla war as exceptional, a sweeping claim which neatly disposes of a massive campaign of terror. Of those operations which might be viewed as more representative of the “regular” war, Neely is similarly dismissive. Sheridan’s razing of the Valley has been overstated; Sherman’s march was exceptional during the war. He does not mention the sacking of Fredericksburg or Union actions in the Carolinas or Confederate actions in Pennsylvania, all of which, though their inclusion would strengthen his claim that the war was not total, might undermine the assertion that it was characterized by restraint.

⁵ Charles Royster, unsurprisingly, has questioned the appropriateness of labeling a war which left 600,000 dead as restrained, as have historians Michael Fellman and James McPherson. Both Fellman and McPherson have leveled severe criticism against Neely’s conclusions, in particular. For criticism of Grimsley see Fellman’s review in the *Canadian Journal of History*, Vol 31, No. 3, (December 1996), 475-476; as well as Royster in *The Journal of Southern History*, Vol. 63, No 1 (February 1997), 180-181. For criticism of Neely, see James McPherson, “Was It More Restrained Than You Think?” in *The New York Review of Books*, February 14, 2008, 42-44; and Michael Fellman, “Down in the Trenches, Smearred with Blood,” *Civil War Times*, Vol. 48, No. 2 (April 2009), 30-31. Shelby Foote, quoted in the Ken Burns documentary *The Civil War*, Episode Nine: “The Better Angels of Our Nature (1865),” PBS Video, 1990.

During the First World War there developed a class of officers derogatorily referred to as “château generals,” commanders who, safely ensconced in the rear of the trenches with little understanding of the reality of the front, detachedly condemned thousands upon thousands of men to pointless deaths in idiotic charges across no man’s land. Neely, in his imagining of the Civil War, has adopted what might be characterized as “château history.” By viewing the conflict as narrowly as possible, relegating as “exceptional” any evidence which might undermine or at least qualify the idea of restraint, and favoring the reports of general officers over the testimony of men in the field, he is able to present a sanitized portrait of the war, heedless of the actual violence that occurred and seemingly unconcerned with the greater violence looming on the horizon. That the Civil War was far from total is indisputable, but to thereby characterize it as fundamentally restrained is unjustified. Ultimately, such an interpretation fails to answer a nagging question: if the war was indeed so “restrained,” how do we explain its ultimate destructiveness in terms of lives lost (military and civilian) and property destroyed? For however much one might deplore the moniker of “bloodiest” war in American history, the fact remains that it *was* the bloodiest war in American history. Simply because the actions of combatants did not match the ferocity of their statements in 1861 does not imply that they did not come close or that they were not approaching it. True, not all of the belligerents went to war with visions of absolute destruction and extermination, but there were plenty who did, and by 1865 it was clear that the war was heading in a direction which resembled more closely the stark portrait of destruction posited by Royster. Perhaps just as important as determining why restraint persisted, then, is gaining an understanding of those factors which led to its clear deterioration.

Improbable though her story may appear, Alcott presented a theme which actual Union and Confederate veterans would also adopt. “The Blue and the Gray” explicitly excused the actions of combatants during the war, representing them as victims both of baser human instincts and a war which allowed those instincts to flourish. “War makes brutes of us all,” Murry had insisted, and Clay agreed, referring to it as “nothing but wholesale murder.” They had done things that in retrospect appeared so anathema to their being that they could not help but to attribute their actions to the brutality inherent in war, itself. In 1893, a former officer in the 48th Pennsylvania recalled the fighting around

South Mountain, Maryland in September 1862. His regiment was hotly engaged in the battle, taking casualties not only from rebel fire, but from their own reserve forces which accidentally loosed a volley into the regiment. Despite the chaos and confusion, his most vivid memory of that day was not the battle but a scene from its aftermath. In their retreat, the Confederates had left over a hundred of their dead around a farmhouse. Rather than taking the time to properly bury the bodies Union volunteers tossed scores of them into a nearby well, filling it to the top. “War makes brutes of human beings,” he despairingly wrote of the incident. “These dead soldiers were men like those burying them, but no one stopped to think of that; haste to cover them out of sight was the principle thing, and the well afforded a convenient receptacle!” A former Missouri Confederate expressed a similar reaction to the war. “Tear from us the covering that education, religion and peaceful living clothes us with,” he wrote, “and you will find left only the brute. Much more does this force predominate when the struggle is for life or death.”⁶

But how and why does war facilitate brutishness among combatants, and how well does the phenomenon explain the conduct of Anglo-American volunteers during the Civil War? There is a military maxim often attributed to General Nathan Bedford Forrest: “War means fighting,” he supposedly said, “and fighting means killing.” Had he cared to elaborate further, he might also have added that killing – as his troopers at Fort Pillow surely understood – entails psychologically distancing oneself from the enemy. “The language of men at war is full of denial of the enormity of what they have done,” writes one authority on the psychological aspects of combat.

Most soldiers do not ‘kill,’ instead the enemy was knocked over, wasted, greased, taken out, and mopped up. . . .The enemy’s humanity is denied, and he becomes a strange beast called a Kraut, Jap, Reb, Yank, dink, slant, slope. . . .Killing is what war is all about, and killing in combat, by its very nature, causes deep wounds of pain and guilt. The language of war helps us to deny what war is really about, and in doing so makes war more palatable.⁷

⁶ Oliver Christian Bosbyshell, *The 48th in the War: Being a Narrative of the Campaigns of 48th Regiment, Infantry, Pennsylvania Veteran Volunteers*, (Philadelphia: Avil Printing, 1895), 77; John T. Wickersham, *The Gray and the Blue*, (BiblioBazaar, 2009), 133.

⁷ Forrest, quoted in John Allan Wyeth, *That Devil Forrest: Life of General Nathan Bedford Forrest*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989), 44. Where and when Forrest actually said these words is unclear. Lieutenant Colonel Dave Grossman, *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society*, (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1995), 92-93.

The dehumanizing or “distancing” that occurs in war, part and parcel of the process of brutalization, would seem to be a universal phenomenon, as sustained killing would probably not be possible otherwise. Among Civil War volunteers, the need to alleviate guilt surely contributing to this process, but so too did a powerful desire for vengeance. But how did brutalization manifest itself among Civil War combatants? It was not that volunteers were turned into amoral killers unconcerned with the ethical implications of their actions – though that certainly characterized some. More accurately, soldiers’ moral sense did not disappear so much as it was increasingly withheld. Grimsley is surely correct that volunteers attempted to direct their wrath toward the guilty. Unfortunately for civilians, among Northern and Southern soldiers the assignment of “guilt” was hardly an exact science, and volunteers were increasingly drawn to the efficacy of collective guilt. Even so, had the war continued along this trajectory, the indiscriminate destruction of all civilian property that might have resulted would still have been a far cry from the indiscriminate slaughter of civilians, themselves. Moral restraint, however, applied only to those considered to be of the same race or community, and was conspicuously absent when an enemy failed to meet those criteria – a fact which the belligerents who racialized each other with such alacrity surely understood. Civic-mindedness and racial solidarity can explain the restraint that existed, but they also point to how that restraint would be undermined.⁸

The connection between war, brutalization, and noncombatant immunity deserves serious consideration and is worthy of further study. At the same time, we should be wary of over-generalizing the applicability of the phenomenon. Quite often, the brutalizing effects of war and the hardships and atrocities which result are reduced to a banal cliché: “war is hell.” Those iconic words, commonly attributed to Sherman, were never actually spoken by him, though their origin can be traced to a speech he gave to a crowd of understanding Union veterans at the Ohio State Fair Grounds in 1880. “You all know this is not soldiering here,” he told his admiring audience in the midst of a rainstorm. “There is many a boy here to-day who looks on war as all glory, but, boys, it is all hell.” Intended as a warning to those who would romanticize the real hardships

⁸ Dehumanizing the enemy was often done with forethought, the consequences well understood. “Confederate nationalists,” explains Mark Grimsley, “portrayed the enemy as demons and blackguards in a bid to create an unbridgeable chasm to reunion.” Grimsley, *The Hard Hand of War*, 219.

experienced by combatants in war, his words have since been ripped from their original context, their meaning sadly distorted. Sherman did not precisely offer an anti-war dictum, for he often spoke of the necessity of war on some occasions, but neither did he mean to glorify it. Certainly he did not intend to trivialize the death and destruction caused thereby. Unfortunately, its contemporary invocation frequently serves just that purpose: a trite dismissal of noncombatant deaths. War is hell. Atrocities are inevitable. The innocent will suffer.⁹

Dismissively describing war as hell, especially in relation to civilian deaths, is ultimately a vacuous assertion, lacking any real explanatory power and obscuring far more than it illuminates. Not only does it deny a qualitative difference between, say, the death of Jennie Wade at Gettysburg and the murder of Cheyenne children at Sand Creek, or the execution of black soldiers by Confederates and the execution of white guerrillas by Union soldiers, but it also tends to excuse and even normalize such tragedies as inevitable consequences of war. Precisely because of its supposed universality, there is a warped attractiveness to this explanation, which helps to explain why it continues to persist. By implying the existence of a universal human response to the stress of combat and offering a sort of *fait accompli* concerning the nature of war, it absolves combatants of any specific charge of wrong-doing. War may be hell, and atrocities may happen, but it does not follow that atrocities inevitably occur *because* war is hell. In fact, between 1861 and 1865 war, and whatever brutalization may have attended it, served more as pretext than cause for the bulk of the atrocities which occurred.¹⁰

Here again, Alcott's story can be of some use in fully understanding the limits of this explanation. Though she makes plain the extremes to which war may drive the individual, she also demonstrates that the combatants acknowledged certain restrictions that moderated their behavior. Clay, when asked about his decision to shoot Murry, responds that his action was but "fair" and that war was nothing but "whole sale murder." When presented with the charge of the "other murder" by poisoning, however, he at first

⁹ Sherman, quoted in John F. Marszalek, *Sherman: A Soldier's Passion for Order*, (New York: Free Press, 1993), 477.

¹⁰ There is, for instance, a tendency among latter-day Confederate apologists to attribute the massacre of black troops to nothing more than the brutality and confusion inherent to war. A similar sentiment may be found among those wishing to excuse the actions of Federal troops against Indians. It is easy to see the appeal of such an interpretation, as it absolves American volunteers of the specific and distasteful charge of racism and instead substitutes a general and inevitable process applicable to all soldiers in all wars.

reacts with shame, followed immediately by exultation at learning the truth: “Thank God I did not kill him!” In this instance, the distancing which obviously occurred would fit the pattern of war as the great brutalizer, creating as it did an artificial image of the enemy as devil incarnate which close contact – such as fraternization across the picket line or the sight of a crying child – tended to dispel, much to the consternation of the soldiers involved.

Let us imagine, now, a slightly different scenario, one in which Clay encounters not a lily-white Murry, but a wounded USCT soldier. Even if we can get past the implausibility of the situation due to the existence of segregated hospitals, or look beyond the slim odds that any of Clay’s comrades would have allowed a wounded African American volunteer to escape the battlefield alive, it is still impossible to imagine that Clay would suddenly embrace the inherent humanity of his opponent. The same difficulties arise if we are to imagine Clay as a Colorado volunteer with a wounded Cheyenne warrior as a ward-mate. As Alcott makes plain that true forgiveness depends on the acceptance of Christ, the process of reconciliation would be difficult, to say the least, and murder by poison (accomplished with a strychnine-laced biscuit rather than tampering with the water) would surely not have provoked a comparable level of soul-searching. In neither case was fraternization likely to change Clay’s underlying assumptions of their inferiority, for his perceptions had not been blinded by war but by the ideology of race. “The Blue and the Gray,” representative of the reconciliationist vision, strains credulity in its own right; it loses all interpretive credibility when we look beyond the traditional view of the war as one solely between Anglos.

To simply state that race served as the decisive factor in determining the treatment of noncombatants is not enough, for it lacks nuance and leaves open the possibility of confusing it with the “distancing” which has previously been described. At the risk of stating the obvious, language – the medium of dehumanization – is important, but not as important as the function it ultimately performs. When Anglo soldiers dehumanized each other and the civilians in their midst, its purpose can plausibly be explained as a defense mechanism against the psychological strains brought about by war. The dehumanization of New Mexicans, African Americans, and Native Americans, on the other hand, served a completely different end. Its origins will be located not in war-induced brutalization, or

the need to alleviate guilt over killing, nor even in simple racial hatred, but rather in the desire to maintain a racial hierarchy which supported white privilege. As such, the views espoused by combatants were often arrived at not through any “process,” but were instead contingent upon circumstances and the seriousness of the perceived threat to their own status as white males. At times, such as at Bear River, this might entail eradication of the enemy. In other instances, racial preconceptions might be altered when the white agenda required it, resulting in less drastic consequences. Union volunteers, though they shared the antipathy of white Southerners toward blacks, eventually reorganized their views in a manner which allowed blacks to participate in the war effort while simultaneously relegating them to second-class status. In all instances, treatment depended not upon the moral superiority of either side, and less still on “brutalization” as it is commonly understood, but first and foremost upon utilitarian considerations.¹¹

One of the goals of this study has been to explore the nature of violence in the Civil War, how and why it fluctuated and the direction it was likely heading, and to provide a more nuanced view of how the concept of race functioned in nineteenth century America. To this end, there is much to be gained by comparing the treatment of noncombatants, but there is an even greater argument that can be made if we consider them in their totality. In a recent defense of his contention of the war’s restraint, Neely argued against dwelling upon what he calls the “bottom of human motivations” in interpreting the nature of the conflict. “If we let the visions of such combat take over our understanding of the war,” he warns, “then we lose sight of other motivations, Union and liberty and defense of home and hearth and the slavery system. *The disagreement is fundamental and would change the entire meaning of the Civil War* [my emphasis].”¹²

While such concern is understandable, it is misguided. Like the issue of total war versus restraint, the protest assumes an attitude of mutual exclusion. Either the Civil War was nothing more than a “blood sport . . . divorced from political purpose,” he argues, or it was fought in a rational manner for rational ends. It is appropriate that violence in the

¹¹ For a particularly thought-provoking essay on the subject of the function of race during the Civil War, see Mark Grimsley’s, “‘A Very Long Shadow’: Race, Atrocity, and the American Civil War,” in *Black Flag Over Dixie: Racial Atrocities and Reprisals in the Civil War*, ed. Gregory J.W. Urwin, (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2004), 231-244.

¹² Mark E. Neely, Jr., “Observing the Laws and Customs of War,” *Civil War Times*, Vol. 48, No. 2 (April 2009), 32-33.

Civil War era be kept in perspective, but to label it as restrained sadly understates a harsh reality. Similarly, to admit that volunteers committed violence in the name of revenge and baser psychological motives does not make them monsters. It makes them human. More important is the assumption that gratuitous violence is somehow *prima facie* evidence of irrationality. No matter how irrational the violence may appear in retrospect, there is little to suggest that volunteers considered their behavior, no matter how heinous, as irrational and devoid of purpose. This, in turn, brings us to an even greater revelation, and that is the commonality between all white volunteers, not simply in their social origins but in the inherent rationality of their motivations. Few killed and committed atrocities simply because they enjoyed bloodshed, and with some notable exceptions they were not sociopaths. Rather, as Neely suggests, they destroyed and killed out of a common desire – a common and rational political purpose. While Neely fears that unduly focusing on the violence of the Civil War distorts the greater meaning of the conflict, the destruction in fact was wholly consistent with those greater goals of Union, liberty, freedom, and defense of home and hearth. The unpleasant issue is one of determining precisely what those terms meant to those who fought in their name, and realizing that they are not nearly as straightforwardly noble as contemporary observers might wish.¹³

It is important to remember that the war was first and foremost a war waged by white men to preserve white privilege, and it is under this banner that the seemingly disparate actions of the era – the burning of Chambersburg, Sherman’s march, the guerilla wars, the abuse of African Americans and New Mexicans, the slaughter of Indians – assume special significance. The issue of race was instrumental in bringing about the Civil War, a war fought over competing visions of a white republic. The Confederates who fought to preserve slavery and the Northerners who fought to prevent its expansion, however, ultimately had much in common with the Texans who pillaged New Mexico and the Minnesotans, Californians, and Coloradoans who exterminated Indians. All hoped to secure a nation safe for white liberty. The exact means of assuring that end differed, because the perceived threat differed, but in each instance there could be but one result: the marginalization or eradication of those who threatened the

¹³ Ibid.

realization of this vision. As the assessment of that threat was based on the vague and malleable notion of “race,” even whites who threatened the ideal might be summarily dismissed in racial terms, an ominous development with well-documented consequences. While viewing the victims categorically allows us to see how and why treatment differed, only by integrating them can we begin to understand the nature and extent of the violence which pervaded the era, and realize that the line which divided the fates of Anglo and Indian noncombatants was not nearly as bright as one might suppose.

There is a narrative to be told of the Civil War era, one which includes service and selflessness and sacrifice, courage and bravery, compassion and mercy, a narrative which also prominently displays the lofty ideals of freedom and liberty upon which the nation was founded. But there is also a darker, uglier aspect of the conflict the origin of which, distressingly, can likewise be traced to the desire to defend those same ideals. Too often, there has been a glaring disconnect between the principles professed by the citizens of this nation and their actions. If, as Americans, we hope to bridge the gap between rhetoric and behavior – especially in relation to how we wage war – it is imperative to acknowledge where we have fallen short of our professed ideals, where our passions and prejudices have led us astray, so that we may, as Lincoln urged in 1861, rise above them to be guided by the better angels of our nature.

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John Chester White Memoir

Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul

Dakota Conflict of 1862 Collection

Lauren Armsby Report
Benjamin W. Brunson Reminiscence
Nicholas Overholt Diaries
Ole Paulson Reminiscence
John Nelson Pettibone Diary
John E. Robinson Letters
Samuel B. Sheardown
James A. Shotwell Letter
John Henry Strong Diary
Oscar Garrett Wall Diary
Amos B. Watson Reminiscences

Missouri Historical Society, St. Louis

Benoist-Charleville Family Papers
Peter F. Clark Papers
Dale-Holt-Hensley Family Papers
Joseph A. Fardell Papers

Gert Geobel Memoir
McEwen Family Papers

Museum of the Confederacy, Richmond, Virginia

African American Collection

A. McDonald Letter

Crater Recollections

David Barnes

Antonio M. Cooke

W.F. Daugh

R.W. Jones

Josiah Joyner

Robert E. Norfleet

Amnon Peek

Soldier Diary Collection

Journal of Captain L.W. Allen

John F. Charlton Diary

Robert Gaines Haile Diary

Robert W. Hicks Diary

Thomas Pinckney Diary

Charles E. Waddell Diary

Byrd C. Willis Diary

Soldier Letter Collection

Anthony Barksdale Letter

Charles Baughman Letter

J.Q.A. Nadenbousch Letter

Howell Stevens Nelson Letter

John V. Townsend Letter (Livingston Letters)

William H. Routt Letter

John Taylor Smith Letter

Philip D. Stevenson Letter

Civil War Letters Collection of George H. Sullivan

William Burnett Letter

Miscellaneous

Fite-Henderson Letters

Levi Lichty Letter

National Archives, Washington, DC

Record Group 109, War Department Collection of Confederate Records,
Microfilm Publication No. 345, Union Provost Marshals file of papers relating to
individual citizens.

Ohio Historical Society, Columbus

Nathaniel Gorgas Papers

Samuel Trescott Papers

Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill

J. Kelley Bennette Diary
Thomas Frederick Boatwright Papers
Campbell Brown Diary
John Fuller Coghill Papers
Montgomery D. Corse Papers
Samuel W. Eaton Diary
Samuel Argus Firebaugh Diary
William H. Haigh Letters
Leeland Hathaway Recollections
Hutson Papers
Joyner Family Papers
Julius A. Lineback Papers
Charles Edward Lippitt Diary
Benjamin Franklin Little Letters
A.D. Pollock Papers
Mark De Wolf Stevenson Letters
John K. Street Papers
Paul Turner Vaughan Diary and Letters
Thomas Ware Diary
George Whittaker Wills Letters
James Peter Williams Papers

United States Army Military History Institute, Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania

Robert L. Brake Collection

Sue K. Black Recollection
G.F. Winter Letter

Civil War Miscellaneous Collection

George Aux Letters
Ben H. Bounds Memoir
John A Cato Letters
Joshua H. Frier Memoirs
Henry Ruffner Morrison Letters
Frank M. Myers Letters
William W. Prichard Diary
Thomas J. Rounsaville Letters

Civil War Times Illustrated Collection

James Abraham Letters
J.C. Attick Diary
Joseph J. Brown Letter
John Kennedy Coleman Diary
Jacob Heffelfinger Diary
John Henry Burrill Letters
Henry Henney Diary and Letters
Friedrich P. Kappelman Letters
John C. Kesses Memoir

George R. Lee Diary
James E. Morrow Diary
James Seagrave Diary
Ira J. Smith Letters
Adolphus P. Wolf Letters

William Gladstone Collection

Unidentified Ohio Soldier Letter
Ralph Buckley Letter
Aleck M. Hayward Letter

Harrisburg Civil War Round Table Collection

Aaron E. Bachman Memoirs
William Britton Bailey, Jr. Diary
Henry S. Carroll Letters
George Conrad Letters
James W. Denver Letter
Gilbert Gulbrandson Letters
Alva G. Griest Journal
John W. Joyce Letters
Henry Keiser Diary
William H. Martin Letters
David Nichols Letters
C.B. Niesley Letters
Eunice Stewart Letters
John Stumbaugh Letters
Spenser Bowen Talley Memoirs
Edgar A. Walters Memoir

Lewis Leigh Collection

W.J. Crook Letter
James McChesney Memoir
James Williamson Diary

University of Kentucky, Lexington
Gunn Family Papers
Mary E. Van Meter Diary

University of Oregon, Eugene
D.H. Taylor Diary

Virginia Historical Society, Richmond
Aylett Family Papers
Chamberlayne Family Papers
Coiner Family Papers
Bird Family Papers
Benjamin Lyons Farinholt Papers
Guerrant Family Papers
Joseph Banks Lyle Papers

McCarthy Family Papers
Manson Family Papers
James Thomas Perry Papers
John McLeod Turner Papers
Edmund Fitzgerald Stone Papers

Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, Ohio

David Auld Papers
Thomas M. Covert Papers
James Eastburn Diary
Wilbur F. Hinman Papers
Carlos Parsons Lyman Papers
Charles H. Merrick Papers
Sosman Family Papers
Cyrus Stockwell Papers
Edward A. Webb Papers

Newspapers and Periodicals

Atlanta Intelligencer
Bellville Countryman
Black Hawk Daily Mining Journal
Charleston Mercury
Cincinnati Gazette
Clarksville Standard
Dallas Herald
Denver Rocky Mountain News
Franklin Repository
Gettysburg Compiler
Harper's Monthly Magazine
Harrisburg Telegraph
Houston Tri-Weekly Telegraph
Iowa City Press
Iowa City Republican
Lancaster Daily Express
Lippencott's Magazine
Little Rock Arkansas True Democrat
Memphis Avalanche
Mesilla Times
National Tribune
New Orleans Daily Picayune
New York Times
Overland Monthly
Red Bluff Beacon
Richmond Daily Dispatch
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