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**Knights, Puritans, and Jesus: Robert E. Lee, Jefferson Davis,
Stonewall Jackson, and the archetypes of American masculinity**

Wilm K. Strawbridge

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KNIGHTS, PURITANS, AND JESUS: ROBERT E. LEE, JEFFERSON DAVIS,
STONEWALL JACKSON, AND THE ARCHETYPES OF AMERICAN
MASCULINITY

By

Wilm Kirk Strawbridge

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Faculty of
Mississippi State University
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in History
in the Department of History

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I interpret Civil War romanticism by looking at well-known archetypal characters such as the knight, the Puritan, and the Christ figure. I argue that sectional reunion occurred, in part, because Americans shared a common celebration of the Christian/chivalrous hero expressed through stories about the lives and personalities of leading figures of the Civil War. Western traditions like Christianity and its medieval warrior code, chivalry, conditioned Americans to seek heroes who conformed to a certain pattern that resembled the knightly ideal. Chivalry did not crowd-out other forms of masculine behavior, but during the nineteenth century, the *British* century, Americans had not yet created a man in their own image. That would come later with the twentieth century's most favored man: the cowboy.

Americans created Robert E. Lee as a knight figure resembling Western heroes such as King Arthur. Unlike the more controversial Confederate notables Stonewall Jackson and Jefferson Davis, the Lee figure offered Americans the genteel, Christ-like,

hero who could be made to represent all of white America. Davis was too defiantly unreconstructed to ever affect much sectional agreement, and Jackson simply could not be made to fit the chivalrous pattern. Thus, Lee allowed southerners to identify themselves as uniquely chivalrous and honorable compared to the modern North. At the same time, the Lee figure provided northerners the opportunity to romanticize a charming, orderly, Old South while rejecting the violent, narrow-minded, states' rights South best symbolized by Davis.

I prefer to interpret commentary about the Civil War as storytelling and do not use terms such as the Lost Cause or Civil War memory. High-ranking officers, the common soldier, and those who never participated in the Civil War each told stories about it. Due to the large number of stories told, certain common themes became evident in American interpretations of the Civil War era. Common stories include: Lee at Appomattox, Jackson's unmerciful marches against Union forces, and Davis (almost) eluding capture dressed as a woman. Taken together the sub-stories reveal much about the grand narrative of the Civil War, and how Americans, though succeeding to a great extent, failed to completely reunite.

DEDICATION

Thanks to a great mentor, Jason Phillips. I must also dedicate this work to Zac, Billy and Lynda Strawbridge, and to Jenny.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Historian Charles Reagan Wilson called “Robert E. Lee, Stonewall Jackson, and Jefferson Davis” the three foremost “saints and martyrs” of “The Lost Cause.” He readily admitted that other men, and women, gained status as celebrated if not deified southern icons, but these clearly ranked above all others. Lee, Davis, and Jackson “were said to epitomize the best of Christian and southern values.” Southerners used many methods to display devotion to their saints. They erected statues, created poems and songs, and recited speeches. The images of the South’s great triumvirate were recognizable enough even to those who had forgotten how they long ago earned their fame. White southerners made clear that no other Confederate men better represented the South in all its aspirations and past glories. With sincere devotion, southerners even into the twentieth-century remembered their birthdays and visited their gravesites. Lee, Jackson, and Davis were the leading men of the South’s most trying hour, and defeat could not tarnish their sacrifices for the Confederate cause. From the close of the Civil War forward, there has been some strange, deeply-ingrained bond between the South and the three men they chose to personify their values.¹

Each left a different legacy and therefore southerners interpreted them in at least a slightly different manner. For many North and South, Lee was the most talented general of the war. Americans revered Lee for his character at least as much as they did his impressive record as a Confederate general. Lee’s legacy cast a shadow longer than most

any other in American History. In contrast, Davis was a lightning rod of criticism during his Confederate administration and remained so long after the end of the war. His actions during the last weeks of the Civil War followed him, for better and for worse, until the day of his death. As for Jackson, he represented probably the greatest “what if” of the entire Civil War. His early success in the Shenandoah Valley and at other battles in Virginia cemented his reputation—until a bullet ended his life. For some southerners Jackson ranked with Lee or even above him, and many reasoned that, if he had lived, the Confederacy would have won. Northerners both admired his success and feared his wrath; thankful that Jackson was not there at Gettysburg to turn the tide toward the South. Davis, Lee, and Jackson were the most discussed Confederate leaders, the most despised and the most respected, the most successful and the most unsuccessful. For southerners, each said something a little different about the South, its past, and its glories. Therefore, Lee, Davis, and Jackson became an integral part of who southerners believed they were.

Wilson came closer to describing the relationship between the South, Lee, Davis, and Jackson, and all of the various symbols of the Confederacy than did most others. Wilson rightly recognized how southerners mingled religious imagery with stories about the Confederacy. Postwar southerners emphasized the pure Christian morality of the Confederacy despite its defeat. They talked about its leading men, eager to explain to the North that Lee, Jackson, Davis and others exemplified Christian values and thus the superiority of the society that produced them. Southerners compared the trials of its representative men to Christian heroes of the past, including Christ himself. Indeed, it was vital that southerners imagined the Confederacy and its leaders as virtuous and Christian due to the reality that the Union actually triumphed in the war. The theme thus has been: we may have been overcome by northern strength, but the greatness of our

morals, character, etc., stands unquestioned. Wilson interpreted southern fondness for remembering the Confederacy as a “civil religion.” It had its saints, rituals, holy days, and sacred literature. There may have been no official “Church of Robert. E Lee,” no group of worshippers who met every week and prayed to the Confederacy, but southern glorification of the past held many of the trappings of Western religion. For Wilson, the southern fervor, one might say obsession, to recognize and preserve its Confederate heritage resembled religious enthusiasm.²

It was not uncommon that Americans described the Civil War in religious terms. Northern and southern stories about the Civil War often highlighted the rebirth or renewal of a bloody, war-ravaged nation. Often, Americans pictured warfare as necessary or even beneficial, because the shedding of blood allowed America to begin anew. Thus, storytellers often defined the Civil War as a period of intense suffering which eliminated most of the most unwanted aspects of American life: slavery, aristocracy, extremism, radical states’ rights, etc. The baptismal fire cleansed the nation and made it better; presenting the possibility that American society could now be perfected. One did not need to be a biblical scholar to grasp the similarities between the national story and the one told about the Christ figure. In fact, this is an important point to consider. The account of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ was most likely the most well known story in America and the Western world. Ever since it was written and spread across the world, the story of Christ’s death has served as the template for countless legends and myths. When both northerners and southerners told stories about the death and rebirth of America, the Christian undertones must have been obvious to most. It was not only southerners, then, who defined the Civil War experience based on religious traditions.³

Stories about hero figures, such as Jesus of Nazareth, gave Americans of all sections and political persuasions a common ground from which to evaluate leading men such as Lee, Jackson, or Davis. The North as well as the South told hero stories informed by Christianity and other traditions of the West. It is valuable to note that the postwar phenomenon of Civil War storytelling, usually labeled the “The Lost Cause,” was not strangely unique to the South. Most Americans reflected upon the Civil War through one medium or another and glorified various heroes. In reality, to refer to American romanticism of the Civil War as the Lost Cause is to call it by the title that ex-Confederates preferred. Postwar southerners created the term, and perhaps it is best to leave it there—to dispense with it as an academic model for understanding the phenomenon. There would be no Lost Cause without the North, and for them it was a cause not lost, but won. Civil War romanticism at times brought about national harmony through the creation of hero narratives which proclaimed American greatness. These narratives often upheld the idea of sectional conflict as a necessary step toward a better, more harmonious, renewed nation. Hero figures often reflected Christ-like values such as self-sacrifice, which almost all Americans agreed made men great. At the same time, Lee, Jackson, or Davis could remind Americans of their fundamental disagreements and dislike of one another. What Civil War heroes meant to Americans was sometimes in dispute, but that they had a major part to play in understanding the Civil War can hardly be doubted. However Americans judged these famous men, much of their opinion wrested on stories and heroes universally known in the Western world.⁴

The point here is that Lee, Jackson, and Davis are characters vital to the national story of reunion more than figures associated only with the pro-southern Lost Cause. Most scholars of the Lost Cause have been primarily concerned with explaining the

uniqueness of the South's response to Civil War defeat. Historians tend to begin with the question of why the South chose to engage in activities related to the Confederacy; attempting to come to terms with what was distinctive about the southern experience of remembering. The South becomes the strange and different place, while the North is pictured as more or less normative. Some who study the Lost Cause, most notably Gaines Foster, have described how it helped southerners "cope with the cultural implications of defeat," and "ease their adjustment to the New South..." Exalting the Confederacy soothed the wounded pride of southerners, and ultimately, Foster concluded, Lost Cause traditions faded once their usefulness expired. It may be, however, that the South's preoccupation with the Civil War is better explained as a part of a reunion narrative grounded in familiar Western stories. Christianity itself is infused with stories about heroic men whose lives teach something important about the world. Canonical stories, most especially the one about the birth and resurrection of Jesus, form the base material of Christianity. Origin stories usually clarify the beginnings of a community or nation, and heroes often play a central role. Tales told about heroes, either real or fictional, have been one of the primary modes through which people in the Western world have understood the past. In this light, the southern want to tell about the Civil War is less singular or surprising. Southerners reacted to Union victory in a particular way, yes, partly to shield their damaged egos, but also because they were steeped in a Western culture of stories. Southerners did not invent Lee, Jackson, and Davis only to confront a world in which they had been defeated and had their manhood called into question. As people who lived in the West, and as Americans, southerners did not invent Lee, Jackson, and Davis without already knowing what made for acceptable hero stories.⁵

It is important to note that, for the most part, only white males could become acceptable heroes. Americans borrowed from Europe an exclusionary model for hero making and storytelling that elevated white males as the truest, bravest, and most honorable of men. Lionized, celebrated men of Western history reflected what the dominant culture wanted to see in themselves and in the origins of their communities. In the West, that culture was white—and thus American heroes followed the established pattern of making white males the key actors of almost all the stories. In both southern and northern stories about the Civil War black men and women do not have their own voice. They are acted upon by others, and rarely were black Americans given aspirations beyond faithful service to white superiors. In stories about Lee, Jackson, and Davis, who at one time or another all owned slaves, blacks appear only to confirm white beliefs about each hero. For example, there were numerous southern stories about one of Davis' former slaves who, at his former master's funeral in 1889, wept at the death of his old friend. Jackson founded a black school in Lexington before the war; something southerners recounted many times. Although, it seemed there were more stories involving Lee and his slaves than either Jackson or Davis. Lee was the most aristocratic hero of the three, and he was thought to be the most genteel, kindly, and paternalistic in his personal relationships. Stories that feature slave characters (slavery was ignored more often than not) emphasized the strong bonds of affection between black Americans and Civil War heroes. Generally, Americans from the North refused to allow the harsh and brutal realities of slavery to ruin a good story about a southern icon.⁶

Actually, after stories about Lee, Jackson, and Davis became common knowledge, and their characteristics, behaviors, attitudes, looks etc, became widely known and accepted, reality (what they actually did while living) almost did not matter. To clarify,

Lee, Davis, and Jackson were *figures* that represented not only themselves (as living or once living beings) but also qualities others have attributed to them. As a man Lee lived, ate, slept, made errors, and had successes. When people evaluated his life, including personal character, his generalship, etc., they created a hero who expressed certain patterns of behavior that together transcended reality. Most imagined Lee as a chivalrous figure because his actions seemed to support pre-conceptions about what knights did, said, and looked like. Lee was not actually a knight in any real sense, but the Lee figure could easily be considered so. Americans thus created Lee, Jackson, and Davis as figures as much as men. By doing so, they told each other of some stupendous action they did, some great feat or great failure, with little regard for the truth. This process helps clarify how southerners and northerners told and retold stories about Civil War figures. Stories sometimes were rooted in fact and sometimes not. Accounts which described the life of Jackson are oftentimes counterfactual, for instance, because it is theorized what he would have done had he lived long enough to be at this or that battle. It was reasonable for Americans to think they could guess the outcome, as they knew the Jackson figure well enough. The vast majority of Americans had never met Lee, Jackson, or Davis personally, but they knew them, what they did, and what they would do, anyway.⁷

The certainty of knowing about these figures stemmed partly from the human familiarity with hero archetypes of the past. Attempting to come to terms with dreams and the mind, psychologist Carl Jung proposed that humans have a collective unconscious of symbols that help us process information and understand the world. Of all the many symbols humankind developed and passed down, “the myth of the hero is the most common and the best-known myth in the world.” Jungians have been mostly interested in the unconscious dream world of humans and the commonalities of religious

or secular myths among various different cultures. Though, the thinking behind Jung's concept of hero archetypes can be as useful to the study of History as any other discipline. What archetypes offer is access to a prior knowledge, a set of predetermined values, which humans use to judge the good and bad, the desirable and undesirable, in leading men. In terms of the West, the knight has been one of, if not the most, prevalent symbol of the ideal man. The historical knight would be difficult to pin down as one thing or another, and he existed in a specific place and an identifiable time. However, most Americans of the nineteenth-century could identify the knight archetype just as easily as one of their own family. He lived in the literature of the day, in oral traditions, and perhaps in the unknowable collective unconscious. In this context, heroes are cultural expressions of the characteristics a people prefer to see in themselves, and they often imagine these preferred principles in the form of an archetype.⁸

The study of heroes, the consideration of archetypes, talking about leading men as representative symbols, all fall into a well-established mode of historical analysis: gender. Heroes encapsulate all the various attributes a culture values in its men. Though not always perfect, a hero usually personifies what it means to be masculine. The application of gender to studies of the South appears logical. An array of academics and other observers have noted how a paternalist ethic and/or strictly-enforced male codes of behavior have in large measure defined the South. As many historians have documented, an Old World honor code survived and thrived in the South more than anywhere else in America. Generally speaking, a man's honor, or public reputation/standing in the community, was a leading feature in southern life. Masculinity encompasses honor, chivalry, or any other prescribed rules for male behavior, though historians of the South have not usually thought of gender in this way. With a few exceptions southern

masculinity has thus been a topic of indirect study; without invoking gender as an explicit category of analysis.⁹

In non-southern fields, however, works dealing with masculinity have been plentiful. These typically focus on America at large and omit any viewpoint inherently southern. Progressive era gender studies usually describe a world trying to come to terms with modernity while depicting men as wrestling with the fear that perhaps their increasingly white-collar world has stripped them of their manhood. Furthermore, historians rightly note a Progressive Era tension between a genteel style of Victorian masculinity and a new, more aggressive type of man who emerged sometime near the turn of the century. Most attribute this conflict to the Spanish-American War of 1898, an increasing imperialist impulse, and the rise of Theodore Roosevelt as a symbol of the American man. Roosevelt prided himself on a “strenuous life” of vigorous activity and carried himself with a certain swagger and confidence unlike the more staid man of the nineteenth-century. It has almost become orthodoxy that Roosevelt’s bluster signaled a departure for how men were supposed to act. Roosevelt and other American men felt they had become over-civilized and thus overcompensated by becoming more outwardly manly. Hunting, sports, and a more belligerent foreign policy resulted from the widespread male anxiety.¹⁰

Roosevelt did not define masculinity as much as he typified the anxiety of the white culture of the Gilded Age/Progressive Era. White American males contended with a modernizing world which threatened to erode their authority over women, blacks, and any other peoples thought dependent or inferior. Many women loudly pressured for voting rights, and black men like boxing champion Jack Johnson struck hard at myths of white superiority. For some it must have felt as if the world was turning upside down, or

at least the possibility of such a thing appeared likely if not imminent. General fears about a changing world were more or less common to northerners and southerners. In Robert Wiebe's famous words, modernity brought with it a "search for order." That is to say, not only were white men increasingly made to discard the farm for the factory, wear white collars, and work for a boss, but they now also had to consider the demands/gains of long-exploited groups such as black Americans. For those who did not want to adjust, nineteenth century men faced the prospect of losing their authority over white women and all people of other races. This is partly why some later chose to join the white-only, anti-immigrant, anti-Catholic, racist Ku Klux Klan of the twenties.¹¹

Along with the increasing mobility of women and non-white ethnic groups, a general uneasiness with modernity also concerned many American men. Gail Bederman outlined how race, gender, along with the growth of technology, industry, and cities threatened the identity of white males and provoked the want of men to return to some pre-modern, super-masculine mode of living. American men expressed their anti-modern outlook in many ways—not excluding Roosevelt's insistence that real men lived close to nature. Historian T. J. Jackson Lears explained the anti-modern perspective common to some Gilded Age/Progressive Era Americans. To Lears, "the antimodern impulse stemmed from revulsion against the process of rationalization...the systematic organization of economic life for maximum productivity...the drive for efficient control of nature under the banner of improving human welfare..." Industrial capitalism was the primary force of modernity for Lears—it bred the erosion of "real" experience in favor of a synthetic, detached world, and replaced faith in higher authority with faith in technology. Carl Jung put religion at the forefront of man's modern problems. Religion, for Jung, was crucially important to one's sense of self. The church declined in

significance as Protestantism lost much of its hold on a secularizing society. In the church, man found expression of his symbols, an explanation of his world, and a sense of just, divine reality that gave him some sense of order. Thus, it appeared that Americans, and white males most of all, struggled to come to terms with modernity in all its forms.¹²

It is important to understand the sociopolitical circumstances of the period, the white aversion to any alteration of the social order, but it is also essential to unearth the underlying legends, stories, myths, etc., from which manliness emerged. Though manliness does not stay constant and is rarely monolithic, Western traditions and/or archetypes profoundly shaped how Americans viewed their ideal man. By the late-nineteenth century Puritanism in New England had been fading from view for many years, but most still recognized the Puritan as an archetype. The Puritan obviously was a religious man, but it went further than that. The Calvinist Puritan was a serious man in all things—dour and often brooding, he worked hard at every endeavor, exhibiting a zeal for any task at hand. Most associated with New Englanders, Americans believed that the puritanical spirit remained vital in many other people and places, as well. For example, Roosevelt's urgings about exerting one's self physically seems much like an adaptation of the Puritan (or Protestant) work ethic. Conversely, his charge with the Rough Riders up San Juan Hill could have been lifted from some poem about King Arthur and his knights or from a tribute to General George Pickett's famed assault at Gettysburg. One could argue, as well, that Roosevelt foreshadowed the emergence of the cowboy archetype—basically an American version of the knight. Roosevelt himself was even inspired partly by old stories about knights and their exploits.¹³

Chivalry in the West has a long and colorful history. It could be argued that from the Middle Ages up until the present chivalry has been as important to defining what

makes a man as anything else. Medieval knights were warriors and adventurers who fought on the behalf of nobility, kings, and sometimes, the Pope. Their viciousness in battle and occasional acts of cruelty did not entirely fit with the Christian ethos, which is precisely why the clergy invented chivalry in order to restrain their behavior. Ever since this time, chivalry has become a romantic idea. Westerners invoke it for a variety of reasons, and rarely is it grounded in a sense of historical reality about who knights were and what they actually did. Even so, the idea of chivalry has provided the guide for how Christian soldiers fight and then behave once the fighting is over. Knightly conduct, after all, is ultimately based on the example of humility and self-sacrifice of the West's premier hero: Jesus of Nazareth. There remains the question, though, whether chivalry has actually increased or decreased acts of brutality. Chivalry has been an excuse for foreign invasion, imperialism, racism, and for southerners, it has been a justification for both slavery and Jim Crow-ism.¹⁴

Americans talked about chivalry quite often before, during, and long after the Civil War. Antebellum southerners promoted themselves as a society built on chivalrous ideals. Generally, many southerners argued that plantation slavery led to a society mostly rural, genteel, and humane, much like a romanticized portrait of European life. They counterposed this self-definition of the chivalrous South against a godless, self-seeking, and corrupt North. The southern man consistently portrayed himself as an expert horseman and masculine descendant of the European knight or cavalier, and he in turn feminized the northern male. In response, northerners called the South "The Slave Power;" asserting that an unfree society, based on forced labor, filled with inequality and violence, did not resemble the honor-bound world of the knight. After winning the Civil War, northerners took pride in mocking the defeated "southern chivalry," especially those

among the slave-holding elite. These self-styled gentlemen, northerners felt, talked about chivalry a great deal but proved to be small-minded and ineffectual men. Northerners never allowed southerners to claim themselves as the sole heir to chivalric traditions. The knight's code survived the Civil War and continued to be used as a standard for the Western man. Despite what southern slave-owners had once said, Americans from all over the nation could at any moment profess chivalrous tendencies. Ironically, chivalry has always been something difficult to define, yet everyone knew what it was and could recognize it almost anywhere.¹⁵

Southerners tended to revere knightly heroes and the code of chivalry more than other Americans. The formulation of the southern hero as cavalier/knight had been firmly established in antebellum southern fiction. One of the South's most popular authors was William Gilmore Simms, and his novel *The Life of Chevalier Bayard* inspired generations of southerners. According to the scholar Michael Kreyling: "The outline of this hero is deeply engraved in the cultural mind of the Old South: the vertical thrust of the posture, the lean body... the serene face and eyes indicating a soul in harmony with some power and certainty that transcends historical contingency." The Bayard character, and others from the same stock, formed the outline of the archetypal hero whose physical appearance and character provided the most favored kind of southern hero. Southerners absorbed fictional characters into their understanding of the model man, until fiction and myth became embedded into the stories of real life people. The want for southerners to identify themselves with chivalrous characters stemmed from many factors. The desire for antebellum southerners to support the institution of slavery contributed to the impulse to link the South with chivalry. The frequency of northern claims that slavery made white men brutish and violent stirred southerners to articulate how their peculiar institution

instead produced the best kind of men. As southerners felt obliged to reason that a slave-based society was *ideal*, they also presented their men as superior to northerners, and thus, knight-like. The antebellum South conditioned itself to see its best men as modern variants of heroes such as Bayard. It is not surprising that they would look for a Bayard among their leading generals, nor that they would find one in Lee. One finds that southern authors, whether consciously or not, projected the symbols of the knight into stories of Lee. Whether it was Bayard, King Arthur and his knights, or other southern favorites, their lasting impression lived through heroes such as “the flesh and blood Robert E. Lee.”¹⁶

Southerners never monopolized the chivalric ideal for themselves, nor were they the only people to tell stories. In America, chivalry is often brought up within the sectional dialogue about cavaliers, Puritans, and the origins of America. The cavalier/Puritan myth about the early colonial period has provided America with one of its most prominent origin stories. As it has been told, dissident Puritans settled New England and British men of the cavalier type made their way to Virginia and then the lower South. Essentially, the cavalier has been imagined as a descendant of the knightly tradition, and the Puritan in almost every way is his opposite. One could draw the obvious conclusion that the Puritan/cavalier paradigm could lead to dissension and disagreement. Instead of a common origin, it is plausible to think that this story gave Americans reason to regard one another as enemies. However, Americans came to regard both the knight and the Puritan with a healthy respect. America romanticized the God-fearing, hardy Puritan, or alternately, Yankee, almost as much as the chivalrous knight. It also helped that both heroes were white. As time progressed, romantic Americans often told stories about Puritans and Yankees as common foes who nevertheless both

represented white Protestant virtue. Perhaps their looks, personality, and outlook were not the same, but both were soldiers of the cross. Reunion stories of the late Victorian era often highlighted sectional reconciliation as the metaphorical marriage of the Calvinist and the Cavalier. When their friendship is restored there is a kind of harmony that is realigned, as if a proper balance has once again been struck. It is likely that Americans recognized both the Puritan and knight as a part of their unique heritage as white, Christian, Westerners. It was not only southerners who had to rationalize racist policies and a history of inequality. Many northerners found a common ground with southerners, who, much like their one-time Confederate enemies, saw heroes as almost exclusively white.¹⁷

Yet, American reunion could not be called complete. The Lee, Jackson, and Davis figures sometimes united Americans but very often did not. Hero stories about Civil War figures at times reinvigorated sectionalism. The legacies of the three were not always agreed upon, and their actions were sometimes controversial. With that being said, the accomplishments or failures of each during the Civil War followed and ultimately shaped their reputations more than anything else. Stories about Lee, Jackson, and Davis offered insight into how Americans interpreted, not only three important men, but what men were supposed to be like. On this, America did not wholly agree.

In the following chapters there will be many stories that clarify what northerners and southerners thought about themselves, each other, and ultimately, what made the model man. Some stories offer the same meaning, the same lessons, while others were intensely contested. Some were true, some were complete fabrications, and some were in between. To discuss American masculinity as represented by the hero, I will often turn to the Western traditions that so influenced the ideal man. For example, British Historian

Stephanie Barczewski recognized how a community's hero figures can offer competing visions of the past. King Arthur and Robin Hood, she argued, were the premier heroes for nineteenth-century Brits even though the meaning of one at times seemed at odds with that of the other. Furthermore, Victorian England told stories about King Arthur and Robin Hood despite that very little is known about either. That did not matter. The British knew who their heroes were and why they imbued the nation with a sense of self-identification. America had no Middle Ages, but it was steeped in Western culture and stories about its great men. They had a more recent past, with men like Lee, Jackson, and Davis, as well. Using one to help explain the other, northerners and southerners set out to tell their own story.¹⁸

In *my* story about hero archetypes, the Civil War, nineteenth century America, and Lee, Jackson, and Davis, it is difficult to miss how a Christian, Victorian, sensibility influenced nineteenth century Americans. At heart, my story is about how Americans described the ideal man in order to define the terms of reunion. Lee, Jackson, and Davis were useful in this process—but not all in the same way or to the same degree. Civil War heroes very often confirmed the Victorian portrayal of American men as humble, religious, and self-effacing, but sometimes they challenged this standard. Either way, Americans told stories about them to illustrate both what men were supposed to be like and what they were not. Northerners and southerners often agreed on the meaning of the stories, and sometimes they did not. Thus, some stories were emphasized and others downplayed or discarded, while many became popular only in the North or in the South. Most of these continued with the Western practice of promoting white males as the most desirable kind of ideal man. Therefore, Civil War storytelling is best understood as the continuing of time-honored traditions. It was not unusual or uniquely southern that

defeated rebels became representative figures, nor was it strange that Americans embraced the idea of heroes in order to understand the war. What is left, then, is to explain what Lee, Jackson, and Davis represented to Americans, and the degree to which Americans agreed or disagreed about the meanings of the stories. Hopefully, this discussion will add something to our understanding of the Civil War, the changing world of the late nineteenth century, and how Americans tried, but failed, to complete the process of reunion.

¹Charles Regan Wilson, *Baptized in Blood: The Religion of The Lost Cause, 1865-1920* (University of Georgia Press, 1980), 25; Unless otherwise noted, I am talking about stories written from the white point of view. Black Americans struggled to provide counter narratives that would be accepted by the mainstream. Occasionally I will use the term white southerner or white northerner simply to remind readers that white Americans dominated the public discourse. Black Americans had a very different set of stories about the Civil War.

²Wilson, *Baptized in Blood*.

³Harry Stout, *Upon the Altar of the Nation: A Moral History of the Civil War* (New York: Penguin, 2006).

⁴The Lost Cause has generally been interpreted as a construct to rationalize defeat or a construct to excuse or justify slavery, and thus southern and/or American racial bigotry. Most of the major works have some combination of both: Foster, *Ghosts of the Confederacy*; David Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American History* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard, 2001); Fitzhugh Brundage, *The Southern Past: A Clash of Race and Memory* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard, 2001); Alice Fahs and Joan Waugh, eds., *The Memory of The Civil War in American Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Also see Wilson's introduction to the 2009 edition of *Baptized in Blood*.

⁵Foster, *Baptized in Blood*; Foster, *The Ghosts of the Confederacy*, 8; Thomas Connelly and Barbara Bellows, *God and General Longstreet: The Lost Cause and The Southern Mind* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1982); W. Scott Poole's (Wilson's former student) wrote a definitive work on South Carolina and Confederate commemoration that challenges some of the prevailing historiography. I believe his take, though limited in his book to South Carolina, could be a new departure. Poole argues that South Carolina's celebration of the Confederacy was an expression of a paternalist, hierarchical conservatism rooted in an Old World critique of liberalism and modernity: W. Scott Poole, *Never Surrender: Confederate Memory and Conservatism in the South Carolina Upcountry* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004); Fred Hobson, *Tell about the South: the Southern Rage to Explain* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1983).

⁶David Blight, *Race and Reunion*; Fitzhugh Brundage, *The Southern Past: A Clash of Race and Memory* (New York: Belknap Press, 2005); Another general source that considers the relationship between the construction of race and historical memory is Grace Hale, *Making Whiteness, The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940* (New York: Pantheon, 1998).

⁷Michael Kreyling, *Figures of the Hero in the Southern Narrative* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1987).

⁸Carl Jung, M.L. Von Franz, eds., *Man and His Symbols* (London: Aldus Books, 1964), 110; Jung, *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*, (New York: Harcourt Publishing, 1955).

⁹Historians have noted that the South has been patriarchal, with male-centered codes of behavior. I believe that what southern historians have described could be called masculinity. Bertram Wyatt Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (New York: Oxford Press, 1982); Wilbur J. Cash, *The Mind of the South* (New York: Knopf, 1941); The primary work on paternalism from Genovese is Eugene Genovese, *Roll Jordan Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Knopf, 1976); Stephanie McCurry *Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman Households, Gender Relations, and the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

¹⁰Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: a Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); Kristin Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood: How Gender Politics Provoked the Spanish-American and Philippine-American Wars* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998); Clifford Putney, *Muscular Christianity: Manhood and Sports in Protestant America, 1880-1920* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard Press, 2003).

¹¹Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*; Robert Wiebe, *The Search For Order, 1877-1920* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1966).

¹²T. J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981). 7; "The Spiritual Problem of Modern Man," in Jung, *Modern Man in Search of A Soul*.

¹³My understanding of chivalry in The West largely comes from John Fraser, *America and The Patterns of Chivalry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982). Chivalry comes from the French word chevalier, which in English roughly means "horseman." The American man on horseback eventually became the cowboy, firmly in the chivalric tradition; Richard Slotkin wrote a classic series on ideas about the frontier, the Old West, and myths about American History. Among these are Richard Slotkin, *Regeneration Through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860* (Middlebrook, CT: Wesleyan Press, 1973); and Richard Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth Century America* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1993).

¹⁴Historians have noted how southern whites used chivalry, and especially the notion of protecting white female virtue, as an excuse for lynching. See Joel Williamson, *The Crucible of Race: Black/White Relations Since Emancipation* (New York Oxford University Press, 1984); and Fitzhugh Brundage, ed., *Under Sentence of Death: Lynching in the South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997).

¹⁵Ritchie D. Watson, *Yeoman versus Cavalier: The Old Southwest's Fictional Road to Rebellion* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1993); Mary Susan Grant, *North Over South: Northern Nationalism and American Identity in the Antebellum Era* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2002).

¹⁶Michael Kreyling's perspective on Civil War heroes will be used throughout this project, but I hope to enhance the southern perspective by providing the counterpoint northern opinion Michael Kreyling, *The Figure of the Hero in Southern Narrative* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1987), 36-37.

¹⁷Kreyling, *Figures of the Hero*; Watson, *Yeoman versus Cavalier*; Eugene Genovese and Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *The Mind of the Master Class: History and Faith in the Southern Slaveholders' Worldview* (New York: Cambridge Press, 2005); Nina Silber, *The Romance of Reunion: Northerners and the South, 1865-1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998)

¹⁸Stephanie Barczewski, *Myth and National Identity in Nineteenth-Century Britain: The Legends of King Arthur and Robin Hood* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

CHAPTER 2

KING ARTHUR REBORN: ROBERT E. LEE AND THE SOUTH

“*Don Quixote* was one of the most mischievous books ever given to the world,” declared *The Southern Review* in 1869. “It took the highest characteristics of human nature, and by turning them into ridicule, rendered them contemptible. Piety, purity, courage, disinterestedness, and honor... were made to appear absurd weakness and folly.” This author was not the only southerner who found no humor in Miguel de Cervantes’ famous parody of the code of chivalry. Southerners took piety, courage, and honor more seriously than most Americans—sometimes too seriously. Whether it was called the knight’s code, chivalry, or honor, the notion that white southerners possessed a special connection to knightly behavior was firmly in place by 1869. The Civil War did not dislodge this belief from the southern worldview and perhaps even strengthened it. White Southerners busied themselves in many different directions after 1865—rebuilding the war-torn southern infrastructure, ensuring that freedmen remained mostly unfree, fighting to end Republican Reconstruction, and struggling to attract industry to “The New South.” A constant, however, was that southerners consistently articulated a version of themselves to the world as a special people. To accomplish this they looked to the medieval past for the great deeds of great men. Then, southerners surveyed the more recent past, their Civil War heritage, to find what remained of the knight in the men of war.¹

Long after 1865, heroes of the Civil War both shaped and reflected what it meant to be a man in American culture—and Robert E. Lee has remained, to the present, one of

the most discussed and memorialized of these figures. Americans debated one another on the merits of this or that hero and argued which should represent the Civil War and thus some slice of America itself. Southerners especially gravitated toward Robert E. Lee, and in him they found many of the characteristics they believed represented themselves. It is difficult to exaggerate how often Lee legends appeared in books, songs, poems, and private letters of the South. No matter the topic at hand, at any moment southern discourse could turn to Lee to explain the southern point of view. His wartime exploits were only the beginning of his legend. The peacetime Lee, and most importantly his personal character, became intermingled with the wartime general to create a hero for white southerners who could be molded to fit almost any need. The idea of Lee as the representative southern man became so ingrained in the minds of Americans that few even questioned this link between one man and a vast, diverse region. It seemed that, for many, putting forth Lee as a symbol explained so much about the war, and why the Confederacy did not win it.²

Scholars of Lee and the South have emphasized the connection between a beaten, humiliated cause and a general who embodied military ability and achievement on the battlefield. More often than not, Lee, due to his many successes as a Confederate general, becomes proof of southern manliness despite defeat. It has been argued that southerners enjoyed talking about Lee's generalship precisely because they lost the Civil War; that they needed to tell northerners how well they could fight. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia did in fact exhibit a great ability to make war against its Union opponents. However, the manner in which southerners defined their heroes owed to western traditions that predated the South's Civil War experience. Christianity and its accompanying warrior code, chivalry, supplied a context in which southerners understood

themselves and war itself. The long shadow of these traditions signaled to southerners who Lee was and what he represented. To begin to study the ways in which Lee represented southern masculinity, it should be reminded that the familiarity of the southern Civil War experience is no less important than the singularity, the uniqueness, of that experience. In other words, in Western History Lee is not the only symbol to emerge from a culture of defeat nor was he the only “marble man” who won immortal fame in battle. The history of lost causes and romanticized but, failed, heroes is not a southern as much as a Western invention. Many things come to mind, such as the uprising in Britain led by Jacobite rebel “Bonnie” Prince Charlie, legendary Scotsman William Wallace and his defiance of British authority, or even Davy Crockett and his band of Texans' last stand at the Alamo. Southerners indeed clung to the figure of Lee because of his success, but they did so because they knew he represented much more.³

To southerners, Lee echoed both the knight's code and the figure on which the Christian warrior's code is directly based: the biblical Jesus. Biblical figures like Moses, Daniel, Paul, Job and others have provided many of the model lessons about manhood in the West, but of these Jesus is the most important. Suffering, self-sacrifice, and humility have been more than just desirable attributes than many admire, as these and other qualities created the composite character of *one* of the model forms of western manhood: the Christ figure. For the white South, Lee was not perfect like Jesus of Nazareth, but they argued instead he exuded the Christ figure's attributes. Southerners talked about Lee the warrior as the modern manifestation of the pure knights of another time. Lee seemed the last and best of a kind rapidly disappearing—the South's version of King Arthur. Thus, to begin to understand Lee's importance as a southern hero, and why his legend became such an integral part of southern identity, one needs to begin to look to the

European past. It was this imagined past where southerners had long gazed to find the men they most admired. Here, southerners learned about the knights of old whose virtues they hoped to find in the heroes of their own age.⁴

To fully comprehend why Lee as knight so gripped the imagination of the region, one must also glance at the time and place that produced such a figure: the Old South. For many Britons, from the Middle Ages to the present, King Arthur's Camelot represents their cultural ideal, their source of pride and identity. Camelot did not last forever, but its sense of pure Christianity and chivalry remained a part of the British consciousness. For southerners the Old South is much the same. The relationship between those who identify as southern and the Old South is similar to the modern immigrant's notions of "The Old Country;" the place of origin and cultural identification. Southerners often harkened back to some imagined place of purity called the Old South, and Lee became its cherished representative. They molded him into an example of southern gentility personified, and crafted his story to reflect a time of perfect Christian chivalry. The Old South was a place of order and civility, southerners preferred to think, where modernity had not yet corrupted the world. Lee's relationship to the recent past, the Old South, and the more distant European past became interwoven threads that created his legend.⁵

As the Old South seemed ever more distant for southerners in the post-Civil War world, the want to remember, if not sanctify it, became even stronger. For southerners, Lee became the manifestation of the paternalist slaveowner and the ideal aristocrat gentleman. Yet, southerners wondered: how can we be like Lee, how can our society remain distinct, after the monumental changes wrought by the Civil War? The end of slavery turned the white southern world upside down; paving the way for black southerners to compete with whites for jobs, wealth, and prestige. Some southerners

recommended that the former Confederacy should use the North as a model for developing a better infrastructure and more diverse economy. These modernizers stressed that the “New South” had truly arrived, and they encouraged northerners to invest their capital in building up the South. In truth, white southerners simultaneously professed faith in a new, more modern South, told the world that blacks were happy and living in harmony with whites, recounted endless stories about a romantic Old South, all while working to deny black southerners full citizenship. The common thread before and after the Civil War was the southern identification with chivalry and the notion that the Old South produced the most honorable, virtuous, kind of men.⁶

After all, was not George Washington, the greatest hero in American History, also a rich, slaveholding Virginian? Southerners tended to compare Lee and Washington for a number of reasons. On a practical level, many argued that, like Washington, Lee was a rebel fighting for a just cause: Confederates did not commit treason, as instead they were Patriots. More importantly, Washington’s life, to countless southerners, exemplified the genteel character of the Christian warrior. Americans noted that during the Revolutionary War and after Washington conveyed a humble, selfless spirit. America would have made him an emperor; Washington could have used the popular passions to subvert the republican revolution. Though overwhelmingly popular, Washington did not make himself a dictator nor did he seek extraordinary power as president. Instead, he retired to a humble life after giving everything in service to his country. The idea of a self-sacrificing Washington mirrored how southerners construed the life of the Lee figure. Southerners weaved stories which consistently identified Lee as a hero who followed Washington's example.⁷

The Washington figure reminded, not only of the chivalrous hero, but also of the disinterested Patriot of classical Rome. Many southerners must have known about the story of Cincinnatus—the great Roman emperor who saved the Republic. On two different occasions Cincinnatus un-retired in order to lead Rome to victory, and in the course of doing so, twice became the absolute dictator of Rome. Once he became the most powerful man in the world, Cincinnatus could have wielded this authority for life. Instead, he saw himself as a simple farmer and immediately surrendered his throne after order had been restored. He cared not for glory, the story related, and sought only to serve the Republic; which made him an even greater legend in his own time and ever since. The Cincinnatus story is one about civic virtue: serving the community, promoting common welfare and harmony, and doing one's duty. The similarities between the story of Cincinnatus and of Washington hardly needs explanation. Comparing the stories of Cincinnatus, Washington, and Lee there certainly are differences in setting, circumstances, etc., but with each one finds a disinterested hero; a man of duty, humble, without ambition, and full of romantic heroism. It also seems that the selfless, honor-bound knight would have found in the virtuous Roman a kindred spirit.⁸

Northerners and southerners *both* were heirs to the heritage of the disinterested, Western, hero, yet southerners too often claimed this as theirs alone. Those men and women who, in the New South, invented Lee as a symbol of southern manhood were steeped in a culture which instructed that southerners and northerners were fundamentally different. Many white Americans North and South understood the origins of sectional disagreement as a contest between the descendants of cavaliers and Yankees (or alternately, Puritans). The idea of the “southern cavalier” and the northern “Puritan” became so commonplace that both sections often used these terms to define the sectional

character of the other. The many incarnations of the cavalier myth most often were not historically accurate, but the importance of these stories to American national and regional identity is impossible to dismiss. Southerners especially became obsessed with the notion that they were made from the stuff of the better class of Englishmen: aristocrats and warriors. Southerners did not usually explain what they meant by “cavalier,” but in time, they did not have to. Southerners connected their preference for the cavalier with the romanticism of the medieval knight, as both became synonymous with the other. As this process unfolded, southerners came to recognize the symbolism of the knight and apply it to the events of their lives. The most powerful planters did not fail to grasp how their landed kingdoms reminded of European nobility, feudalism, and the world of the knight. Elite antebellum southerners often contrasted this world with the capitalist, democratic, northern society they claimed to despise. Common southerners, too, talked about chivalry and knights as the ideal type of man. Historical accuracy mattered little here; the idea prevailed that white southern men could trace themselves to a European past where noble men lived out their daily lives, honor-bound to some masculine code. Southerners tended to combine classical and medieval forms of the hero, mix in the knight, southern gentleman, and cavalier, and apply them all to the Lee figure.⁹

Expressions of Lee as a knightly hero were part of a larger southern penchant to differentiate their civilization from the North. Antebellum southerners held a preoccupation with themselves and the singularity of southern society, and in both the pre and post war South, claims of regional distinction often stemmed from northern criticism. The sectional war officially began in 1861, but the two sections warred by other means long before. Frustrated by abolitionists and others who saw the slave South as brutal and backward, southerners cast their region as not backward but nobly in keeping with the

best qualities of old Europe. Southerners used words such as “chivalry” and “honor” to define themselves against the material, immoral Yankee civilization. Southerners read the works of Sir Walter Scott and other authors who summoned an imagined past of heroism. They knew about the stories of King Arthur and his knights. In short, southerners drank in the romance of this past before Confederates ever fired a shot at the northern enemy. It was in this context, guided by the lessons of Scott and others, that southerners fought the Civil War and then formed its new heroes from the ranks of Confederate leaders.¹⁰

Immediately after the Civil War, southerners especially needed to articulate who were heroes and why Confederates conformed to the knightly ideal. Plantation slavery allowed for the romantic notions about the South as a quasi-feudalistic land of genteel lords and ladies. Yet Civil War defeat toppled the core institution of this society. In addition, it was not clear what would happen to major Confederates such as Lee, and especially Jefferson Davis. If Confederate leaders were deemed traitors, as many northerners thought them to be, then they possibly faced a dire fate. Southerners immediately built upon their understanding of heroism to defend their leaders and define them as exemplars of “true” masculinity. As one southerner put it in *The Land We Love* in 1868: “the true heroes are the strivers in the cause of *right*, from love of right...” Triumph by force of arms did not a true hero make, as only men of honor, who fought for a just cause, could claim real victory. The “truest conception of *Heroism*” consisted mainly of “truth, courtesy, and courage.” According to the author, the “most perfect illustration of the heroic traits of pure and exalted chivalry,” was “the popular idea of King Arthur.” Increasingly, long after the Civil War concluded, and many of its legendary men passed away, southerners would equate figures such as Lee with the “true” heroism of past warriors.¹¹

The real Lee could count as among his relatives some of the more notable founders of America, which helped connect him to the heroes of European History. The Lees were among the most prominent families during the colonial era and after. He was the great nephew of Richard Henry Lee, the son of “Light Horse” Harry Lee, and the cousin of George Washington, all of which southerners often noted. After surveying the long legacy of the Lee family, a writer for *The Southern Bivouac* called him “the great soldier of the Southern Confederacy, whose fame was to overshadow his father’s, his name being next to Washington’s...” Southerners valued family lineage, as it again connected them back to a glorious past sometimes real and sometimes imagined. It was customary for southerners to depict Lee as the result of a great bloodline filled with cavaliers, knights, and warrior-heroes of all types. T.C. DeLeon was the brother of Confederate diplomat Edwin DeLeon and was one of many southerners fascinated with the romance of the Lee figure. In an 1890 work, he recounted Lee's famous ancestry. Among the predecessors of the great Virginian were “Launcelot Lee who came over with the Conquering William, and fought valiantly at Hastings,” and “Sir Lionel Lee” who “was in the Crusades as a favorite knight of doughty Richard the Lion Heart.” Commentary of this kind adhered to the rhetoric that dichotomized northerners and southerners into opposing races: Puritans vs. Cavaliers. Lee as a representative southern man demonstrated the South’s cavalier heritage and their connection to one of the purest masculine figures of the West, the knight.¹²

For a knight with a famous name, Lee began his Civil War career in obscurity in western Virginia. Lee became a favorite of General Winfield Scott during the Mexican War, but most southerners did not initially think of the Virginian as their savior. Neither did President Jefferson Davis and the other notables of the Confederate government.

Davis' longtime friend Albert Sidney Johnston, along with generals Joseph Johnston and Pierre Beauregard were thought of as the leaders most likely to ensure a southern victory. Sydney Johnston and Beauregard especially, fit the mold of the dashing soldier who southerners associated with medieval Europe. The postwar figure of Lee bore little resemblance to the general who fought inconsequential battles and had only the begrudging respect of his men. It was Joseph Johnston and Beauregard who led Confederates at the first battle of Bull Run. It was Johnston again who countered Union General George McClellan's advance on Richmond in 1862. It was in the middle of this series of battles (called the Peninsula campaign) when Johnston fell wounded and the little known Virginian assumed command of the Army of Northern Virginia. The Seven Days' Battles provided the first sign of Lee's talent as commander. More victories would follow, as Lee's southern fame began to overshadow most other Confederate generals. Lee would never relinquish his command of this army, leading it until the death of the Confederate cause at Appomattox Courthouse in 1865.¹³

Lee had more major successes than any other Confederate general, yet southerners remembered his defeats more than his victories. The most often told stories of Lee's military career centered on the Battle of Gettysburg in July 1863 and Grant's Overland Campaign versus Lee's Army of Northern Virginia in 1864-1865. Gettysburg stymied the positive momentum of Lee's previous accomplishments and reinvigorated the Union's efforts to conquer the capitol at Richmond. Grant's long, exhaustive campaign in the closing year of the war was far from easy, but it culminated with the surrender of the last best hope of the Confederacy at Appomattox. In the years to come, these defeats did not tarnish Lee's legacy nor dim his stature as an iconic southern man. In fact, Lee's actions during the Confederacy's downfall actually added pages to the narrative of him as one of

the premier gentleman-warriors of the nineteenth century. It was quite common for southerners to remark that Lee's finest moments, which best displayed his undeniable greatness, came when he and his army faced dire setbacks. By 1903, when Atlanta's *Constitution* discussed the greatness of Lee and his place in History, the idea of a defeated but honorable Lee had become southern orthodoxy. In an article lauding the memoirs of ex-Confederate General John Gordon, a top subordinate of Lee's, the editor noted "Robert E. Lee, the man, was even greater in defeat, than Robert E. Lee, the general in victory."¹⁴

For southerners, Lee's successes on the battlefield alone did not make him worthy of acclaim; of greater importance were his personality, looks, and character. Southerners did occasionally criticize Lee for a military blunder, but few questioned Lee's great qualities as a man. In his memoirs ex-Confederate John Haskell blamed Lee for a "demoralized army" due to an undue preference for officers educated at West Point. Haskell believed that Lee failed to recognize the talent of many subordinate officers, and as a result, "many a man went to his death, trying to win against the incompetency of leaders who should have been brushed out of the way when they failed." Yet, despite this, Haskell praised Lee's "high character" as the loftiest of any soldier who fought for either side. Even Haskell's mild criticisms seem unusual when compared to the constant outpouring of affection that surrounded the figure of Lee. Most often, southerners argued that Lee's virtue as a man transcended the results of battles, such as Gettysburg, and remained a source of inspiration long after Appomattox. As one poet put it, defeat did not dim the stature of this southern hero:

“He came not home triumphant,
But a hero he did come;
With honor, pure, unsullied,
And a love excelled by none.

For he tried the path of duty,
And he won respect and fame,--
The proudest wreath of laurels
That a mortal man can claim.”¹⁵

Honor amid failure was not the only knightly trait Lee possessed. The term “knight” can mean many things, and it is malleable enough to contain a wide array of characteristics. Lee as a knight—or its rough equivalent the cavalier—allowed for diversity which in turn strengthened the connection between the Virginian and a noble southern heritage. The symbols that indicate a knight encompass, not only martial ability, but also include personality and physical features. Being a knight usually meant an impressive, strong physical bearing, an upright posture, and a certain level of physical attractiveness. Lee was all these things and more. He was always portrayed as a Christian gentleman with good morals. Southerners took care to make Lee the paternalist slaveholder, always reminding how much he cared for slaves. Being self-possessed, with an almost stoic calmness, Lee never lost his temper nor behaved recklessly. As all knights must be, Lee cared little for his personal safety; he was fearless when faced with danger. Virginia journalist and author Edward Pollard summarized Lee’s greatness as owing to a special blend of masculine characteristics, more so than natural talent or a brilliant intellect. Lee belonged to a “class of great men in history, not remarkable for genius,” but possessing “a certain combination, a just mixture of qualities, a perfect balance of character at once rare and admirable.”¹⁶

Those qualities that made Lee a southern symbol were reflected in his personal appearance. Southerners tended to take the physical form of their commanders as proof of

their inner worth. A southern man, especially one from the upper class, was expected to present his public self in a manner that confirmed his standing as a gentleman. First hand accounts of Lee's valor, either in battle or civilian life, often begin with the affirmation of the general as handsome. As a young officer before the Civil War, a southerner remarked, Lee "was the most perfect animal form I ever saw." His "knightly bearing, and his eagle eye, and the very expression of his countenance all betokened mingled firmness and gentleness..." During the Civil War or later in life, southerners remembered Lee as good looking—somewhat tall for the day, strong, and attractive. After the Civil War, a Confederate widow recalled "as if it were yesterday the superb figure of our hero standing in the little porch...as he swung his military cape around his shoulders...It did not need my fervid imagination to think him the most noble looking mortal I have ever seen." DeLeon declared Lee "one of the handsomest men I have ever seen. Both in face and form he looked a young man, while his stately figure, carried with military erectness, induced all who passed him to turn and look again." The idea of Lee as the tall, handsome, figure of strength reinforced stories of Lee as the ideal knight. The greatness of his physical bearing reflected the purity of his heart, southerners claimed.¹⁷

Lee's impressive attractiveness owed a great debt to his notable lineage. The stories of Lee which remarked upon his beauty closely related to his reputation as a well-bred, Virginia nobleman descended from the highest type of western warriors. Lee could not be ugly or even plain, because he was not a commoner in any sense. His dress must be perfect, and symbolic of the laurels achieved in battle, while his posture must be upright, his profile striking, his gaze firm. These characteristics indicated that Lee was a Virginia gentleman, and they also confirmed his status as a knightly figure. The language used to describe Lee persuaded that his genius was not only in his well-trained talent for

leading men during war. More than a good general, southerners created Lee as the flesh-and-blood representation of their cavalier civilization. Only a lesser society could produce a hero of common looks without Lee's well-proportioned, imposing physicality. In a society prone to patriarchy and hierarchy, Lee became the ultimate manifestation of the southern nobility that set apart the South as different from the North. No northern general was as handsome, and none other looked the part of the gentleman-knight as did Lee. Others may have been smart, well trained, or skilled in a myriad of ways, but none matched Lee. Furthermore, this was obvious even to the unlearned, because all one had to do is look at him to know his worth.

Photographs and art depicting Lee furthered his image as a southern symbol of genteel masculinity. In their study of postwar Confederate images, Mark Neely, Harold Holzer, and Gabor Boritt demonstrated that representations of Lee were the most popular Civil War prints among southerners. The Lee image, by the late nineteenth-century, had become so commonplace that almost any southerner must have recognized its message. Rarely did artists portray Lee in battle; coaxing his men toward the enemy, sword in hand. It was his bearing, the way he carried himself, along with his character, more than his military prowess which became the focal point. Sometimes pictured atop his horse Traveler (itself a southern icon), but more often shown alone, southerners usually saw a staid Lee, brave but benevolent, with his sword sheathed. This was the picture of strength combined with perfect gentility. According to Neely, Holzer, and Boritt, "most engravers and lithographers placed Lee on an iconographical pedestal—the gentle knight forever gazing out at unforeseen dragons." Southerners envisioned Lee as the figure most symbolic of their self-appointed, chivalrous civilization. As such, the image had to match

the stories. Images told the story of Lee as the gentleman amid defeat, the hero who best exuded the virtues of the long gone, but fiercely remembered Old South.¹⁸

Even stories about Lee's greatest blunder as commander of the Army of Northern Virginia proved his near-flawless character, southerners claimed. Defeat at Gettysburg caused many to question Lee's judgment as a general, but few went as far to question his honor. It was no coincidence that southerners retold accounts of Gettysburg more than any other Civil War battle. The end of the Army of Northern Virginia's second invasion of the North resulted in disaster for the Confederacy and greatly weakened any chance to win the war. At the pinnacle of the third day's fighting, Lee ordered a desperate frontal assault, led by General George Pickett, which sealed Union victory. For a long time, there was plenty of blame to go around. At first, Lee's top cavalry officer, General Jeb Stuart, was taken to task for being absent at a critical time on the battlefield. General James Longstreet became a much more popular target for ridicule, however. Many popularized the story that Longstreet did not follow Lee's directives on the morning of July 2 which would have sealed victory in Pennsylvania and perhaps even ended the Civil War. Numerous times in his long life after the Civil War, Longstreet admitted that Lee "knew that I did not believe success was possible," because the Union occupied the high ground around Gettysburg. Plenty of southerners agreed with Longstreet during and after the Civil War. It was reasonable to conclude that Lee should not have engaged a well-positioned Army of the Potomac at a site of little importance; that perhaps the Confederates should have sought a battlefield of their own choosing. Virginia author James McCabe felt Lee was not himself at Gettysburg, that he was "influenced" by a "contempt" for the Union army, and he wrote that assuredly Pickett's Charge "was an error." Edward Porter Alexander, Lee's chief artillery officer, concurred with Longstreet's

assessment that Pickett's Charge was doomed to fail. It was a “useless slaughter,” Alexander recorded in his memoirs. Pickett himself detested the loss of so many of his soldiers on July 3 and put the blame squarely on Lee. Pickett held a grudge against Lee and did not try to hide it. Most others loved Lee, and the archetypal symbols of the cavalier or knight, but could find fault with Lee, the general, at Gettysburg.¹⁹

A small number of ex-Confederate Virginians promulgated the story of Longstreet as the villain of Gettysburg, but they were not representative of all southern opinion. In the 1870s and 1880s Virginia’s Southern Historical Society spent much of its time and energy piecing together their own story of Lee, and from their viewpoint, he could do no wrong. Ex confederate Virginians comprised the SHS, men such as Jubal Early, William Jones, William Nelson Pendleton, and Dabney Maury. As many have observed, the Virginians, through the voluminous writings, settled upon Longstreet as the most suitable villain of Gettysburg. The Virginians identified Longstreet because he publicly and privately disagreed with Lee's tactics during the northern invasions of 1863, and just as importantly, because he joined the despised Republican Party during Reconstruction. Though the Virginians were very powerful, and indeed shaped public opinion of the war, even at their height they could not dominate the discourse about Lee, Longstreet, and Gettysburg. Southern attitudes toward Lee and Gettysburg varied much more than the SHS wanted to believe. In time, though, it did not matter as much who lost Gettysburg for the Confederacy. What southerners remembered most of all, and what tended to make it into the stories of Gettysburg, was the bravery of those Confederates who set out on the long hike toward Cemetery Ridge. As scholar Jon Fraser has written, interest in Western chivalry has been largely defined by the fascination with the losers and not the winners. For Fraser, “the history of the chivalric has largely been a history of

failure” as exemplified by “Pickett’s Virginians advancing in vain across the murderous fire from Cemetery Ridge; Lee surrendering to Grant at Appomattox...Arthur wounded almost to death in his last fight against Mordred...” Most postwar southerners enjoyed recalling the bravery of the chivalrous men who crossed that open plain on the third day of July. They did not need to consider Lee the perfect general in order to make him, and the men who followed him in the Army of Northern Virginia, chivalrous heroes.²⁰

Gettysburg’s deep hold on the mind of the South, from July 1863 to the present, says something about a culture preoccupied with stories about chivalric heroes. In 1892 noted southern author Thomas Nelson Page illustrated the important legacy of both Gettysburg and Lee himself. Page turned his attention to Lee and Gettysburg in an article about the need for better southern education, which itself is important to note. Lee at Gettysburg figured so prominently in southern lore, stories of the event could appear in virtually any medium on any topic. Though he could have discussed any other moment of the Civil War, Page chose Gettysburg, and the character of Lee, to present as symbols that best represented the courage of the southern people and their noble past. Southerners did not think it unusual that they chose to memorialize Lee’s greatest defeat more than any of his brilliant victories. As Page explained, southerners loved Lee just as much, or more, after a defeat than after a victory. Page declared:

“When Lee, with tattered standards and broken battalions, recrossed the Potomac, after Gettysburg, the South exhibited greater devotion to him than when he forced Burnside’s staggering back across the Rappahannock (Fredericksburg). When he abandoned Richmond and started on his march southward, the South still trusted him.”²¹

For his future legend, it was important that Lee accepted blame for Gettysburg. Even knights must admit when they have erred, and so it was with Lee. In southern stories, a sorrowful Lee mourned the loss of Pickett’s men and took full blame for the

disastrous results. As one southern editor related: “really great men do not hesitate to avow their responsibilities, even of errors which prove disastrous,” as when “General Lee, on the field at Gettysburg...watching the returning remnants of Pickett’s brigade after its heroic and deadly charge, said, ‘The fault is all mine.’” Ex Confederate George C. Eggleston glowingly described Lee as “the model of manly beauty: large, well made, and graceful,” and praised that “which prompted him to take upon himself the responsibility for the Gettysburg campaign.” Another southerner, listing various admirable attributes of Lee’s, lauded the Virginian’s tendency to accept the fate of the southern people in both good times and bad. Lee “was such a hero vouchsafed to us and to mankind,” as he chose to “fight the battles and share the miseries of his own people; proclaiming on the heights in front of Gettysburg that the fault of the disaster was his own.” The theme here is seen very often in Lee stories. Southerners surmised that Lee cast his lot with the people he was charged to protect, no matter what occurred. Though others accused Longstreet of disobedience and even treachery, none ever said that Lee tried to explain away Gettysburg by shifting the blame to Longstreet. Only a lesser man would have done so. Many southerners rebutted the idea of the Virginians, that Lee’s military career was spotless, and that he held no responsibility whatsoever for Gettysburg. The point here, though, is that most did agree that his honor remained intact, nonetheless.²²

Southerners crafted some of their most long-lasting stories about a defeated Lee. After the Civil War, Lee accepted an offer to become president of Washington University. Ever since, the idea prevailed that Lee retired to a civilian life in the tradition of heroes like Cincinnatus or George Washington. Many explained how Lee chose a quiet and virtuous life instead of one in the public spotlight. According to one Atlanta minister,

Lee's course after the war publicized the need for better education, and he provided an excellent example for youths to follow. The public education movement "began, when General Lee decided not to become the president of an insurance company, and became the president of Washington College," he noted. In "How Lee Came to Lexington" one southern author described Lee's arrival to Washington College as the return of an iconic hero, so much so, that locals "flocked" to see Lee "mounted on his old-war horse Traveler." The tone of the story relayed the idea of a legendary warrior returning from battle, revered by southerners as more than just a wartime commander. It was the end of an epic journey by which "the great soldier who disdained a princely revenue from corporate treasures was proud to accept a modest pittance from a school of learning that he might do his part in training the manhood of the South." This author, like almost all others, did not mention that Lee was financially broken after the war and had few other options. The United States government confiscated his Arlington plantation and made it a federal cemetery, for example. That was not the purpose of the story, and that was not how it was told.²³

In many postwar stories, Lee's benevolent, selfless nature became something of a feminine concern for the welfare of others. A major part of chivalry is to concern oneself with the lot of the less fortunate; to take oaths to protect those who need it. This could mean that the hero fights for family, for community, for a higher power, or very often, for women. A feminine sensibility also reflected the Christ figure's love for every human being regardless of their lot in life. According to one story, when Lee left home for West Point his disabled mother grieved losing her beloved son and caretaker. She called him "both son and daughter to me," because of Lee's tender devotion to her. This sensitivity to the plight of others, especially the helpless, very often seemed like maternal love. In a

boyhood encounter with Lee, one southerner remembered that “he was so gentle, kind, and almost motherly, in his bearing that I thought there must be some mistake about it.” Another described Lee as “brave as the noblest knight that ever laid lance in rest, and pure as the perfection of womanhood; so great that the heroes of the world pale in comparison to him...” As southerners often did, *Debow’s Review* in 1866 compared Lee with his cousin and fellow Virginian, George Washington. “There was a large streak of the Woman both in Washington and Lee,” because both sincerely cared about others. It was not that southerners believed Lee’s womanish tendencies made him less a man, or weak in any regard. An Alabama novelist makes this point in her postwar work *Cameron Hall*. Lecturing to a young boy about Lee, one of the characters noted “no woman ever had a kindler, gentler heart... which instead of being a blemish upon manhood, are rather its glory and its crown.” The point here was that having aspects of a woman’s tenderness made one more of a man. A feminine Lee also spoke to the special character of the knight’s calling and the code of chivalry, which southerners knew existed in medieval Europe and hoped still lingered in the South.²⁴

Many stories remarked upon Lee’s motherly concern for weak or wounded young Confederate soldiers. According to ex-Confederate Henry Smith, as a young private in the Confederacy he had two memorable wartime meetings with Lee. The “mere boy” encountered an old, kindly looking man one day after marching many miles. “Tired and hungry,” Smith asked him casually for food, not realizing he was talking to none other than General Lee. After being invited inside his tent, the famished Confederate “ate ravenously, without saying a word,” and then thanked his “new friend” for the meal. Smith was “taken aback” to learn this quiet, unassuming gentleman was the commander of the Army of Northern Virginia. Only a few days later, Lee encountered the private

again, remembered him, gave him one of his horses, and then rode side by side with Smith while passing toward the Confederate frontlines. Thus, Smith rhetorically asked his readers: “do you wonder that we boys all took a fancy to him?” Apparently, interacting with Lee left a lasting impression on the self-described “young and cheeky” soldier. Reflecting back, Smith called Lee “the Confederacy’s greatest soldier—the idol of the people,” and “the father of the soldiers...” In the story, Lee does not reprimand the naïve private for his boorish behavior and disrespectful treatment of a superior officer. Lee’s manner is that of a parent toward a son. Lee knows the young man does not know better, and relieving his suffering is the great general’s foremost concern. One gathers that Lee thought of his soldiers, not as lowly cogs in the machinery of warfare, but as an extended network of children who needed his protection.²⁵

Southerners also described Lee as a father figure; the charismatic leader of both Confederate soldiers and generations of southerners. In a *Southern Review* article about Gettysburg, “Lee the father” is portrayed as the parent of the southern cause and alone its sole hope for victory. At Gettysburg, the author insisted, Lee’s officers failed him much like a child’s behavior disappoints a loving parent. Gettysburg only further proved the South’s “dependence” on Lee to save them, because from this point forward “the care of his children must devolve upon him alone.” In her narrative of the Civil War, Mary Tucker Magill expressed many of the ideas that so many used in order to make Lee into a paternalist figure. For men of the South, Lee was the “Captain of their salvation,” as he led them during both war and peace. Lee’s character was so striking that all followed him, and at his death southerners “mourned him as a father, and wept again as for the second loss of the cause of the South.” Another southerner, writing in the *Review*, again referenced Gettysburg to prove Lee’s greatness in defeat. Here, Lee’s greatest legacy

became his “conquest” of human weakness, such as “ambitions,” “personal preferences,” and “personal dislikes.” For southerners, Lee was “your captain,” a fatherly figure who, this author believed, should “follow him” by learning to become more like him.²⁶

Whether motherly or fatherly, most agreed Lee owned in great number all of the attributes of a Christian. There were many ways in which Lee demonstrated his Christian virtue: his kindness to women and children, his concern for Confederate soldiers, a disdain for destroying civilian property, faithfulness to family, and his consistently restrained personality. Many argued that one of Lee’s finest hours was choosing the Confederacy over the Union in 1861. Though he could have assumed a higher command in the United States Army, Lee chose to defend his native state and region—which southerners interpreted as a Christian act of selfless love. As one writer in the *Veteran* remarked, Lee could have accepted the Union’s “dazzling offer” but he “felt his first duty was to Virginia...he felt it his duty to answer without regard to personal considerations.” This was a shining example of Lee’s “Christian character.” Knightly heroes were expected to follow a higher code of honor; they must fight and win, but knights must be respectful to enemies and gracious in defeat. They also must set an example of lofty, Christian ideals for others to follow, as one North Carolinian related in 1866. She urged to “follow the example of our great and glorious General, Robert E. Lee, greater, if possible, in his day of humiliation than in his hour of triumph,” who “stands pre-eminent before the world, first among its Christian gentlemen.” The belief that Lee was the ideal Christian followed the pattern, repeated many times in many ways through the years, that the Virginian typified the knight’s self-appointed duty to fight for grand causes.²⁷

It was important that southerners reinforced Lee’s pious religious beliefs in order to distinguish their society as a white, Christian civilization. Medieval knights and

English cavaliers usually fought for a higher calling that included God and country. Assigned a task much greater than themselves as individuals, knights (in theory) were the ultimate Christian warriors in the tradition of the West. Lee and the Army of Northern Virginia, in the southern romantic worldview, became the last of these great men. Southerners preferred to think of their region as the West's last outpost of chivalry, Christianity, and a white-only world typified by heroes such as King Arthur. Southerners often said the chivalrous, honor-bound sensibility had been ingrained into the culture of the South and its men but had much less influence in the North. After all, Lee stood out as a singular hero partly because of the South's longstanding antebellum critique of an increasingly secular North. The popular theory held that a rising industrial, urban North was losing its religious soul in favor of raw materialism, and it was supposed that the agrarian, slave South somehow was more Christian and better reflected the best of Western civilization. This basic rationale of southern difference remained vital throughout the latter nineteenth-century. Thus, southerners created a Lee who carried the cross with him into battle, and harkened back to a type of western hero who was rarely found in the current age.

It is difficult to miss the allusions to the Christ figure inherent in many stories about Lee. The code of chivalry arose from the fear of the medieval clergy that knights, who were trained warriors, would lose sight of their Christian virtue on the battlefield. In other words, chivalry was introduced partly to tame knights—to remind them of their duty to abstain from un-Christian behavior. As a result, as most in the West can probably recall, true knights respected opponents, fought bravely but not ruthlessly, and never harmed those (women and children) regarded as defenseless. Postwar southerners loved to recount how Lee, during the summer 1863 invasion of Pennsylvania, ordered that his

men dare not harm northern civilians nor their property. Many wartime Confederates disliked Lee's tolerant position because of the plentiful stories about Yankee acts of plunder and of violence in the South. The postwar storytellers, however, regarded Lee's plea as quite chivalrous indeed. For southerners Lee's conduct during war perfectly matched his behavior; his values when not leading men into battle. As either gentleman or general, Lee supposedly took the honorable, Christian course. As westerners immersed in the Christian tradition, southerners turned to Jesus for a guide for manly behavior. The trials, tribulations, lessons, and code of behavior learned from biblical stories clearly echoed in the life of Lee, many southerners maintained. Thus, whether Lee was a god or a general, to so many he perfectly exemplified probably the leading archetype of western manhood.

Many felt that if Lee indeed was a man he was one who came closer to perfection than any other of his age. Unlike the SHS, not every southerner attempted to acquit Lee for his decisions at Gettysburg or at any other military campaign. Most believed that it was through his character that Lee achieved near-flawlessness as a man. In an article "Perfect Through Suffering" *The Land We Love* argued that wartime southerners held a godlike reverence for Lee. Perhaps this was not good for the Confederate cause, the author wrote, "yet if ever a case existed in which mortals might load one of their fellow men with an amount of almost supernal devotion, it was this." Writing in the *South Atlantic Quarterly* much later in 1908, another described Lee as the ideal southern man; the illustrious example of the peerless soldier. For southerners Lee was always "our first gentleman, a Christian hero, without self-seeking, without avarice, without malice or vindictiveness, without vice, kind and considerate, tender and forgiving, a knightly man without fear and without reproach." It was quite common that southerners used "spotless"

or “stainless” to describe their hero. Poet and priest Abram Ryan wrote “the Sword of Robert E. Lee,” which was very likely the most often repeated poem about Lee. Ryan described Lee as “defeated, yet without a stain” and offered that his sword with “stainless sheen” on many occasions “led us to victory.” Another poet described Lee’s death in terms of the last charge of a legendary knight. Here, Lee became “our pure Commander” who was “lofty, simple, tender,” and “through good, through ill” wore “his armor spotless” even until the very moment of his dying breath. The message was often repeated in many forms throughout the nineteenth century and beyond, employing a diversity of language and metaphor: Lee may or may not have been perfect, but he was as close to perfect manhood as the beloved Old South could have produced.²⁸

Many often said that Lee, like Jesus, suffered from unfortunate circumstances throughout his life but never let adversity change him. When southerners described the condition of the Army of Northern Virginia, especially late in the war, they most often painted a picture of hardship and woe: a lack of food and supplies, tired soldiers, and desperate times. Though, as one biographer believed, “General Lee shared the same sufferings and privations of his men... Upon himself he laid the lowliest duties in order to relieve the suffering of his soldiers.” Southerners compared Lee with the stories of Jesus in the Bible—how even the son of man humbled himself before others and chose to live like a pauper instead of a king. Lee shared the fate of suffering soldiers because they were all under his care, and after the war, this trend continued. Many stories of Lee accentuated his postwar life, when, the great knight, who accomplished much and retained his honor, became a non-citizen denied the laurels of victory. As one declared, Lee “forgave, but was unforgiven... He died a prisoner of war... stripped of every rank that man could give him.” Like Christ, in southern narratives Lee accepted his destiny to

the end. As one eulogist remarked, “he never paid to fortune the abject tribute of complaint, but bound the cross that God had laid upon his bosom, and bowed with meakness under the torture that inscrutable wisdom had allotted.” The “torture” that Lee suffered may not have been as horrible as the Cross itself, but it was endured with a similar dignity and clarity of purpose, storytellers maintained.²⁹

For whatever gentler, Christian qualities he possessed, there was no question that Lee had a certain dash and daring in combat that any knight or cavalier must possess. Southerners very often compared Lee’s military tactics to Napoleon, Hannibal, or Caesar—generals in history known for quick, unpredictable movements that win decisive victories. There was some truth in this interpretation. Though most Civil War generals had been schooled in Napoleonic warfare, it appeared that Lee adhered to these principles more than most. Lee was the only Confederate to lead a major army into northern territory. Time and again, through deception and speed, his armies frustrated and defeated larger Union forces. Union generals such as George McClellan seemed slow and hesitant; they had none of the pluck, none of the brilliant ability of Lee, southerners claimed. Much the same argument was used with Confederate generals in the western theater, especially with Joseph Johnston, who appeared overly-cautious and afraid to act.

Most agreed that there was no fear in Lee. Regardless of the outcome of the campaign, southerners described his generalship as visible displays of his boldness and bravery. Ex-Confederate A.L. Long wrote of a charismatic Lee whose quick-mindedness and martial instincts inspired soldiers to do great things. During one battle, Lee was “almost constantly on the move, first at one place, and then at another, where important work was in progress. It was remarkable how his quiet, confident manner stimulated the men to exertion.” In Fitzhugh Lee’s memoir of his uncle, the author described Lee’s

abilities as a general and compared them to other great commanders from history. As was often argued in postwar memoirs of the legendary Confederate, Lee's service as general put him "in the front rank of the great warriors of the world." The author emphasized Lee as an example of honorable conduct despite trying obstacles, and that he accomplished all as a general that could have been possible. Lee declared "The profession of the soldier has been honored by his renown, the cause of education by his virtues, religion by his piety."³⁰

An essential part of the Lee story, as it related to his daring in battle, and his generalship, was that Lee fought all his battles against armies of superior numbers. It is difficult to overestimate the want of postwar southerners, obsession may be a better term, to quantify the numbers of both Union and Confederate soldiers of every battle. Southerners almost constantly argued with one another and with northerners about the strength of each side. In most accounts, the Army of Northern Virginia fought against a force much more numerous and powerful than Lee's small band of warriors. In many cases this was true, but southerners were also prone to exaggerate the disparity. Stories about out-manned Confederates adhered perfectly to the perception of the South as an Old World society. As this argument went, the northern military machine overwhelmed the noble knights in Confederate service. White southerners indicated many times how Confederates made great soldiers but could not overcome impossible odds. It is true that the North held a very sizable advantage, but southerners repeated the honorable--but--overwhelmed mantra because it fit the prewar idea of a chivalrous South. It was crucial that Lee always found himself outnumbered, not only because this highlights his skill as a warrior, but also because this notion underscored his willingness to perform a duty *despite* all other considerations.

To southern romanticists, numbers mattered the most during the last year of the war, as Lee and Ulysses S. Grant faced off in Virginia. Abraham Lincoln named Grant commander of all Union forces in 1864. He had proven his worth as a general time and again, and especially at Vicksburg—a defeat as disastrous for the Confederacy as Gettysburg. Grant took over direct command of the Army of the Potomac with the intention of destroying Lee’s army. He finally succeeded, but southerners maintained that Grant’s victory was not honorable, as his superior numbers simply eroded Lee’s ill-supplied army. To understand the southern view of the Civil War, it is undeniably important to grasp what this meant for generations of white southerners. Simply put, Grant’s successful Overland Campaign against Lee was not legitimate; it did not correspond to the southern understanding of masculine behavior, so in other words, the prize of Appomattox was not rightly won. In his war memoir, William C. Oates provided a familiar explanation of the dishonorable victory of the Union and the valorous though defeated cause of the Confederacy. As was often argued, southern soldiers fought a desperate war to defend their homes, while the Union recruited immigrants to the ranks who had no real stake in the contest. Oates asserted “about one-third of the rank and file were foreigners, recruited in Europe...and we staked the best and most chivalric blood that ever flowed through the veins of the young men of any land or country against such trash as this.” Oates indicated that a dishonorable victory at any cost was really no victory at all.³¹

The southern interpretation of the showdown in Virginia provided *the* symbolic meaning of a clash between competing, divergent civilizations. Soon after the close of the Civil War, it did not take southerners long to see the series of battles between thousands of men manifested in the strategy, the maneuvers, the personality, in short, the opposing

figures of Lee and Grant. As Kreyling observed, “Grant and Lee, gravitated in the national mind toward irreconcilable poles in a cultural debate over which would be our national hero, the model for our male youth, and the bonding figure in our narratives.” For southerners, there was no question that they chose Lee over Grant. Yet, unlike with those other Union generals who did not measure up, McClellan, Joseph Hooker, and Ambrose Burnside, here Lee had actual competition—a rival who southerners had to at least respect. Yet, most southerners never allowed that Grant was Lee’s equal. Instead, the Union general and those thousands he commanded represented the overwhelming force, not just of foreign barbarians, but of a materially advanced yet morally inferior culture. As they had been conditioned to do, southerners viewed the Overland Campaign, instead of a military engagement between foes, as a timeless struggle between Yankees and cavaliers.

Edward Pollard’s 1867 *The Lost Cause* provided southerners with an early interpretation of the Civil War that offered a comparison of the figural Grant and Lee. Grant’s strategy to destroy Lee’s army in order to end Confederate resistance meant that the Army of the Potomac would constantly threaten the Army of Northern Virginia. Grant would chase and confront Lee wherever possible and use his numerical advantage to the best benefit. Many battlefields witnessed the result of this warfare, Spotsylvania, Cold Harbor, Five Forks, and Petersburg among others, and many thousands would die. Grant’s designs most likely ended the war sooner than if a different type of commander, such as McClellan, had been in charge. Still, it irked Pollard, and many others after him, that the public would praise Grant for his generalship. A seething Pollard wrote that, despite Grant’s triumph, he believed “a great General is he...who defeats large armies with small ones: who accomplishes great military results by strategy...who makes war an

intellectual exercise rather than a match of brute force,” and this greatness applied only to “Robert E. Lee.” More than just an attack aimed at Grant, the author went on to convict northern civilization itself and the generals it produced. Pollard maintained that “the North has produced no great General in this war;” that only the South could claim “exhibitions of generalship, chivalry” and “humanity,” and that “northern people have exhibited gross materialism...and worshipped the grossest types of physical power.”³²

Plenty of other authors followed Pollard’s lead, and most agreed that Grant benefited more from the mite of the United States than any inborn leadership abilities. Not all southerners criticized Grant as harshly as the acid-tongued Pollard. One former Confederate credited Grant as a “man of strong common sense who knew what he *could* do and what he could *not* do.” Yet, “in all the contests between the Grant and Lee one is reminded of a fight between some powerful, awkward giant and a light, active and expert swordsman.” An editorial that appeared in the *Bivouac* in 1885 followed the same pattern. Here, the author portrayed Grant as having some skill, but he certainly was no knight. In the last year of the war in Virginia, Grant succeeded by “attrition” and “incessant attack,” which proved that Grant “seemed lamentably deficient in strategic science and” the “combination” of swift maneuver which marks the ablest commanders. Even so, “to say that Grant was not Lee’s equal as a tactician is merely to say of him what is true of every commander of the age,” the editor surmised. In general, southerners believed that Grant possessed more talent than most Union generals, but not nearly enough to match Lee in a fair fight. In his caustic narrative of the Civil War, Clarence Stonebreaker believed Grant no better than those who Lee whipped in 1862-1863. He wrote “Grant would have been put out of service like his predecessors; for he was not a superior commander at all, but chanced to be the one on hand when Lee’s army had

become a skeleton.” In a manner typical of southern romantics, Stonebreaker could not believe that Lee’s skills as warrior knight could be overcome by anything other than overwhelming numbers and impossible odds.³³

In the novels of John Esten Cooke, one can see all of the important elements of the epic clash between Lee and Grant and what that meant for the southern interpretation of the war. Cooke served as an officer in the Army of Northern Virginia, and was a well-known writer who excelled at authoring romanticized stories of the Civil War. Though known more for his work about Stonewall Jackson, his 1870 *Hammer and Rapier* captured, perhaps better than anyone else, the southern view of both Grant (the hammer) and Lee (the rapier). In Cooke’s telling, Grant “was not a great commander” but he had a “clear brain” that told him to use his abundant resources and superior numbers to bludgeon Lee’s small legion of cavaliers. For months on end Lee outmaneuvered Grant, inflicting more casualties than did his northern counterpart, while keeping the imposing force of Union soldiers at bay. In this fight “hammer and rapier were matched against each other” and Grant knew “the sledge-hammer must strike until Lee’s keen rapier was shattered.” Cooke’s metaphors were clear enough: Grant headed the largest, best supplied army in history and used it to batter the Army of Northern Virginia into submission, and Lee’s shrewd, slicing blows at Grant—much like the strikes of a knight’s sword—could not prevent the demise of his shrinking army. Cooke questioned the conduct of Grant’s fighting style, and he pondered if this was respectable warfare or something else. Grant’s tactics “was not war exactly, in the old acceptation of the term,” and this clumsy display of blunt force was certainly not “practised by Napoleon.” Cooke’s use of language was fitting, because though the hammer triumphed, it had none of the beauty, skill, or bravery of Lee’s ancient sword.³⁴

Grant's hammering of Lee—or more specifically, the southern interpretation of the Overland Campaign—only made the Virginian more of a regional icon. Again, it seemed instances of defeat only made the Lee figure more powerful. Writing in 1870, perhaps Cooke did not realize how pervasive this story of Lee would become; how its loud echoes reverberated throughout the South for decades. For countless southerners, narratives of the Overland Campaign symbolized the meaning of the war itself. Here was the culmination of that fight which southerners, long before 1861, had both anticipated and feared: southern knights, honor-bound, virtuous and brave, pitted against the strength of an industrial power. This was the knight's last stand, the final charge of a society descended from cavaliers and legends of long ago. As the story went, there was little honor in besting an overwhelmed opponent. The North was indeed strong but not of the truest masculine type, as southerners long argued northern brawn owed to its bald pursuit of power and profit. It was not that southerners were not sometimes envious of this strength. Many argued for more factories, schools, railroads, and in favor of a thriving society based on a northern model. Yet this made Lee all the more important for the South. Lee, staring across the entrenched lines at Cold Harbor or Petersburg at Grant's hordes, came to embody the knightly past of the South and thus its distinction as a special society. Conditioned to depict themselves as different from the average American, Lee offered southerners the best example of the gentleman, knight, or cavalier opposed to his counterpoint, Grant. As one southern poet proudly put it: "Brown, Sumner, Grant, *their* types of manhood be! Ours Stonewall Jackson, Washington, and Lee." Simple comparisons between Grant and Lee further proved what southerners somehow had always known: we are made from different stuff than most Americans.³⁵

Stories about a knightly, Christian Lee changed only slightly throughout the decades of the nineteenth-century. For southerners, Lee's biography seemed mostly written, *mostly* agreed upon, by his death in 1870. From the southern point of view, by the beginning of the twentieth-century the story had changed in degree but very little in substance. In the *Veteran* in 1908, one tried to present a more balanced view of Lee, believing it folly that past admirers "dwelt upon petty things—his well cut beard, the correctness of his dress, the whiteness of his teeth...that one almost expects to read that his hair was never parted awry and that he never ate with his knife." Lee admirers had perhaps gone too far in the past, but even so, the author lauded Lee as humble, gracious, and self-sacrificing, and urged that it was his character, his example to others, that was most worthy of praise. She wrote "his real worth lies in the spirit of the man...the loftiness and dignity of his character," with a spirit "not intoxicated by glory, nor crushed by defeat, unspoiled by praise and success." In 1906, Atlanta minister John White referenced Lee in an article about the South and its lack of progress since the Civil War. A New South booster, White believed in industrial development, but he also took time to praise the Old South and the greatest knight that it produced: Lee. White reckoned that "the Southerner, tracing himself back to a knightly past" believes in "chivalry, which was characterized by a fair and open give-and-take with something of a beautiful respect for opponents." These ideals "came like a white flame on the bosom of Robert E. Lee...he was southern knighthood in flower."³⁶

If Arthur came to represent the eternal exemplar of English civilization, its best expression of manhood, Lee served much the same function for the South. To southerners, Lee was an expert warrior who struck opponents with skillful cunning, yet he also was the man who forgave his enemies, humbled himself before the world,

displayed kindness to all, honorably accepted defeat, and did not seek glory for himself. He chose the education of youth instead of fame and fortune, and in all things, he provided an example for others to follow. First and foremost, in the southern imagination Lee was a knightly figure, a cavalier, who reminded many of the stories of heroes such as King Arthur. There was no modern, nineteenth-century equivalent to Lee, southerners reckoned, so they looked to an older type of manly character that all knew and understood. As Page put it, to find Lee's "prototype we must go back to ancient times, to the antique heroes who have been handed down to us." Like with the legend of Arthur, stories about Lee mixed fact and fiction to the point where both became obscured, and perhaps even unimportant. Britons knew Arthur existed, whether he was one man or a composite of many, and southerners knew Lee was a knight because they belonged to a society descended from heroes of the same order. They also knew that northerners were not knights and that their society did not produce them. Whatever northern heroes such as Grant had, they were not made of the same material as Lee. Southerners were quick to point out these differences to their northern neighbors, and to do so, all they had to do is reference Lee—again and again. In time though, southerners would come to understand how other Americans appreciated Lee, as well. There was something about the Lee story that stirred the interest of non-southerners, and there was something about the Old South white America found quite appealing.³⁷

¹ *The Southern Review*, vol. VI, July 1869 (New York: AMS Press, 1965), 96; For general interpretations of the South after The Civil War see Edward Ayers, *The Promise of the New South: Life After Reconstruction* (New York: Oxford, 1991); and C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South* (Baton Rouge, LSU Press, 1953).

² Thomas Connelly, *The Marble Man: Robert E. Lee and His Image in American Society* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1978); Thomas Connelly and Barbara Bellows, *God and General Longstreet: The Lost Cause and the Southern Mind* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1982); Michael Fellman, *The Making of Robert E. Lee* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997).

³ John Fraser discusses one aspect of chivalry is the hero fighting for a hopeless cause in John Fraser, *America and the Patterns of Chivalry* (London: Cambridge Press, 1982).

⁴ Carl Jung, *Man and His Symbols* (New York: Doubleday, 1964); Ibid, *Modern Man in Search of a Soul* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1957); Eugene and Elizabeth Fox Genovese speak at length about the influence of the idealized Old World chivalry on the white upper class in Genovese, Eugene and Elizabeth Fox, *The Mind of the Master Class: History and Faith in the Southern Slaveholders' Worldview* (New York: Cambridge Press, 2005); I am influenced by W. Scott Poole's book that consider white southern conservatism in South Carolina: W. Scott Poole, *Confederate Memory and Conservatism in the South Carolina Upcountry* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004); Also see Eugene Genovese, *Southern Conservatism: The Achievement and Limitations of an American Conservatism* (Boston: Harvard Press, 1996).

⁵ Books about the romance of the Old South are plentiful. A few classics are: Nina Silber, *The Romance of Reunion: Northerners and the South, 1865-1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); and William R. Taylor, *Cavalier and Yankee: The Old South and American National Character* (New York: Oxford Press, 1961); Also see Eugene Genovese and Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *The Mind of the Master Class*.

⁶ James Roark, *Masters Without Slaves: Southern Planters in the Civil War and Reconstruction* (New York: Norton, 1977).

⁷ For a focused study of the links between Lee and Washington see Richard McCaslin, *Lee in the Shadow of Washington* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 2004)

⁸ Epilogue to Eran Shalev, *Rome Reborn on Western Shores: Historical Imagination and the Creation of the American Republic* (London: University of Virginia Press, 2009), 217-240; Gordon Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1969), 65-69.

⁹ William Taylor, *Cavalier and Yankee: The Old South and American National Character* (New York: George Braziller Inc., 1961); Eugene and Elizabeth Fox Genovese, *The Mind of the Master Class*; David Hackett Fischer *Four British Folkways in America* (New York: Oxford Press, 1989).

¹⁰ Taylor, *Cavalier and Yankee*; Ritchie Devon Watson, *Normans and Saxons: Southern Race Mythology and the Intellectual History of the Civil War* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 2008); Susan Mary Grant, *North Over South: Northern Nationalism and American Identity in the Antebellum Era* (Lawrence: University of Kansas, 2000); My primary source of understanding honor comes from Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (New York: Oxford Press, 1982).

¹¹D.H. Hill, ed. *The Land We Love*, Charlotte NC, November 1868, 59-60.

¹²*Southern Bivouac*, June 1885—May 1886, vol. IV, (Wilmington, NC: Broadfoot Publishing, 1993), 652; T.C. DeLeon, *Belles Beaux and Brains of the 60's* (New York: G.W. Dillingham, 1907), 430.

¹³James McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom* (New York: Oxford Press, 1988); The best biography of Lee probably is Emory Thomas, *Robert E. Lee: A Biography* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1997).

¹⁴McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*; Gary Gallagher is likely the premier Civil War historian of the eastern theater, writing and editing several volumes on campaigns and battles. Gary Gallagher, ed., *The Third Day at Gettysburg and Beyond* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1998); For studies of Gettysburg in memory see Carol Reardon, *Pickett's Charge in History and Memory* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1997); and Gaines Foster, *Ghosts of the Confederacy: Defeat, The Lost Cause, and the Emergence of the New South* (New York: Oxford Press, 1987); *The Constitution*, Atlanta, November 4, 1903.

¹⁵ Gilber Govan and James Livingood, eds., *The Haskell Memoirs* (New York: Putnam, 1960), 24; *The Confederate Veteran*, Nashville, February 1893, 40.

¹⁶ For military histories of these battles see George Rable, *Fredericksburg! Fredericksburg!* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2002); Gary Gallagher, ed., *Chancellorsville, The Battle and its Aftermath* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2008); Edward Pollard, *The Early Life, Campaigns, and Public Services of Robert E. Lee. With A Record of the Campaigns and Public Services of his Companions in Arms* (New York: E.B. Treat & Co., 1871), 36.

¹⁷ Wyatt—Brown, *Southern Honor*; Edwin Mims and William H. Glasson, eds., *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, Durham NC, vol. VII, Jan.-October, 1908, 360; Mrs. Burton Harrison, *Recollections Grave and Gay* (New York: Scribner's, 1911), 127; T.C. De Leon, *Belles Beaux and Brains of the 60s* (New York: Dillingham Company, 1907), 426.

¹⁸ Mark Neely, Harold Holzer, and Gabor S. Boritt, eds., *Prints of the Lost Cause: The Confederate Image* (Chapel Hill: North Carolina Press, 1987), 140.

¹⁹ Foster, *Ghosts of the Confederacy*; Thomas Connelly and Barbara Bellows, *God and General Longstreet: The Lost Cause and the Southern Mind* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1982); James Longstreet, *From Manassas to Appomattox: Memoirs of the Civil War in America* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1896), 388; James D. McCabe, *Life and Campaigns of General Robert E. Lee* (Atlanta: National Publishing Company, 1866), 395; Edward Porter Alexander, *Military Memoirs of a Confederate: A Critical Narrative* (New York: Scribner's 1907), 422.

²⁰ For discussions about Lee, Longstreet, the SHS, and Gettysburg see Foster, *The Ghosts of the Confederacy*; Thomas Connelly and Barbara Bellows, *God and General Longstreet*; and Gary Gallagher, "Shaping Public Memory of the Civil War: Robert E. Lee, Jubal A. Early, and Douglass Southall Freeman," in Alice Fahs and Joan Waugh, eds., *The Memory of the Civil War in American Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); For works that tend to favor Longstreet's argument see William Garrett Piston, *Lee's Tarnished Lieutenant: James Longstreet and His Place in Southern History* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1990); and Carol Reardon, "James Longstreet's Virginia Defenders" in Gary Gallagher, ed., *Three Days at Gettysburg: Essays Confederate and Union Leadership* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State Press, 1999), 235-269.

²¹W. P. Trent, *Southern Writers: Selections in Prose and Verse* (New York: Macmillan, 1905), 465.

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- ²² *Southern Bivouac*, October 1885, 187; George Cary Eggleston, *A Rebel's Recollections* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1959); *Southern Bivouac*, September 2 1883, 2.
- ²³ *South Atlantic Quarterly*, vol. 5, January to October, 1906, 238; Lucian Lamar Knight, *Memorials of Dixie-Land: Orations, Essays, Sketches and Poems on Topics Historical, Commemorative, Literary and Patriotic* (Atlanta: Byrd Printing Company, 1919), 335-336.
- ²⁴ *South Atlantic Quarterly*, "Robert E. Lee Once More," 1908, 364; *Confederate Veteran*, September 1893, 265; *The Land We Love*, January 1868, 194; *DeBow's Review, Agricultural, Industrial Progress and Resources*, New Orleans, May 1866, 615; Mary Ann Cruse, *Cameron Hall* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1867), 263.
- ²⁵ Ben LaBree, ed., *Campfires of The Confederacy, Humorous Anecdotes, Deeds of Heroism, Thrilling Narratives, Campaigns, Hand-to-Hand Fights, Bold Dashes, Terrible Hardships Endured, Imprisonments, Hair-Breadth Escapes, Exploits of Scouts and Spies, Perilous Journeys, Daring Raids, Boarding and Capturing Vessels, Sea Fights, Tragic Events, Etc.* (Louisville: Courier Journal Printing, 1898), 311-313.
- ²⁶ *Southern Review*, vol. xxii, 447; Mary Tucker Magill, *Women, or, Chronicles of the late war* (Baltimore: Turnbull, 1871), 384; *Southern Review*, vol. XIX, July 1871, 695.
- ²⁷ *Confederate Veteran*, February 1893, 40; "The South Expects Every Woman to do Her Duty," *The Old Guard*, vol. 4, Issue 8, 1866, 483.
- ²⁸ *The Land We Love*, January 1868, 194; *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, vol. VII, January to October 1908, 367; Edwin Mims and Bruce Payne, eds., *Southern Prose and Poetry* (New York: Scribner's, 1910), 278-279; *Southern Writers*, 339.
- ²⁹ Henry Alexander White, *Robert E. Lee and the Southern Confederacy, 1807-1870* (New York: Putnam, 1907), 334; *Southern Bivouac*, September 1883-August 1884, 8; *DeBows Review*, October 18, 1870, 848.
- ³⁰ A.L. Long, *Memoirs of Robert E. Lee; his military and personal history, embracing a large amount of information hitherto unpublished* (np: J.M. Stoddard & Company, 1886), 142; Fitzhugh Lee, *General Lee* (New York: Appleton, 1895), 423-424.
- ³¹ William C. Oates, *The War Between The Union and The Confederacy And its Lost Opportunities* (New York: Morningside Bookshop, 1905), 199.
- ³² Edward Pollard, *The Lost Cause* (New York: E.B. Treat, 1867), 699.
- ³³ *Southern Bivouac*, June 1885, 61; W.W. Blackford, *War Years With Jeb Stuart* (New York: Scribner's, 1946); Clarence Stonebreaker, *The Unwritten South, Cause, Progress, and Result of the Civil War* (np: 1908), 168.
- ³⁴ Passages from *Hammer and Rapier* are taken from John Esten Cooke, *Mohun; or The Last Days of Lee and his Palladins* (New York: Historical Publishing, 1869), 104-105.
- ³⁵ *Southern Review*, vol. VII, October 1870, 450.
- ³⁶ *Confederate Veteran*, vol. XVI, January-December 1908, 359-360; *South Atlantic Quarterly*, vol. v., January-October 1906, 102.

³⁷ Thomas Nelson Page, *Robert E. Lee Man and Soldier* (New York: Scribner's, 1911), 685; From the British perspective see Stephanie Barczewski, *Myth and National Identity in nineteenth-century Britain, The legends of King Arthur and Robin Hood* (New York: Oxford Press, 2000).

CHAPTER 3

THE IDEAL SOUTHERNER: ROBERT E. LEE AND THE NORTH

“The ‘lush’ and the freckled boy were in a dispute,” wrote midwestern humorist George Ade, over “which was the greater general, Grant or Lee.” The youngster held firm to his belief in Lee’s superior ability, while the other argued that the Overland Campaign was proof enough that Grant was superior to his Confederate counterpart. The boy contended “if Lee had only had as many soldiers as Grant had there wouldn’t have been a thing to it...you couldn’t say he was licked. He had to yield to superior numbers.” However, the lush countered that Grant actually prevailed over Lee, and then wondered why “Lee didn’t get some soldiers and have them there? I don’t think much of a general who can’t get soldiers...that’s part of the business...” The two continued along these lines, neither willing to concede the game. For one side of the debate, Lee’s greatness owed to his bravery and skill despite crippling disadvantages, for the other, only the bottom line mattered; if the Army of Northern Virginia suffered from natural shortcomings that could only be the fault of its commander. It took a wise “Doc Horne” to step in, and finally settle the issue. Both Grant and Lee was “a military genius in his way,” Doc reminded, and “I admire them, not only as soldiers, but as American gentlemen, and now that they have gone to their long rest...I hardly feel that it would be proper to enter into any dispute as to their relative merits.” In this case, at least, Doc’s lecture was the final word on the topic.¹

Northerners had plenty of reasons to prefer the Lee figure to Grant. Northerners read romantic stories that featured genteel heroes, and they were aware of the southern male's self-appointed role as an American knight. Well before the Civil War, northerners reacted to the idea of chivalrous southerners with mixed reviews—sometimes critical, and sometimes envious. According to Historian William Taylor in his classic *Cavalier and Yankee*, many antebellum northerners embraced the image of the genteel southerner. According to Taylor, Americans of all sections “had begun to express decided reservations about the direction progress was taking and about the kind of aggressive, mercenary, self-made man who was rapidly making his way into their society.” James Fennimore Cooper was likely the most popular American author of the nineteenth century, and it is not surprising that a Romantic like Cooper would see much to value in the southern aristocrat. Writing in 1828, Cooper expressed what other like-minded Americans thought about the kind of heroes Lee would later embody. “I am of the opinion,” Cooper wrote in 1828, “that in proportion to the population, there are more men who belong to what is termed the class of gentlemen, in the old Southern States of America than in any other country of the world.” Cooper thought there was a definite difference between northerners and southerners, and found much to admire about “the owner of slaves.” Even as many disparaged the slave South, there was already the feeling that perhaps it bred men in the chivalric caste. Therefore, the work of turning the slave South into the romantic Old South had already begun before the Civil War.²

Northerners came to prize the Old South myth largely because it fit nineteenth century America's fondness for making the middle or upper class, white, Victorian types the ideal man. Americans were drawn to many different kinds of manly archetypes. The frontiersman, for example, such as Davy Crockett or Kit Carson, represented a self-made,

tough, and pioneering spirit most Americans prized. Victorian America, though, tended to gravitate toward a man more refined, dispassionate, and humble. Similar to the British gentleman, the perfect Victorian man exhibited restraint and resolve over aggression while exhibiting a quiet strength. The Victorian man thus epitomized the dominant culture of the times: the white, middle to upper class, Christian, civilization of both North and South. Both northerners and southerners had many different terms to describe their ideal man. The gentleman and cavalier figures both have much in common, but Americans seemed most familiar with chivalry. The knight ruled the nineteenth century more than any other of his cousins, because chivalry fit the desires of the Christian world to see its best men as humble and restrained. Lee fulfilled the dream of the Victorian knight for some, but in modernizing America chivalry alone could not contain all of the variations of the masculine ideal. Challenges to traditional Victorianism increased toward the end of the century. The Industrial Revolution, the growth of cities, social pressures from black Americans, political demands from women; all of these things began to alter manhood in America. However, just at the moment that knights began to disappear in the modern world, many yearned for his return. Lee became a knight like symbol of the Old South, a figure associated with a place where racial problems, modernity, and capitalism supposedly did not exist. Much of the Lee figure's power stemmed from its ability to absorb American cravings for chivalry, the American version of the British gentleman, while also reflecting a mythical place much different from Gilded Age/Progressive Era America.³

Many of the more romantic Victorians turned to medievalism as a balm for the pressures of the modern world. Like white southerners, northerners too had roots in Europe and reflected upon their origins in order to make sense of the present. The “Old

World” of medieval Europe provided the cultural point of contrast which Americans used to judge their own society. As Michael Lowy and Robert Sayre argued, romantics have always existed in every culture, and use the idea of a golden age past, a time when things were better, to criticize the values of their own society. The pursuit of an idealized reality can be mythical, as in the case of the Garden of Eden, or it can involve a historical era, such as the Middle Ages. Northerners saw many things to admire in medieval culture and legend. They too preferred King Arthur as the ideal knight, as a scholar of American chivalry, John Fraser, observed: “the fact that the Arthurian mythos took its definitive shape as early as it did, lasted as long as it did, and has such generative power suggests very strongly that...the chivalric patterns in general embodies and answered to deep desires and needs.” Many northerners saw in Arthur a masculine hero to emulate, and in Lee they saw many of the virtues that Arthur represented. For some, the symbols of the knight: courage, disinterestedness, Christianity, humility, and self-denial, still mattered and could be found in the person of the great Virginian. In most ways, then, the Lee figure meant similar things to Americans both North and South. After all, for most Americans Christianity and the figure of Jesus formed an enormously important part of how hero characters were formed. The Christian religion gave the knight most of his traits and bonded northern and southern interpretations of upright, manly conduct. As scholar Michael Kreyling wrote: “the historical Jesus is the prototype of all Western heroic figures...” Therefore, northerners and southerners had much in common and could agree on some things that made the ideal man. ⁴

Northerners and southerners also held in common a romantic affection for the values, traditions, and archetypal figures associated with the Old South. There are probably a multitude of reasons why northerners were drawn to medievalism, chivalry,

King Arthur, and myths set in Old World Britain. The Arthurian canon of stories, for example, usually relate a preference for white-only, Western traditions such as democracy and the values of Christianity (not necessarily religion itself). For many northerners, the Old South became a place not unlike Camelot or a romanticized Middle Ages. Americans of all regions experienced the impulse to both hail the prosperity, the growth of Industrial America, and to also criticize its effects. Nineteenth century Americans often equated the Old South with Old World Britain; a quaint place, mostly rural, unspoiled, charming, and in some manner, chivalrous. The racial dynamic is impossible to ignore. White northerners were far from egalitarian on the issue of race, and in the Old South, they saw what most romantics usually yearn for: order. In the Old South, the racial order was certainly established and rigorously enforced. The appeal of the Old South was its hierarchy, its quasi-feudal, paternalist, and white-dominated culture. For many, this world was more attractive than what some interpreted as the chaotic state of the present.

Despite similar tastes for Old South romance, North and South have not shared all the same cultural traditions, and nor have northerners and southerners interpreted the past in the same way. The Civil War seemingly confirmed the democratic vision of the Republican Party and the view of America as the nation of the common man, not the aristocrat. The North was thus more receptive to the heroes who, unlike Lee, were not of the manor born. After all, in feudalistic societies knights typically did not come from the lower ranks of commoners. In their stories of Lee, southerners essentially gave preference to the elite gentleman over any other as the most positive expression of manhood. According to Kreyling, southern stories tended to conform to a classical western pattern, as heroes were “self evident” men who defied contingency and perhaps even fate as well;

they imposed order from above despite the whims of the world. The classic hero story is thus “not democratic,” and southern narratives tend to “take up the conflict between democratic ideas and heroic counterpositions” in which, as a result of this competition, “either the heroic prevails (the outcome of most antebellum narratives) or it falls before a modern order universally acknowledged to be powerful but morally and culturally bankrupt (the frequent pattern after Reconstruction).” Northerners also celebrated the classic hero, but one also finds a diversity of characters that do not fit the Lee type. “With the rise of democracy and the development of the ideal of the egalitarian society,” wrote scholar Carol Pearson, “the heroic archetype” began to appear in forms that differed from traditional narratives. As a result, one finds plenty of northern stories which affirm the common respectability and plain-spoken wisdom of heroes like Ulysses Grant or Abraham Lincoln.⁵

To highlight the commoner as hero Americans often turned to the kind of man most knew about: the Yankee, or Puritan archetype. White Southerners preferred to think of their civilization as some remnant of the Old World that represented, juxtaposed against the rest of America, knightly honor, pure Christianity, pastoral living, and in essence, a superior manhood. Instead of greedy or immoral, to many northerners the Yankee was strong-willed, self-reliant, and successful. This character is born of, and synonymous with, the American archetype so often in competition with knights: the Puritan. Not quite the dashing figure of the knight, the Puritan symbolized hardy determination and a strong work ethic. The Yankee, as many in the world understood Americans to be, could not have existed without the historical Puritan. Like the southern knight, northerners blurred history and legend together in order to create the figural

Puritan as they wished him to be. To some, the Puritan, expressed often as the Yankee, came to represent a unique American identity that did not spring from southern soil.

In the years immediately following the Civil War, though, it mattered little to northerners whether Lee was a knight or a Puritan. Americans had never seen anything as bloody as the Civil War, and northerners believed that southern rebels were assuredly to blame for the carnage. In this environment many sought revenge, and the premier Confederate leaders made the likeliest of targets. Due to their powerful positions in the Confederacy, leading generals like Lee or Stonewall Jackson, and high-level southern statesmen like Jefferson Davis could not be spared for their vast crimes. In time, northerners would differentiate between Confederates, writing narratives that identified some as villains and others as heroes, but at first northerners usually characterized all Confederate leaders as conspirators of secession. Lee belonged to the southern “slave power” who manipulated national events toward horrifying war, many believed. It would take a handful of years for some northerners to begin to see that Lee’s sword shone brighter than the average Confederate leader.

Northern commentary between 1865 and Lee’s death in 1870 emphasized Lee as one of the leaders of the rebellion, without any distinctive, special merit. Northerners were more interested in identifying Confederates as what they believed them to be—treasonous rebels—than highlighting the unique talents of any one individual. In 1865, *Harper’s Weekly* asserted that there was nothing “which should favorably signalize Robert E. Lee among hundreds of his fellow rebels.” Neither the Virginian’s personal character nor his generalship exhibited anything worthy or praise. Lee’s “military skill has been much overrated,” and “he has no claim of any kind whatever upon the regard of the American people.” In an Abraham Lincoln biography from 1866, not only did Lee

lack the qualities of a hero, but he was also the “double-eyed traitor” who, while in army of the United States, used his friendship with General Winfield Scott to secretly plan for rebellion. Much like other elite “southern secessionists” Lee “could linger in our ranks till he possessed himself of Scott’s plans, and then desert to the enemy,” thus using “his knowledge in an effort to overthrow the best Government in the world.” In 1865 one editor professed his desire to see all leading Confederates punished by death, despite any “apologetic opinions” of some toward Lee. His successes as general could not erase that “he lifted his traitorous sword against his country,” and thus Lee deserved the same fate as all Confederate leaders: to be “executed for treason.”⁶

Instead of praising him as the *beau ideal*, as southerners did, northerners of the early-postwar era evaluated Lee’s character to find him lacking real manhood. Summarizing his life and personal traits, one northerner concluded that “Lee was less of a man” because he decided to turn against his country instead of serving it. Lee had “weak intellectual and moral organization... was never certain which was right” in any given endeavor, “was unbalanced,” and “had no real convictions” due to his “weak will.” In Boston’s *Old and New*, a New England critic cast Lee as Judas instead of the Christ figure, who, in the darkest hour of his country, “threw in her face the sword which she had given him” by spurning the Union Army and joining the Confederacy. For Lee it was not courageous but despicable to continue fighting after Confederate defeat seemed assured, and thus “Lee himself had no such sense of honor” that would have spared so many from needless death. It is key here that the author chose the word honor. In the coming years, critics of the South and/or Lee would use the South’s vaunted honor against them, taking every occasion to mock the regional obsession with chivalry. In these types of Lee stories, knightly behavior and the South’s honor code are absent, and

in their place are unmanly figures that appear more weak and selfish than brave and high-minded.⁷

In 1866 *The Living Age* provided a comparison between America's founding fathers and Confederates that illustrated how *some* northerners unmasked the pretense of a knightly Lee. Both sides of the Civil War claimed a place as the rightful heirs to generation of 1776. Though Confederates often compared their leaders to Washington and others, some sought to disprove this idea. Though Virginians like Washington, Patrick Henry, Thomas Jefferson, and Harry Lee were genuine Patriots, those born after this generation did not measure up and eventually made rebellion possible. After Washington's death, "the Virginia malcontents loudly grumbled," and by their talk of secession "marked out the path for (John C.) Calhoun of the past and (Jefferson) Davis and his followers of the present generation." The author also contrasted a letter of Harry Lee, who spoke of solemn duty to his country, and one from his son Robert, who the journal quoted as waffling between loyalty to America and to his native Virginia. The editor surmised: "could there possibly be a wider contrast than the above manly letter, and the sentimental effusion of his son, Robert Lee, the military leader of the slaveholders rebellion..." Here the "softness" of Lee's character that southerners embraced as chivalric is turned into a feminine lack of will.

At his death in 1870, northern opinions of Lee had clearly begun to change, yet there was no consensus that the ex-Confederate deserved to be an American hero. Rare eulogies expressed devotion to Lee without qualification, but more typically, his passing occasioned mixed reactions. It was clear, however, even in highly critical accounts of Lee's life, that the southern story of the knightly Lee fascinated many in the North. It seemed "there was very much in the character of General Lee worthy of admiration,"

though it was deeply regretted that someone “intimately connected with the American nationality by his birth, by his military education at West Point,” and “by his military commission” would “broke asunder and cast off all these sacred ties.” Though, for many, the few years since the war ended afforded an opportunity to analyze Lee anew. His silence off the public stage spoke volumes: it confirmed his willingness to accept the outcome of the war. In an era when many white southerners contested the war’s result by resisting federal Reconstruction, northerners interpreted Lee's course as the proper one. As one eulogist remarked, after Lee’s surrender to Grant, “very little has been heard of him,” and thankfully he resisted the opportunity to re-emerge as a political figure. In a very positive appraisal of Lee, the *Boston Daily Advertiser* noted that he was “a lineal descendant of the cavaliers who first occupied Virginia” who “did not forget the blood from which he descended.” As many northerners would increasingly point out in the years to come, “General Lee sought no distinction after the close of the war,” as he instead chose to follow a more honorable path.⁸

Those who began to praise Lee at his death did so out of admiration of his character and not because of his military successes. Considering the horrible human cost of the Civil War, it is notable, if not remarkable, how quickly many northerners and southerners spoke of reuniting the nation. Northern rhetoric, especially, expressed some degree of optimism and faith in a renewed Union soon after Lee and Grant met at Appomattox. In any would-be southern hero, northerners would have to find a symbol of peace—a man who contributed to the end of the war and the beginning of a restored America. To early Lee admirers, it seemed that, at the very least, he understood when the war was over and counseled submission instead of resistance. Lee’s calm resignation contrasted with the chaos of the times; the death of Lincoln, the emancipation of millions

of slaves, and lingering questions about what to do with the former rebellious states. Although in latter years many would praise his generalship, Lee as the brilliant master of warfare, a Napoleon or a Caesar, was not the figure that northerners immediately needed. In the wake of the Civil War, then, northerners cared mostly about looking for heroes who could provide peace and stability, and they would wait until later to critique the campaigns of the war's leading actors.

During the last two decades of the nineteenth century, the Lee figure most often represented national reunion and American rebirth after the Civil War. Diehard sectionalists slowly lost momentum in the postwar world, as a new generation, born after the war, pursued compromise and cooperation instead of conflict. Popular discourse praised the heroism of both Confederate and Union soldiers. Old South romance became one of America's most popular pastimes, as northerners did plenty to aid white southerners in creating the antebellum South as an Old World paradise; complete with gentlemen, ladies, and happy black slaves who knew their place on the bottom rail. Reunion was never complete in America, sectionalism remained very much alive, and not all agreed on the greatness of the Old South, but for those who wished it, Lee epitomized the dream of America renewed. The increasing romance of the Lee figure corresponded with the rise of nationalistic rhetoric characteristic of the last two decades of the nineteenth century. Inherent in most Lee stories are the symbols of peace, reunification, and nationalism. Only a knight could have affected so much agreement between North and South. In late Victorian America, during a period of escalating national sentiment, the knightly symbols of humility and self-sacrifice formed an important part of the idealized American man.⁹

Interest in the characteristics of the knight corresponded to a revived, nineteenth century fascination with all things medieval. Southerners were not the only Americans who read the works of romantics such as Sir Walter Scott. Furthermore, the revitalization of medieval symbols was not invented by nineteenth-century southerners. Instead, interest in all things medieval, such as Gothic architecture, the knight's tournament, courtly love, and chivalrous heroes, was a product of the Victorian culture born in England that then spread to the United States. The Victorian vision of the ideal man closely resembled an Arthurian knight: self-effacing, honor-bound, bold yet not reckless, and humble yet strong. According to Alice Chandler's *A Dream of Order* the *idea* of the Middle Ages seemed like some lost pre-modern Golden Age for Victorians in England and later, America. The virtues of Camelot so represented the society that Victorians wished to create that it essentially was "Victorian England in costume." In a modern world, medievalism meant a return to a more stable, orderly state, where "the world could be made to have meaning" because mankind's "society was rightly ordered." Many Americans could sympathize with England's dreams of a more organic society while experiencing their own search for order. In late nineteenth-century America, both Victorianism and interest in medieval culture together fueled appreciation for knightly heroes of the past and present. Unlike the South, northerners did not present themselves as the offspring of cavaliers; the inheritors of the knight's code. Yet, in Lee, many northerners recognized the symbols of chivalry and embraced many of the qualities of this Confederate Arthur. The romance of Lee, in turn, was the romance of the Old South; which was simply another version of the dream of Camelot: a mythologized society properly ordered. Many northerners rejected the dream and preferred to dwell on a

uniquely American identity, but for many others Lee provided a relationship to a medieval past that seemed somehow appealing.¹⁰

The nineteenth-century penchant for romanticism and interest in an imagined Middle Ages helps explain the European fascination with Lee. Western European observers tended to rank Lee as the foremost Civil War general, ahead of Grant and all others. Yet, it was Lee's character that Europeans found most attractive. One Englishman predicted in 1872 that Lee's "infinite purity, self-denial, tenderness, and generosity" would one day make him America's favorite hero of the Civil War. Many of the most outspoken pro-Lee commentary stemmed from high-ranking military officers. As officers tended to come from the upper strata of society, it is not surprising that many sympathized with the Lee figure. As a child of the Virginia aristocracy, much about the Lee figure represents elitism, privilege, and hierarchy—reminiscent of European nobility during the Middle Ages. English Colonel G.F. R. Henderson wrote numerous books about the Civil War, and in all them his great admiration for Lee, "the great American captain," and the Confederacy could not be mistaken. Calling the Confederacy the "landed aristocracy" and the Union "a radical democracy," a man such as Henderson naturally gravitated toward the type of feudal knight who Lee represented. Prussian officer Justus Scheibert studied the Confederate high command during the Civil War, and his writings on the Army of Northern Virginia clearly made Lee the most impressive man of his day. In Scheibert's account, Confederate officers basically could do no wrong. To a man, Confederate officers apparently were all brave, Christian, dutiful, and patriotic. In the Army of Northern Virginia "selflessness ruled" among the top generals, he recorded. Specifically, Lee was "imposing, grand, elegant in the saddle," and during his campaigns he demonstrated "the graceful way of the knight" while orchestrating battle against

northern foes. For the most part, commentary from European officers offered a romanticized, pro-Confederate viewpoint that aligned with the Civil War narratives that white southerners promoted.¹¹

The writings of Englishman Viscount Wolseley probably did more to advance Lee as a knightly hero than did the work of any other overseas observer. General Wolseley's essays were well known to many Americans. One of the most respected soldiers in Europe, Wolseley eventually became the commander in chief of the British army. Especially during the 1880s, Wolseley's works appeared frequently in northern journals and figured prominently as a part of *The Century's* popular "Battle and Leaders of The Civil War" series. Wolseley credited Union leaders such as Lincoln and Grant, and remarked upon the bravery of the northern soldier, but Lee unquestionably stood above all others as "the renowned soldier, whom I believe to have been the greatest of his age" and "the most perfect man I have ever met." Not surprisingly, the General emphasized that "Lee came from the class of landed gentry that has furnished England at all times with her most able and distinguished leaders." As did many others, Wolseley imagined the Civil War as an epic confrontation between different civilizations. Once again, in his narrative, the spirit of the Puritan for the Unionist and the cavalier for the Confederate permeated the character of the soldiers on either side of the war. Wolseley clearly favored the knight, but there is no doubt that he found something of merit in the disciplined northern soldier. In an effort to perhaps appease both northern and southern readers, Wolseley pondered which civilization produced the better type of manhood—perhaps forgetting he had already chosen. In concluding one of his essays, the Englishman left readers to decide "which to admire the more—the Southern pluck and daring, or the stern, sober determination which eventually led the North to victory?"¹²

Some northerners bristled at the foreign outpouring of Lee's greatness. In the pages of *The Galaxy*, a contributing writer spoke out against the writings of Charles Cornwallis Chesney, a British officer known for his fondness for Lee. Chesney's work was "entirely unreliable as history." For this northern critic, Lee was a failure as a general, "excellent on the defensive, but entirely devoid of vigor on the offensive." Northerners often commented that there was *something* in the character of Lee that warranted adulation, but it was hard for some to endorse him as the stainless knight without sin or error. In *The Century* another northerner rebutted Wolseley's unqualified praise for the renowned Virginian, saying Lee had been overrated as a general and overestimated as a man. Wolseley compared Lee favorably with Lincoln, but this reviewer urged that the rail-splitting president was far greater than the haughty Virginian. "Whatever parallel might be drawn between the native integrity and manliness of Lincoln and of Lee...Lee, shrinking from the responsibilities of civil war" cared only about defending his Virginia, while Lincoln chose the tougher and more important task: to save his nation from destruction. Former Union General William T. Sherman also offered a strong attack on Wolseley's assessment of Lee. Sherman mocked the idea of a knightly Lee, and like the scribe from *The Century*, insisted that Lee's defense of one state did not a great general make. Though he defended Virginia "like a valiant knight" his short-sighted strategy amounted to one "at the front porch battling with the flames whilst the kitchen and house were burning, sure in the end to consume the whole." In other words, Sherman inverted the idea of Lee as a dutiful hero sworn to protect his home turf. In Sherman's story, an unmanly Lee feared wandering beyond his beloved home state, and his reluctance to do so signaled a lack of will to do perform his responsibility: to protect *all* of the Confederate states. For someone like Sherman, to treat the Lee figure favorably

was one thing—to make him into the ideal American man was another. If Lee’s exaltation also meant disparaging Grant or some other Union notable, the opinionated and sometimes gruff Sherman felt compelled to attack Lee’s many admirers.¹³

The type of strong criticism offered by Sherman, though, grew increasingly rarer after Lee’s death in 1870 and the end of Reconstruction in 1877. A large number of northerners recognized the Virginian as a uniquely enduring representation of the most favored type of southern man. European elites sensed something in the Lee figure that northerners also began to find alluring; that Lee seemed to have a special bearing, a valorous character so admirable, he must be distinguished from the ranks of other Confederate leaders. As early as 1870, a northern journal classed Lee with beloved Union Generals George Thomas and David Farragut who all hailed from the South. With the deaths of “Thomas, Farragut, and Lee...the three great men who throughout the late war most nearly represented the American idea of the knightly soldier, the Bayards of the contending forces, have departed from earth.” One could be a Union veteran and/or a diehard Republican and still profess a great respect and even love for Lee. In his memoirs northern journalist Sylvanus Cadwallader compared Lee’s surrender at Appomattox to Confederate John Pemberton’s at Vicksburg. Pemberton’s conduct proved him unmanly, but “Gen. Lee, on the contrary challenged admiration from the outset.” Lee’s “manners and bearing were perfect,” and he “comforted himself with that happy blending of dignity and courtesy so difficult to describe.” Northerners portrayed Lee as fundamentally different from the average Confederate, saying he stood for all the admirable qualities of the Old South. As former Union soldier Gamaliel Bradford put it, Lee “typified all that was best in the South.” Lee “had the fine qualities of his class with none of its weaknesses. He had courage without bluster, dignity without arrogance, reserve without

haughtiness, tranquility without sloth.” Essentially, Bradford suggested that Lee symbolized only the best of the southern cavalier without the traits that northerners disdained. Believing in Lee as the *ideal* southerner allowed northerners to celebrate the code of the knight on their own terms; to pick and choose their Confederate heroes and villains by differentiating between Lee and lesser types of southern men.¹⁴

Northerners emphasized that Lee fought only from duty and maintained his honor throughout the war—which was invaluable to making him into the idealized southerner. The perfect Victorian man performed services for others without regard to self-interest while committing himself to a higher calling. For one northern author, Lee represented the “ideal type” of that hero who committed himself wholly to his own principles; who swore oaths and then did not waver from them. Lee clung to a “higher order of beliefs—a chivalrous devotion to conviction” and a lofty standard of “personal honor.” Descriptors such as honor, duty, conviction, etc., were characteristic of chivalrous conduct and were applied to prove how Lee’s character remained unsullied despite his Confederate service. During the Civil War Lee’s “aim was to be a man; his aim was nobility of character” and thus “he came out of it the same noble Christian character that he entered it.” Stories indicated that Lee remained true to himself and never forfeited honor for personal gain nor military success. Most would always maintain that secession was wrong, but northerners increasingly insisted that Lee’s superb record through war and peace justified his knighthood. Although an editor for *Scribner’s Monthly* believed that Lee lived a “noble life of mistaken duty,” his “justice, self-sacrifice, and moderation” should be highlighted as an example for others to follow. *The New York World* in 1872 claimed that “wherever duty led Robert Lee was wont to follow with unquestioning devotion.” Though he fought diligently in defense of the Confederate cause, Lee “rose above all

vindictive feelings towards those to whom he was opposed.” In sum, stories revealed that Lee’s participation in the Civil War owed only to a higher calling to protect Virginia, his home, family, and all those under his protection. In many northern accounts, storytellers imagined Lee as a man doomed to fight for an unfortunate cause; one who had little choice but answer the call to arms. His resolution to succeed while preserving honor made him, and any other Confederate who followed his lead, worthy of enshrinement as an American knight.¹⁵

Duty and honor were important, oft-mentioned terms that many applied to Lee’s life and his Christ-like sacrifice to a pre-destined calling. It was easier to forgive Lee for his Confederate turn if it seemed as if he had no choice. As a chivalrous warrior he could not forsake his home, family, and state to foreign invaders. Many would put Lee’s decision as a fated one—that he had no real alternative. His decision was pre-determined in 1861, because “his first duty, as he saw it, was to his state” and for mere “money and rank” could have never “proved false to the Old Dominion.” Stories of Lee could not conceal the comparisons between the noble Virginian and the West’s favorite suffering hero: Jesus Christ. Whether it was taking on the burden of defending his state from her enemies, or accepting defeat and silently retiring to obscurity, Lee displayed the Christ-like surrender of self. The idea of suffering was an indispensable part of the Lee legend. Much like Christ at Gethsemane, an anguished Lee finally came to terms with his fate in 1861, and as a result, the rest of his life could only promise sadness and calamity. “Carefully” and “prayerfully” Lee considered what to do, and then decided “wrongly but firmly, to stand by his state,” and thus he “leaves his beautiful home at Arlington never again to return to it.” Thus, Lee begins his journey towards a defeat that would strip him of his beloved Virginia plantation, his rank, and everything else save honor itself. In 1876

Scribner's called Lee "the Confederate hero," and likened him to "the head of all Christian knights." Though he offered to resign after Gettysburg, "the halo of his pure life...the self-sacrifice and devotion of his followers," his "exalted manhood," and "disinterested patriotism" proved that Lee was the *only* man to lead the Confederacy in battle. In these stories one can find the convergence of medieval chivalry, Victorianism, and symbols of Christ—which are all integral parts of nineteenth-century masculinity. The honor-bound Lee, who suffered and sacrificed for something greater than himself, made for a very potent American hero.¹⁶

At Appomattox all of Lee's Christian, chivalrous qualities became apparent in what probably was the central, most often discussed event of the Lee story. As the story went, in April 1865 Lee and Grant met together and decided to end the Civil War, and in doing so, began the process of reconciliation for the North and South. For Americans Grant and Lee at Appomattox became a metaphor for the rebirth of a united nation—the premier symbol of sectional reunion and a renewed American nationalism. It is important that northerners viewed Lee's capitulation as the end of the Confederacy and thus the Civil War. Being the premier southern general and leader of its most successful army, northerners believed that Lee alone had the authority to abruptly stop Confederate resistance. As many recounted countless times, at Appomattox "Lee decided its (the war) course for the Confederacy. And I take it that there is not one solitary man in the United States today, North or South, who does not feel that he decided right." Northerners described a Christ-like, chivalrous Lee who gently laid down his sword, persuaded other Confederates to do the same, and felt no malice toward his conquerors. Due to "his example after surrender," argued one northerner in *The Century*, "it is little known to-day at the North how much blood and treasure was saved...due to the influence of General

R.E. Lee.” In the northern imagination, Appomattox was the beginning of America’s transition from war to peace. The climax of the Civil War is really the opening scene of the story of American rebirth, and Lee played the starring role. It was a story filled with Christian imagery about sacrifice, humility, blood-atonement, and the subjugation of self for the good of others. Appomattox witnessed the beginning of Lee’s journey from soldier to educator, from a man of rank and power to humble citizen; just as it was the starting point for America’s journey from war and hatred to peace and harmony. Northerners were forever grateful that Lee “retired to his home in Virginia” and “urged the people to occupy themselves with legitimate industries.” The point, then, is that Lee set an honorable example for southerners more vindictive and less knightly than the great Virginian, and therefore his great influence helped halt violence and usher in the restoration of peace.¹⁷

Essential to the Lee at Appomattox romance was Grant, and in their narratives Americans usually emphasized the manhood of both of these leading soldiers of the Civil War. Most Americans agreed that, at Appomattox, Lee decided upon the noble course, to disband his army and halt needless deaths, and in return Grant allowed the beleaguered Confederates to surrender with honor. Americans never got tired of telling this story, and it is difficult to overcalculate its importance. Through the celebration of two great men, Appomattox provided a common Civil War heritage for both northerner and southerner to share. For those white Americans who embraced sectional reunion, it was easy to see how “every true American should rejoice that the opposing sections of the country were capable of producing such men as Robert E. Lee and Ulysses S. Grant.” There were many sub-plots to the Appomattox narrative that appeared in various forms, and all tended to translate the following: both Lee and Grant demonstrated perfect restraint, humility, and

disinterestedness. Sometimes Lee offers Grant his sword but is spared the humiliating gesture, and almost all versions note how, post-surrender, Union soldiers entreated starving Confederates to some of their rations. As one northern author related, “General Grant was delicate and considerable toward the vanquished chieftain, who appreciated the magnanimity of the one whom hard fate had designated to be his conqueror.” For northerners Appomattox appeared as the perfect ending to the war: it proved the manliness of both southerners and northerners, each represented by its leading man, who together decided the fate of America. It was often written that “Lee and his staff were brave men” and that they “had fought well.” As for Grant, he “knew how it must hurt their pride to bend their knees to him,” so “he would be as kind as he could.” After kind and respectful terms were settled, “Lee rides down his lines” as “the men rush up in crowds” to touch their idol. In some accounts, Lee weeps. In others, his soldiers tearfully mourn that they never again will follow Lee into battle.¹⁸

No tale about Appomattox was complete without a contrast between the appearance and personalities of Lee and Grant. There was a remarkable consistency to how northerners characterized the opposing generals. When the two actually sat down to converse, their appearances, bearing, and manner suggested two different types of men reared in two different types of civilizations. Northerners almost always have Lee impeccably dressed, in his finest, most formal uniform with an ornamented sword, while Grant’s muddy boots and unadorned dress give the impression of a low-grade officer, not the commander of all Union forces. Though always humble, Lee also radiated honor, rank, and distinction. Cold yet kindly, Lee was the planter- gentleman who northerners reckoned composed the best type of southern man. The distinction between the two was clear enough. Most northerners understood that “The Lees were of pure cavalier descent,

while Grant was of Connecticut Puritan stock.” In 1884 *The North American Review* classed Grant, John Brown, and Abraham Lincoln together as the same type of American hero. The general, the president, and the abolitionist martyr were the three pillars of the American spirit, best exemplified by Brown, “a Puritan of the Puritans.” Grant and Lee were linked in part because of their parts played during the Civil War, but also because Americans perceived they embodied opposing characters—both instrumental to the conception of the ideal man. Plenty of northerners deduced that Appomattox meant the reunion, not just of North and South, but of cavalier and Puritan, as well. For many, Lee and Grant provided two symbols of manhood that, because of Appomattox, could once again peacefully coexist.¹⁹

In almost every way northerners’ physical depiction of Lee at Appomattox matched the southern portrait of the ex-Confederate as the ideal knight. Even for those who favored Grant over Lee, the Virginian still appeared as the more physically imposing. According to a biographer of Grant, Lee was “tall and soldierly” and wore “high riding boots and a beautiful sword.” On the other hand, Grant’s uniform was unkept and “covered in mud,” and there was little about him that offered “indication of his rank.” The moral of the Appomattox narrative was not simply that Lee was attractive and Grant was something less than. Their differences indicated that one represented the common but sturdy Yankee and the other a knightly Virginian. One author wrote that Grant “apologized for his unkept condition” that contrasted with “his faultlessly attired opponent.” Compared to Lee, Grant was “uncouth in appearance and unpolished in manners,” but his decency and simplicity marked him as a real man. *Potter’s American Monthly* characterized Lee as unusually “tall, well proportioned cold, and courtly in manner” while Grant “was of medium height” and “compactly built.” Grant “was a son of

a plain farmer” while Lee “was the scion of a family” long “distinguished in the annals of Virginia.” Another described how Lee’s hair “was white as the driven snow” with no “speck” upon either his uniform or “the gauntlets that he wore.” Lee’s opposite, Grant, wore no garnishments at all, his “boots were nearly covered with mud,” he missed “one button off his coat,” and “he wore no sword.” These stories about Appomattox do not necessarily indicate a preference between Lee and Grant, and thus the cavalier or the Puritan. Through Lee, northerners vicariously indulged an appreciation for chivalry without disparaging the Yankee/Puritan tradition.²⁰

As did southerners, northerners also found it necessary to contrast Lee and Grant’s generalship during the Civil War. A survey of northern stories indicates a lingering fondness for Lee’s chivalric sword over Grant’s relentless hammer. Northerners tended to see in Lee a skillful, wise captain with a natural cunning for military tactics; a master swordsman bold and brave. Most northerners hailed Grant as a hero and lauded his military successes, but even the most strident Union man sometimes questioned his manner of warfare. An even-handed critic in *The North American Review* praised Grant for his victories at Ft. Donelson and Vicksburg, but took him to task for his ill-conceived assaults against Lee’s armies. Grant was at fault for the “tremendous sacrifice of life” and “repeated and always unsuccessful attacks” during the Overland Campaign, while Lee’s war record proved impressive “even to the most devoted Unionist.” Most nineteenth century observers of Civil War military history believed Grant possessed a strong will and a great deal of ability—a good soldier but not a dashing knight. Quite often northerners told of how the Army of the Potomac simply pummeled the smaller Confederate forces into submission, and though Grant showed himself an able, dependable commander, his methods lacked refinement. Grant believed in “a vicious

principle,” as “he relied on mere fighting...even when the fighting meant assaulting works without any reasonable grounds of success,” one of Grant’s critics noted. Some took the approach of former Union officer Theodore Dodge, who believed that Grant seemed flawed as a general mostly because of the genius of his rival. Grant’s “determined, unflinching courage” could not erase “so much hammering...so much loss of life” that defined Grant’s campaign against Lee. Still, he argued that Grant’s comparison to Lee, “the great soldier of our Civil War,” was unfair. For many like Dodge Grant was good, but Lee was better.²¹

Politics and unhealed sectional feeling fueled much of the harshest type of anti-Grant commentary. This manner of censure was often found during Grant’s Reconstruction-era presidential career. “Bloody Shirt” politics became a staple of Reconstruction and lingered afterward as a reminder of Civil War animosities. In the case of Grant, a Republican, Democratic partisans often referenced the Civil War in order to stir the populace against him. *The Old Guard* was a New York journal unabashedly anti-Republican with pro-Confederate sympathies. In 1868 an editorial cast Grant as a clumsy butcher and Lee as “the one undisputed great soldier of the war.” In 1872 *The New York World* called Grant “utterly devoid of sympathy,” because he looked “unmoved upon the most terrible human suffering.... in...his victories human life has always been of small account to him.” Don Piatt’s *Memories of The Men Who Saved the Union* was as scathing as any anti-Grant tract of the nineteenth-century, northern or southern. Instead of a genuine talent for warfare, Grant’s fame wrested principally on his besting of Lee, who in his “moldering remains” lived “a heart so grand in its emotions that his life seemed that of a saint.” Piatt, the Republican and former Union officer, compared Grant to a false God, “a monkey faced dog” who deserved no induction into the American hall of heroes.

Rarely did the reunion spirit abide such frontal assaults upon Grant's manhood, but northerners often expressed uncertainty or disapproval of Grant using similar logic. Most did present Grant as some kind of hero, but it seemed also he lacked something that northerners saw abundant in Lee. Many lauded Grant precisely because he did appear more common, more like them than Lee. Still, the appeal of the chivalric ideal made the Lee figure a more enduring romantic hero. ²²

It would be wrong to say, however, that late Victorian Americans accepted only chivalry as a guideline for judging their men. Northerners had not forgotten about the Puritan archetype, the Yankee, or men who achieved great things because of dogged determination. Romantic Victorians tended to celebrate the "real" men of the past amid a less-than-satisfying present, and that often meant the glorification of medieval chivalry. Yet the Puritan too could be a romantic figure; a character vital to the origins of the nation yet all too rare in industrial America. Fundamental to the shaping of American identity, the Yankee/Puritan archetype was hardy, stern, reliable, relentless, and usually born from the lower ranks. Civil War heroes such as Abraham Lincoln or Grant typified most of the characteristics of the American Puritan. For some, Grant was "a typical American" because he was "quiet, self contained, energetic, possessing indomitable will and unshaken purpose to succeed." The Puritan made his own way in America—scraping out an existence in an unkind land. At the 1899 unveiling of a Grant memorial in Philadelphia, the orator chose to depict the northern hero in the familiar language usually applied to the industrious Puritan. Grant was of "sturdy, plain, simple, unpretending stock," without polish and culture "but possessed of probity and power." In his thinking Grant reflected Yankee virtues, such as "common sense," and in his writing he made "no attempt at adornment" and "seldom indulged in metaphor," said New York's chapter of

the Loyal Legion. Everything about the Grant figure bespoke a simple manhood; of lowly but proud origins, self made, but uniquely American in its single-minded pursuit of a goal. There was nothing beautiful about Grant's wartime hammer. Yet for the American, and thus for his Puritan progenitor, the tool mattered less than the results of its work.²³

Though it seemed most Americans loved chivalry, there were still plenty who preferred the Puritan to the knight, and a hero like Grant to Lee. Just as easily as some could imagine Lee as the ideal southern gentleman, others could mock Civil War romance and especially southern chivalry. Likewise, a romantic, pre-modern Old South could, for some, be made into a lie, a false world. For the northern cynic, all of Lee's accoutrements amounted to nothing of substance, and his southern chivalry was nothing but empty pretense. As one wrote, only in the "boyish imagination" was there something special about the leading Confederate generals. Admittedly there was "something picturesque" about Lee and other Confederates, and about the "southern chivalry" as a whole, but these were not the right types of male idols for American youths. Although "the figure of Grant is not touched with the color which belongs to men such as Lee...it was not he, nor Lancelot, nor another" who actually proved victorious in the Civil War. Some northerners disputed the notion that Lee's knightly persona and physical attractiveness made him a great general. Assuredly Lee was "very handsome in person, gentle and dignified in manner..." yet ultimately those qualities did not assure success in any engagement. He paled in comparison to his rival, Grant, "who was the chief military hero" of the war. Therefore, there were some who sought to expose the Lee figure as an artificial kind of man opposed to the resolute Union hero—the Puritan or Yankee archetype. At the same time, the unraveling of Lee as a masculine figure could lead to the unmasking of the Old South as an American Camelot. For many who chose to contradict

the stories about a knightly Lee, the Old South held little attraction. It was the American culture of enterprise and democracy, one that could produce a man like Grant, which should be highlighted.²⁴

Mark Twain, for one, saw little of substance in Old South chivalry. No American ever wrote a more biting satire of chivalry than did Twain in his *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*. He went even further, however, in *Life on the Mississippi*, where Twain blamed Sir Walter Scott for causing the Civil War. As he explained in 1883, antebellum southerners convinced themselves they were the heirs of the knightly characters featured in novels such as Scott's *Ivanhoe*. The widely-read author's influence prepared southerners to obsess over "dreams and phantoms...with decayed and degraded systems of government; with the silliness and emptiness, of sham grandeurs, sham gauds, and sham chivalries of a brainless and worthless long-vanished society." Twain wrote that Scott "did measureless harm, more real and lasting harm, perhaps than any individual who ever wrote." Though some of the romantic impulse had left the South after the Civil War, the region still "confused and commingled" the "wholesome civilization of the nineteenth-century" with "the Walter Scott Middle-age sham civilization." Twain's satire was meant to entertain, and he overstated his case for effect, but he also argued a valid point. Twain saw chivalric romances as absurd and inaccurate interpretations of the past. He believed southerners had taken Scott too seriously, appointed themselves as the keepers of the chivalric heritage, and then played a large part in plunging the country into civil war. Twain was also clearly of the opinion, that the West, and America in particular, had evolved passed stories about chivalry. It was the stuff of fantasy stories and should no longer be taken seriously.

Unlike the iconoclastic Twain, most northerners still held chivalry in high regard, but many more challenged the prevailing view Lee as the Civil War's greatest general. Northerners committed to honoring the abilities of Union commanders must have sometimes felt outflanked. Rarely did even those southerners who counseled reunion and spoke highly of their former enemy put Grant, Sherman, or any northern general in Lee's lofty category. Southern along with European sentiment made it sometimes difficult to critique Lee's tactics to any significant degree. One disgruntled contributor to *The North American Review* even proclaimed that "it has become fashionable with a certain class of writers of the North to belittle the achievements of their own section during the war." Unfortunately, instead of instilling pride in Union heroes, some gave the impression that "Grant was always doing the wrong thing," and only Confederate generals deserved praise. Another, even more embittered northern author, openly disagreed with the prevailing story, reminding readers that Lee's major offensives were not successful. It seemed odd that "Lee, who never won an offensive battle, was the great general of the war," and that "Grant was a blunderer—always blundering into success." The accepted stories of the Civil War proved difficult to dislodge from the American imagination after they firmly took hold, however. Even for those who preferred Grant over his Confederate rival, Lee as an unmatched general became a powerful part of the American story of the Civil War.²⁵

Some fiercely resisted the notion, so habitually repeated in late Victorian America, that Lee was America's King Arthur. Stories of Lee as the honor-bound soldier, the great general, the noble knight at Appomattox, and the peace-loving educator must have irked northerners who tired of the message. There is no question, as well, that sectionalism continued to stir emotions about the past and about the war's leading men.

In 1886 *The Los Angeles Times* took issue with *The Atlanta Constitution's* disparagement of the publication of Grant's memoirs. The penniless Union hero spent the last months of his life authoring his own story while fighting the disease that soon killed him. *The Times* mocking editorial rebuked the *Constitution's* assertion "that Genl. Robert E. Lee, the beau ideal of the Southern Chivalry would have never allowed even abject poverty" to compel him to write. Clearly *The Times* believed that Lee was something less than a knight, and concluded that only "the hand of death" prevented him from writing his own book. Here the editor sought to invalidate the idea of the self-sacrificing Lee by recasting him as just an ordinary man in search of a profit and fame. In 1899 former Union officer James Rusling went to great lengths to try to change the popular opinion of Lee. It was argued that Lee, in fact, was inferior to Grant as a soldier and as a man, and his victories came against weak Union generals such as George McClellan, John Pope, and Joseph Hooker. The author asserted that "when he became pitted against Grant" it soon became apparent that Lee did not compare, "measured up to this simple man from the prairies of Illinois." Whatever qualities Lee possessed were superficial and typical of southern manhood, full of ornament but lacking the marrow of a man such as Grant. Rusling wrote:

"General Lee was, indeed, the true type of southern oligarchs—proud, haughty, pure, upright (in their way), self centered, well poised—as Grant was the true type of our Northern democracy, the consummate flower of our American civilization, and in the end bound to win, because he embodied the moral and spiritual forces of his age and time, and was the best representative of them²⁶."

Despite the work of his many admirers, however, Grant continually finished a close second in his competition with Lee. By the end of the nineteenth-century if not before, the southern depiction of Lee became the dominant one in all sections of the country. Among Lee's devotees were some of the most prominent, powerful men in

America. Charles Francis Adams, the noted author, diplomat, and son of President John Quincy Adams, hailed Lee's greatness in print and in speeches, likening him to George Washington, and arguing for him as one of the greatest American men. Theodore Roosevelt very publicly called Lee one of America's greatest men, making sure that potential southern voters heard him. Alfred Thayer Mahan was a top naval officer and a leading observer of the history of warfare. Mahan believed that Grant possessed a determined strength to win, to hammer away at Lee, but he lamented his "blind and reckless conduct of the war." Grant suffered from his connection with Lee, because even though he won more victories in comparison, he lacked his rival's romance. The story was simply too good to ignore: the brave knight, who, with unmatched Christian virtue, stared down the leviathan military power of the United States and unflinchingly sacrificed his self for others.²⁷

Northerners could valorize southern manhood through the figure of Lee by identifying him as singularly heroic. Lee could be many things to many people: a medieval knight, an English cavalier, an ideal Victorian, or an Old South gentleman. All of these allowed northerners to celebrate the southern man and the Old South itself. For those who read about or appreciated the glories of Arthur or Bayard, Lee seemed the perfect Confederate hero. He was the slave owner without slavery and the aristocrat without the aristocracy; northerners only wanted Lee in his romance, in his perfect Victorian knighthood. Northerners could condemn the very things that he was and that he fought to preserve by elevating him above everyone else—making him the ideal southerner. There were many ways in which northerners distinguished Lee from lesser Confederate men. Lee turned Confederate only because of his sense of honor and duty, despite the fact his cause was doomed to fail. He fought well, with masterful strokes of

his sword, and proved himself equal to knightly warriors of old. When Lee could no longer resist Grant's legions he then ended the contest, and in doing so spared the lives of thousands of soldiers. The postwar Lee did not seek fame and fortune nor did he use his popularity to rally southerners against Reconstruction. Instead Lee educated southern youth, teaching them to follow his example. One could love Lee and hate secession, the Confederacy, and slavery, because it was so obvious that Lee was not of the common sort.

Americans accomplished the task of divorcing Lee from secession while making him into a national figure. There must be something important about the Appomattox narrative that motivated Americans to tell it again and again. Likewise, there was something inherently appealing about the Lee figure that caused Americans to clearly choose him as the greatest southerner since George Washington. Since southerners and northerners each created an almost identical Lee figure, the story of the great, Virginian knight was national and not sectional. It was not Lee's military exploits that allowed for the story to be created and cherished—it was his character in battle, and in defeat, that really mattered. We sometimes can underestimate the value of highly romanticized stories where great men perform great deeds. For instance, King Arthur evokes imagery of medieval romance, bravery, and a simpler, morally-superior time and place. However, Westerners generally think of Arthur only as the *ideal* knight without remembering the reality of the medieval world. We can only romanticize this world if we think of its best representative and forget that the Dark Ages was a deadly and often brutal period. One could argue that knights were more mercenary than gentleman and killed, with little remorse, at the behest of others. But, that is not how the story goes. Victorian Americans remembered that Lee surrendered to Grant, not because no other option was available,

and not due to fear for his own well being, but because he was a chivalrous Virginia gentleman.

There was something voyeuristic about the northern interest in Lee as a hero. Northerners could constantly re-imagine Lee at Gettysburg, for example, watching him, admiring his gallant figure, but also knowing the outcome of the third day's fighting. Like the Confederates who charged the Union defense at Gettysburg, Lee was fated to lose because his armies could not withstand northern mite; but northerners appreciated the way in which he lost. According to historian John Fraser, the charm of the chivalrous warrior is not his success in battle as much as his commitment to honoring a code. Northerners lauded Lee from afar without wishing Gettysburg would have turned out differently. They detailed his stainless uniform at Appomattox but felt grateful that Grant's relentless hammering won the day. They mourned the destruction of America's Camelot and told stories about its American Arthur.

For Americans, the dream of Camelot found expression in stories about Lee and Old South. Some remained highly critical of Lee's decision to send his gray warriors on a suicidal mission at Gettysburg, and others applauded the heroism of the desperate yet brave charge. Either way, most everyone acknowledged Lee's genuine sorrow and willingness to bear the burden of such a terrible defeat. Lee was the man northerners needed to complete the story of reunion, while they needed Grant the general mostly to ensure that the Old South survived only in myth. They could love both, but Lee was more important to the rebirth of America. Gamaliel Bradford wrote more about the hero figures of the Civil War than probably any other author of the nineteenth century. In *Lee the American*, Bradford spoke of his admiration for Grant and outlined the general's many great qualities. However, there was something romantic about Lee, he affirmed,

something that Grant and all other Civil War heroes lacked. Lee was the perfect man—the quintessential southern gentleman—and he belonged to America as much as the South. Bradford articulated the differences between Lee and Grant like this: “Grant stands for our modern world, with its rough, business habits, its practical energy, its desire to do things no matter how, its indifference to the sweet grace of ceremony and dignity and courtesy. Lee had the traditions of an older day, not only in its high beliefs but its grave stateliness, its feeling that the way of doing things was almost as much as the thing done.” The Lee figure was atypical, unique, and perhaps one of the last of its kind.²⁸

It is a key difference that northerners made Lee the ideal and not the average southerner. Northerners did not accept everything about the South; they picked and chose what they liked and disliked. Most did not feel it necessary to besmirch the great Union captains of war in order to praise a Confederate hero such as Lee. Northerners loved the idea of the cavalier or knight, but this did not mean they bought wholesale in the southern interpretation of the Civil War. Furthermore, creating an altruistic Lee figure that stood for what was best about the South allowed northerners to forget that slavery was not a romantic institution. Likewise, it made it easier for white northerners to ignore the failures of Reconstruction and the curtailing of the social mobility and political rights of black southerners. Northerners believed in the South of Lee sort of like a man in a gentle sleep temporarily believes in his dream. The Old South was a world northerners could turn to when they wanted, but they could wake up at any time.

¹ The short story appears in *Iowa Postal Card*, November 4 1897, Fayette, Iowa.

² Taylor, *Cavalier and Yankee*, 334; James Fenimore Cooper, *The Traveling Bachelor; or, Notions of the Americans, New Edition* (New York: Stringer & Townsend, 1852), 293.

³Gail Bederman, *Manliness & Civilization: A cultural History of Gender and Race in The United States, 1880, 1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

⁴John Fraser, *America and the Patterns of Chivalry* (New York: Cambridge Press, 1982), 68; Kreyling, *Figure of the Hero*, 4; There is a large school of scholarship that focuses on Europe and mostly England but also can be applied to America, which includes: Michael Lowy and Robert Sayre *Romanticism against the Tide of Modernity* (Durham, NC: Duke Press, 2001); Alice Chandler, *A Dream of Order: The Medieval Ideal in Nineteenth-Century British Literature* (Lincoln, NB: 1970); Loretta Holloway and Jennifer Palmgren, eds., *Beyond Arthurian Romances: The Reach of Victorian Medievalism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

⁵Michael Kreyling, *Figures of the Hero in Southern Narrative* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1987); Ritchie Devon Watson *Yeoman versus Cavalier: The Old Southwest's Fictional Road to Rebellion* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1993); Carol Pearson *The Hero Within: Six Archetypes we Live by* (New York: Harper & Row, 1986); The expression of the Yankee as the ideal American comes in part from pre-Civil War sectionalism, and the desire for northerners to define themselves separately from southerners. These are themes explored in Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party Before the Civil War* (New York: Oxford Press, 1970); and Mary Susan Grant *North Over South: Northern Nationalism and American Identity in the Antebellum Era* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 2000).

⁶The article was reprinted in *Janesville Weekly Gazette*, Janesville Wisconsin, May 4 1865; Mrs. P.A. Hanaford, *Abraham Lincoln: his life and Public Services* (Boston: B.B. Russell and company, 1866, 82; *The New York Evangelist*, New York City, May 4, 1865, 1.

⁷*Titusville Morning Herald*, Titusville, PA, October 24, 1870; *Old And New*, Boston, December 1870, vol. 2, 742-744; Bertram Wyatt Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (New York: Oxford Press, 1982).

⁸*Christian Advocate*, Chicago, October 20, 1870, 332; *Daily Evening Bulletin*, San Francisco, October 13, 1870; *Boston Daily Advertiser*, Boston, October 13, 1870.

⁹David Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge: Harvard Press, 2001); Nina Silber, *The Romance of Reunion: Northerners and the South, 1865-1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998).

¹⁰ Chandler, *A Dream of Order*, 232-233; My understanding of America's "dream for order" comes from Robert Wiebe, whose description of late nineteenth-century life and explanation of reactions to modernity parallels Chandler's in Robert Wiebe, *The Search For Order, 1877-1920* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1966); Lowy and Sayre, *Romanticism Against the Tide of Modernity*; Michael O'Brien discusses Henry Adams'

fascination with medieval symbols in Michael O'Brien, *Henry Adams and the Southern Question* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2005).

¹¹*The Eclectic Magazine of Foreign Literature*, New York City, May 1872, 564; Jay Luvaas, ed., *A Soldier's View: A Collection of Civil War Writings, by Colonel G.F.R. Henderson* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 32; Frederic Trautman, ed., *A Prussian Observes the American Civil War: The Military Studies of Justus Scheibert* (London: University of Missouri Press, 2001).

¹²James Rawley, ed., *The American Civil War, An English View, by Field Marshall Viscount Wolseley* (Charlottesville, University of Virginia Press, 1964), 53, 55, 223.

¹³*The Galaxy*, "Broken Idols," New York City, August 2, 1874, vol. 18, 193; *The Century*, New York City, June 2, 1887, vol. 34, 310; *The North American Review*, Boston, May 1887, 442.

¹⁴*The Albion, A Journal of News Politics and Literature*, New York, October 15 1870, vol. 48, 666; Cadwallader complete his memoirs in 1896, but they were not published until much later. Benjamin Thomas, ed., *Three Years With Grant, as Recalled by War Correspondent Sylvanus Cadwallader* (New York: Knopf, 1955), 328; Gamaliel Bradford, *Confederate Portraits* (New York: The Atlantic Monthly Company, 1912), 253.

¹⁵*Appleton's Journal of Science Literature and Art*, New York, December 12, 1874, 763; *Scribner's Monthly, an illustrated magazine for the people*, New York, October 1875, vol. 10, 790; *The Chronicle*, Elyria Ohio, Jan. 14, 1903; *The New York World*, July 1872.

¹⁶*Anaconda Standard*, Anaconda Montana, May 17, 1901; *The Chronicle*, Jan. 14, 1903; *Scribner's*, February 1876, vol. xi, 519.

¹⁷ Charles Francis Adams, *Lee at Appomattox and Other Papers* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1903), 12; *The Century*, "Two Interviews with Robert E. Lee," vol. 41, March 1891, 798; *North American and United States Gazette*, Philadelphia, October 13, 1870.

¹⁸*Anaconda Standard*, April 11, 1901; Edward Ellis, *The Camp Fires of General Lee, From the Peninsula to Appomattox Court House* (Philadelphia: Henry Harrison & Co., 1886), 411; Josephine Pollard, *Our Hero General U.S. Grant, When Where and How he Fought, In Words of One Syllable* (New York: McCloughin Brothers, 1885), 163.

¹⁹*The Morning Oregonian*, Portland, Oregon, October 28, 1886; *The North American Review*, Jan. 1884, 148-150.

²⁰Albert D. Richardson, *A Personal History of Ulysses S. Grant* (Hartford: M.A. Winter & Hatch, 1885), 493; Frederick Trevor Hill, *On The Trail of Grant and Lee* (New York: Appleton, 1911), 273-277; *Potter's American Monthly*, "The Historic Buildings of America," June 1875, 407; *Massachusetts Ploughman and New England Journal of Agriculture*, "Last Day of The Lost Cause," Boston, August 11, 1877, 4.

²¹*North American Review*, October 1874, 458; *Papers of The Military Historical Society of Massachusetts*, vol iv, , 1905 (Wilmington: Broadfoot Publishing, 1989), 403; Theodore Ayrault Dodge, *A Bird's Eye View of The Civil War* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1883), 221.

²²*The Old Guard*, "Ulysses S. Grant," December 1868, 927; *The New York World*, July 29, 1872; Don Piatt, *Memories of the Men Who Saved the Union* (New York: Belford Clarke & CO., 1887), viii-xii.

²³*War Papers: Being Papers Read Before the Commandery of the State of Wisconsin, Military Order of The Loyal Legion of the United States*, vol. 1, Milwaukee, 1891 (Wilmington: Broadfoot Publishing, 1993), 79; *Ceremonies Incident to the Unveiling of the Bronze Equestrian Statue of General Ulysses S. Grant, Erected in Fairmount Park By The Fairmount Park Art Association of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1899), 52; *Personal Recollections of The War of the Rebellion: Addresses Delivered Before The New York Commandery of The Loyal Legion of The United States, 1883-1891* (New York: The Commandery, 1891), 366.

²⁴*War Papers Read Before The Indiana Commandery Military Order of The Loyal Legion of the United States*, 1898 (Wilmington: Broadfoot Publishing, 1992), 398; *North American Review*, May 1887, 438.

²⁵ *The North American Review*, vol. cxliv, April 1887, 317; *Ibid*, vol. CXXXIII, July 1881, 309.

²⁶*Los Angeles Daily Times*, March 27, 1886; *Christian Advocate*, "Men and Things I Saw in War Days," March 14 1895.

²⁷Alfred Thayer Mahan, *A Critical History of the Late American War* (New York: A.S. Barnes and Co, 1877), 455.

²⁸Bradford, *Lee the American*, 169.

CHAPTER 4

JACKSON'S WAY: STONEWALL JACKSON AND THE SOUTH

“General Lee sat near a cedar stump; Jackson stood near him,” wrote an unnamed southerner, comparing Robert E. Lee with Stonewall Jackson. “I had seen General Lee only once before—the day he came from Washington to Richmond to offer his stainless sword to the land that gave him birth and the State to which his first allegiance was due.” As the author looked upon “this splendid figure, five feet eleven inches high, and weighing one hundred and seventy-five pounds...and saw those brown hazel eyes, that beaming countenance, and the whole bearing of that ‘king of men’... as he gracefully mounted his charger...I was fully impressed” Lee was the one most “prepared to handle with signal ability the splendid army under his command, and lead it to glorious victory.” On the other hand, Jackson cut a strikingly different figure. Jackson, “as I saw him that day in his dingy uniform, covered with the dust of the Valley, his faded cadet cap tilting on his nose, mounted on his old sorrel...in a very bad humor as he gave his sharp, crisp orders, and was evidently very impatient at the delay in the march of his column, I felt sure that” the troops under his command “had bloody work before them, and that their iron chief did not mean to spare them.”¹

Most southerners understood that their two primary military heroes, Lee and Jackson, represented contrasting types of manhood, and therefore southern storytellers described the two generals in different ways. Most Lee stories included some affirmation

of his physical attractiveness: his “splendid figure” and “beaming countenance.” They noticed his height, the way he seemed to always stand erect, and his easy manner while in the saddle. Jackson, though, inspired few picturesque descriptions of this kind. They were both great men and expert generals, but physically Lee and Jackson could not be more different. As one wrote, in a fictionalized drama of a war council between the two generals:

“He (Lee) went straight to Stonewall Jackson, laid one hand on his shoulder, the other on his breast. The two had met, perhaps, in Mexico; not since. Now they looked each other in the eyes. Both were tall men, though Lee was the tallest; both in grey, both thin from the fatigue of the field. Here the resemblance ended. Lee was a model of manly beauty. His form, like his character, was justly proportioned; he had a great head, grandly based, a face of noble sweetness, a step light and dauntless. There breathed about him something knightly, something kingly, an antique glamour, sunny shreds of the Golden Age. ”

Southerners concluded that Jackson’s physical features and mannerisms appeared more quirky than attractive. Lee rode Traveler—always depicted as the finest specimen of a horse, fit for a king, or at the least, a knight. Jackson’s “Old Sorrel” served him well throughout the Civil War, but as its name suggests, it was not the kind of horse that would make a cavalier proud. The motives of Lee are almost always the same: due to the secession of Virginia he is thrust into a war he did not want, and he must prosecute it well to protect those who cannot protect themselves. His conduct in fighting the war always corresponds to that which best defined his character: selfless humility. In this regard, Jackson indeed had much in common with Lee. However, when Lee carried out his plans, he was rarely shown as “impatient,” practically never exhibited a “bad temper,” and his dutiful, honor-bound selflessness never permitted that “bloody work” should be done. To southerners, Jackson was not completely unlike Lee, but the differences were clear enough.²

Lee seemed perfectly suited to play the role of knight, but it was less clear what type of man Jackson represented. Southerners were never completely comfortable with linking Jackson with chivalry, because almost everything about him suggested something different than the traditional knight. Although most understood that Jackson was, like Lee, a brave, Christian warrior, he could never be confused with his fellow Virginian. Plenty of southerners remarked upon his gentleness, his caring for others—the basic plot of the Victorian hero—but even more commented upon his dark swiftness, his bold determination, and his terrible fury. Stories about Jackson routinely described his aggressive vigilance in taking the war to the enemy; his earnest determination to seek and destroy. It was not that southerners recognized in Jackson a stronger commitment to the Confederacy than Lee or any other general. It was, however, that southerners linked Jackson's bold wartime campaigns with his personality to create a unique type of character. As they did with Lee, southerners combined Jackson's military strategies, maneuvers, and general way of conducting warfare with his background, physical features, and personality traits. As a result, southerners created a figure that could occasionally be knightly, representative of the chivalrous South, and at the same time came to symbolize something about the region that had little to do with the classic description of the genteel southerner.³

Much of the reason for the uncertainty about Jackson's nature and the ambiguity of his relationship to the dominant masculine archetypes were rooted in the reality of his background. Like so many Confederate generals Jackson's home state was Virginia, but unlike Lee, he was raised in the western, mountainous part of the Old Dominion. The "first families" of Virginia, those who most often claimed kinship to English royals and a heritage of chivalry, considered the lowland parts of eastern Virginia their kingdoms. As

one traveled west, sparse, rocky settlements replaced plantations as the most common landscape, and thus the concept of the ordered, feudal-style society, ruled by elitist cavalier-gentleman, also grew harder to find. Though both Lee and Jackson worked as educators as well as generals, their divergent experiences highlight the differences between the two men. Stonewall Jackson was a professor at Virginia Military Institute before the Civil War, but there was little about Jackson's methods that could fall under the category of knightly. White southerners believed Lee presided over Washington College like a sage, setting an example for southern youth, graciously giving of himself without seeking reward. Legends about Jackson at VMI are numerous, and most of them make him out to be something of a tyrant in the classroom. Jackson did not lead by example but by constant repetition, forcing his students to memorize lessons until they could be recited perfectly. To his students, Jackson seemed harsh, strict, and sometimes a little odd. If he was a southern gentleman then his pupils did not recognize it, because, as most who knew him recounted, Jackson's students generally disliked him. This portrait does not inspire visions of Jackson as southern knight, or even a genteel gentleman. This image does not correspond with the southern, self-promoted idea of their region as the last bastion of chivalry in the western world.⁴

Jackson's Scot-Irish heritage was central to his southern legend and a major reason why his figure could not be the same as the knightly Lee. Truth be told, most southerners had no ancestral connection to English cavaliers or knights of any kind. For the sake of southern romanticism that mattered little, but it also mattered that so many southerners shared with Jackson some degree of Celtic lineage. Even though Lee probably had Scottish ancestors himself—some even claimed Robert the Bruce as one—southern stories did not emphasize this idea. That they did with Jackson evidences the

centrality of his ethnic origins in explaining this type of southern hero. The narrative of Jackson as a man from the backwoods Virginia, who could be short-tempered and strict, corresponded with the fact that he descended from Scottish/Irish peoples; groups historically known for their underdog role, fighting the more powerful English empire. Many southerners believed the Scots-Irish' reputation as an independent-spirited, quick-tempered, tough, fearless, impassioned, but too often reckless people had been well-earned. The Scot-Irish legacy, as most of the time understood, gave Jackson a never-say-die boldness that was courageous, yes, but not exactly chivalric. Jackson as a quintessential Celtic Virginian united the story of his background with descriptions of his personality to produce the type of figure southerners thought him to be.⁵

Considering his ancestry, upbringing, personality, and other factors, southern stories indicated that, though a knight in some respects, Jackson seemed more like a southern version of the archetypal Puritan. Stories about Jackson typically harnessed the symbols of the Puritan in order to describe this hard-to-define figure. Unlike Lee, there was more about Jackson that was common than uncommon. He hailed from no noble family, had no privileges in life, and achieved his success through hard labor and force of will. Stern, strict, determined, and other similar terms were those most often used to portray Jackson as soldier or man. Though most of all, it was Jackson's religious faith which marked him as a unique type of southern hero. More than any major commander of the Civil War, Jackson seemed especially committed to his religious beliefs. A devout Presbyterian, Jackson's habit of incessant prayer and constant talk of a higher power was well known to both Confederates and Unionists. As was the case with Lee, southerners usually promoted their heroes as good Christians, but Jackson's brand of religion did not fit the familiar Victorian pattern. Jackson's faith, and therefore his God, was dogmatic,

unrelenting, vengeful, and often unforgiving to his enemies. Jackson worshiped a God that Puritans knew well—one that promised damnation to those who did not closely follow the straight and narrow. Jackson's steadfast loyalty to his Presbyterian roots colored all else in his life, including the way in which he waged war. Thus, for southerners Jackson's religious piety and his heroics as general went hand in hand. Glorifying Jackson then forced southerners to celebrate the large portion of him that was clearly Puritan inspired.

Southerners did not recognize Jackson as a Puritan when the Civil War began, nor were they likely to recognize his name at all, but this began to change as news of his military successes reached the homefront. Jackson's vaunted record as a Confederate general and the manner in which he conducted his campaigns is essential to understanding him as a masculine southern hero. It was at the battle of first Bull Run where Thomas Jackson forever became Stonewall, after his stand against volleys of Union fire made him the hero of the hour. Jackson's fame really began, however, during his spring 1862 campaign in the Shenandoah Valley. Lee sent Jackson to the Shenandoah to distract McClellan's legions who threatened the Confederate capital at Richmond. In successive days of hard marching, Jackson's small army divided and conquered Union armies who, if combined, would have greatly outnumbered his own band. Not only did Jackson accomplish Lee's purpose, and aid in repelling McClellan, but his bold action implied that he could strike a northern city, or even the Union capital. The Battle of Chancellorsville sealed Jackson's place in southern lore after his audacious flanking march sent stunned Union soldiers running for their lives. The most often told stories about Jackson's military exploits put him in the role of an eager aggressor who sought ways to punish his enemy. Jackson pushed his own men hard and preferred to give no

quarter to the enemy. Whether it be at Bull Run, the Valley, Chancellorsville, or any other battle, stories about Jackson consistently reaffirmed him as the most determined and unrelenting of Confederate generals.⁶

Jackson's successes and aggressive tendencies made him a favorite of southerners during the Civil War; perhaps even surpassing the popularity of Lee. While the war was being waged, many southerners yearned for someone like Jackson—who would stop at nothing to defeat the hated Yankees. William Gilmore Simms' 1866 compilation of wartime poetry suggests that southerners believed Jackson, at least as much as Lee, was the Confederacy's best hope for victory. Southerners sometimes described Jackson as an Old Testament type warrior-prophet, as did H.L. Flash's poem of Jackson as a Confederate Moses who freed his people from northern rule but then died too soon: "He entered not the nation's holy land, At the red belching of the cannon's mouth: But broke the house of bondage with his hand—The Moses of the South!" Another poet posited that Jackson did not fear death—that his only purpose, his one undoubted mission, was to destroy the enemy at every turn: "swift—coming death Appalled him not. Nor life with all its charms. Nor home, nor wife, nor children could weigh down The fierce, heroic instincts to destroy The insolent invader." Hopefully all southerners would follow Jackson's example "in revenge of wrongs, to dare and die!" One anonymous author insisted that Jackson would not have wanted his country to mourn him. The Confederacy would be better served to follow his path, to continue his type of war-making, to seek the destruction of the enemy:

"No! Still the cry is 'onward !'
This is no time for tears ;
No ! Still the word is 'vengence !'
Leave ruth for coming years.

We will snatch thy glorious banner
From the dead and stiffening hand
And high, mid battle's deadly storm
We'll bear it through the land."⁷

Southerners mourned Jackson's death as a calamitous disaster for the Confederate cause, and their reactions predicted how later stories would describe the southern hero. Confederate troops shot Jackson by mistake after the Battle of Chancellorsville, as he returned from scouting the position of the retreating Union army. After his right arm was amputated most believed Jackson would survive, but his life ended a few days later. For Tennessean Eliza Fein, Jackson's death reminded he was indeed human, and that southerners had been "guilty of idolatry" by believing that their beloved general could accomplish anything. Before his death, Confederates tended to think "if Stonewall is there all will be right," Fein recorded. After Jackson's untimely demise another noted the "sorrow which has befallen our country..." and the feeling that southerners "could not do without him ...for he was the nation's idol." Confederate Kate Stone expressed deep sorrow at the prospect of losing Jackson, because "in the death of Stonewall Jackson we have lost...the greatest general on our side." Stone believed "he is lost to his country at the time she needs him most...his death has struck home to every heart." Emma Leconte's diary entry shortly after Lee's surrender revealed an honest assessment of the South and Jackson's legacy. She remembered Jackson "as my hero." Even though Leconte "then admired Lee as grand" and "magnificent...Jackson came nearer to my heart." After Chancellorsville though, "Lee has had all the hero-worship, *all*—both his and Jackson's—though the dead hero will always be shrined in every southern heart." Leconte indicated that southerners soon forgot how much Jackson had once fired their hearts, due to the rise of Lee as the quintessential Confederate general. Even so, stories about Jackson soon after his passing expressed the idea that he was irreplaceable as a

Confederate general, and they highlighted his fearsome qualities on and off the battlefield. Here, in the middle of 1863, Jackson seemed as much the southern savior as Lee.⁸

Though an early understanding of Jackson-as-Puritan existed at his death, his first biographers did not present one uniform portrait of him as Confederate hero. Virginians John Esten Cooke and Robert Dabney served in the Civil War and wrote romanticized Confederate histories after its conclusion. Cooke's *Stonewall Jackson* appeared soon after the general's death at Chancellorsville in 1863. Cooke's first effort at describing Jackson (he later wrote more on the subject) portrays him both as a Virginia gentleman and a hard-charging, militant rebel. Jackson could not be called a fatalist, which was to Cooke, "a vulgar and shocking sentiment." It was important that southerners understood that Jackson was a zealous Christian but not a religious extremist. He was humble and forgiving, but there was no "dogmatism in his religious creed" no "strange Oriental fatalistic sentiment" in his practices. Still, Cooke's Jackson was a harsh, stubborn, man, and the author compared him to Oliver Cromwell, both of whom possessed "iron souls." Dabney's 1866 treatment of Jackson is an unapologetically romanticized account reminiscent of the most common Lee stories. Again, Jackson's much discussed religious convictions played a central part of Dabney's work. Most southerners, Dabney urged, "called him a fatalist, and imagined that, like a Mohammedan, he thought natural precautions inconsistent with his firm belief in an over-ruling Providence," but "nothing could be more untrue." Dabney dismissed stories about Jackson's surly reputation and highlighted his Christian charity and cavalier-like qualities. Yet, both authors, especially Dabney, believed that southerners had many wrong ideas about Jackson. That Dabney would have to set the record straight, and compel his readers to believe in Jackson as a

chivalrous figure, indicates that southerners had already formulated alternate stories about their beloved commander.⁹

Southern author Edward Pollard cared little for chivalry, and believed it may have even hastened the South's downfall. Pollard published massive histories of the Civil War, which appeared as *The Lost Cause* and *Southern History of The War* in 1866. An editor of *The Richmond Examiner* during the Civil War, Pollard frequently criticized major leaders for their failures to successfully prosecute the military effort. Lee, Pollard noted, did not fight the Union with the vigor, relentlessness, and violence that it took to win. Pollard noted how Lee persuaded his commanders to abstain from destroying property and to generally act with genteel civility toward the enemy, and he believed that type of approach helped explain the Army of Northern Virginia's defeat. Chivalry could not save the Confederacy, and only unremitting, unqualified brutality toward the enemy could have, Pollard argued. Pollard criticized Lee throughout his volumes, but in Jackson, he found the type of spirited warrior most invaluable to the Confederate cause. In 1866, the author clearly outlined Jackson as the Confederacy's greatest general and the one who best understood how to fight the enemy. Jackson embodied "strong religious sentiment...with practical energy and an apparent dash of purpose," ranking him "among the great heroes of the age." Pollard indicated that the Confederacy needed more of Jackson's kind of spirit and less of Lee's. For southerners mourning the defeat of their beloved cause, this viewpoint made a great deal of sense.¹⁰

Though Jackson would remain a southern legend, one of the two most discussed and memorialized Confederate military heroes, after the Civil War public opinion increasingly valorized Lee as the more important general. Pollard was an angry observer of the Civil War, as his postwar work reflected. He wrote under the pretense that incited

many southerners to swear vengeance against the North: the belief that Union armies had committed many told and untold atrocities against Confederate civilians. Pollard, for example, believed that Lee should have brutalized northern homes and cities in retaliation—that he should have made northerners feel the hard hand of war. It seemed to many that Jackson could have, perhaps would have carried out something of the sort if he had been in Lee’s place. In later years, the Jackson figure would undergo slight modifications, as some southerners tried to turn him into something closer to a knight. Southerners mentioned his name less often than they did during the war, and defined themselves more and more using Lee’s example. Still, Jackson remained an important man long after his death. Southerners were not sure what kind of man that he represented, but they knew, either Puritan or knight, he in his own way symbolized southern manhood.

Though one of the most iconic southern men ever born and an enduring symbol of regional pride, Michael Kreyling barely discusses Jackson in his treatment of history and the southern hero. Either during the antebellum period, the late Victorian nineteenth-century, or the twentieth-century southern literary renaissance, Jackson did not fit the *ideal* figure of the southern hero. For Kreyling, southerners knew about Lee the figure even before they knew his name. That is to say, antebellum fiction gave southerners the cavalier-as-southern-hero, then Lee gave it life by becoming the chivalrous character in human form. Kreyling indicates that no southerner better fitted the mantle of hero as most understood it, and no other seemed less complicated or more taken for granted. Quoting one of Lee’s eminent biographers, Douglass Southall Freeman, Kreyling wrote: “Robert Lee was one of the small company of great men in whom there is no inconsistency to be explained, no enigma to be solved.” Lee so perfectly fit the archetype southerners

expected, and that storytellers so often affirmed, that all about his life was a self-evident confirmation of his knighthood. Jackson cannot so easily fit an archetypal southern character, however. Jackson may not have been the hero they expected, but it is the one they got—leaving postwar southerners the task of trying to mold him to their liking. Despite his shortcomings as an Arthur-like hero, Jackson was too successful and too important to the Confederate cause during its life to be ignored in the cause's romance after its death.¹¹

To understand and explain to others the enigmatic Jackson figure, southerners often referenced the poem “Stonewall Jackson’s Way.” Out of the many poems dedicated to Jackson before and after his death, this was likely the most repeated. The title of the poem previews its main ideas: Jackson’s way was different from most southerners, because he was a unique, perhaps even peculiar, kind of man who was nevertheless singularly suited to prosecute a vicious war. The way that “We see him now—the old slouched hat Cocked o’er his eye askew...the speech so pat, So calm, so blunt, so true...” signaled a figure of everyday origins and was a familiar way southerners described Jackson. Stonewall’s “Way” at once seemed very ordinary and plain, because his looks could not predict an accomplished hero of great renown. This is much different from a heroic southern figure like Lee, who at first glimpse stirred comparisons to pure knighthood. Only the “fool dares to scoff” at Jackson, because his way, while unique, brought swift and terrible consequences to the enemy. The poem repeats the line “Stonewall’s” or “Jackson’s Way” after every stanza to illustrate this rare type of hero. His marches were faster, his religion more strident, his movements more destructive to the enemy, and his physical features and personality more idiosyncratic than the average Confederate commander. The closing lines then offer the poem’s true meaning: that,

because of his special ability, the enemy would be wise to fear Jackson. It was better that “the foe had better ne’er been born, That gets in Stonewall’s way!” This poem appeared often in postwar memorial literature—perhaps because it captured something about the essence of the Jackson figure.¹²

Not only was Jackson’s way distinctly his own, but his emergence as a Civil War hero was unlikely and unexpected, southerners agreed. Most accounts of Jackson’s life and character foretold that no one could have predicted his rise to prominence; that there was little impressive about him. Jackson almost always begins as an awkward youth, destined to obscurity until he distinguished himself on the battlefield. One perceptibly wondered how this, “the most unromantic of great men” had become such an idolized figure in the hearts of southerners. It was assumed that Lee always commanded respect and naturally assumed leadership roles throughout his life. Like George Washington, his mere presence encouraged deference from inferiors. In southern stories, however, those who knew Jackson never thought him a general-in-the-making. Beginning the war as a “shy Puritan professor,” at his death, “by his extraordinary daring and military skill, Jackson had taken hold of the popular mind as a supreme favorite.” John Robson was a private in the Army of Northern Virginia, and his story typifies many that were told about Jackson. Seeing Jackson for the first time, “I thought it hardly possible that he could be much of a general...I should have reported that I had seen a ‘crank,’ and I believe most” would have “pronounced the opinion correct.” Like always though, Robson soon learned that Jackson’s unflattering appearance masked a genuine military brilliance. After Chancellorsville, “the army was in mourning for the victory that had cost us our chief treasure...*He* was the ‘Great,’ the ‘Glorious,’ the ‘Triumphant.’”¹³

In southern stories, the journey of the unremarkable youth who becomes a master of warfare usually begins with Jackson's roots as a member of the "staid, orderly, Scot-Irish citizens" of "The Valley of Virginia." Most of these follow the same pattern: Jackson's European ancestors came from no great family of affluence and had no advantages upon their arrival in the New World. As it was told, "The Jacksons did not belong to the class of planters, living in luxury and elegance on the seaboard, but to that energetic, intelligent, and thrifty population which settled in Western Virginia." Southerners commonly applied the catchwords of the Puritan archetype, such as thrifty, sturdy, hardy, etc., to Jackson and his family tree. According to an author in *The Confederate Veteran*, Jackson's family could be traced to "the hardy borderers of North Britain" known for their "devoutness," bravery," "thrift," and "inflexibility of purpose" among other traits. This scribe even argued that "in the South, and as much in Virginia as in Massachusetts, "a genuine Puritanism has always held sway," as Jackson and his lineage evidenced. Virginian John Wise delighted in describing the Scot-Irish of western Virginia in great detail. These were a people "of earnest, thoughtful and religious natures...intense in their religious fervor, yet strangely lacking" in "mercy" and characterized by "dogged obstinacy, pertinacity, and courage." From the valley, and from this stock emerged "Stonewall Jackson...followed by his brave men of Scot-Irish ancestry recruited here, to revive, by his grim prowess and their unshaken valor, the memory of Old Ironsides and his Presbyterians." This was no cavalier. Instead, the Jackson figure indicated a man who surfaced from the masses of a hardy but common people.¹⁴

Even after Jackson achieved a professorship at V.M.I., few thought of him as natural leader of men. It was commonly repeated that "the cadets and the graduates of the

Virginia Military Institute, who had known him as a professor there, held him in small esteem,” and they all believed “Tom Fool Jackson, could never be anything more than a martinet colonel, half soldier and half preacher.” Jackson won his unflattering reputation mostly because of his unremitting teaching style that directed students to recite lessons endlessly. Most of those who knew Jackson the professor agreed that he was too bland, too grave, to inspire admiration from others. In other words, in postwar stories, young people thought that Jackson was a religious extremist without originality or personality—the antithesis or a great leader of men. In his memoir ex Confederate William C. Oates imagined Jackson at VMI in the accustomed manner. Oates wrote that “no one discovered in him any ability which attracted attention;” Jackson had “eccentricities,” and though he was “sociable when approached,” he was usually “austere, and quite religious—a regular blue stocking Presbyterian.” Edward Moore attended V.M.I., saw Jackson’s teaching style firsthand, and served as a Captain in the Army of Northern Virginia. “As a professor at the Virginia Military Institute,” Moore recorded, “he was remarkably only for his strict punctuality and discipline.” Southerners consistently promoted the idea of Jackson as a harsh taskmaster who students disliked. In many of these stories, the same qualities that made Jackson maligned in his civilian life, stubbornness, tenacity, fidelity to his faith, rigidity, etc., made him a feared warrior as a soldier.¹⁵

Clarence Stonebreaker’s narrative of Jackson at West Point is illustrative of how southerners linked the prewar struggles of an out-of-place youth to the glories of a celebrated general. Hoping to win recommendation to West Point, Jackson is beaten by his rival “Gib” who has better grades. Once Gib proves too weak to handle the rigors of the academy, Jackson travels a long, two-week journey to win the favor, and

appointment, of the Secretary of War. “Impressed by Tom’s dogged earnestness,” the Secretary gave the “weary homespun figure” his desired place at West Point. Young Jackson has no money but assures his patron, Mr. Hays, that all he needs is a small loan to get to his destination. Jackson promised “I’ll not fail, like Gibb. You have always known me, Mr. Hays. I ‘lowed {sic} you would loan me enough to get there—that is all I need.” The moral was that Jackson was not the smartest and had few natural advantages, but his one shining quality, his untiring, devoted discipline, served him well. As a youth and as Confederate general, Jackson’s special gifts, which sometimes appeared to others as oddities, made Thomas Jackson into the Stonewall of southern fame. Stonebreaker closes this section with a poem about a ghostly Jackson who remained an ever-present force even after death, protecting Confederate encampments with his remorseless gaze:

“A grave and solemn man was he,
With deep and solemn brow;
The dreamful eyes seem hoarding up
Some unaccomplished vow...
Be strong, be valiant, be assured
Strike Home for Heaven and right;
The soul of Jackson stalks around;
And guards the camp to—night.”¹⁶

The austerity of Jackson—a stalking spirit which even death could not conquer—is even more extraordinary when compared to other Confederate military heroes. The romance of Confederate war figures extended beyond Jackson and Lee to include many other major and minor soldiers of the Civil War. Most of the high-ranking generals acquired personas of their own and were celebrated and eulogized in southern stories of the war. Among these, Jeb Stuart, Turner Ashby, John Mosby, Wade Hampton, and John B. Gordon were a few of the most frequently mentioned, and more often than not all of them adhered to the prescribed knightly ideal. Southerners displayed a want to make

almost every general into a chivalrous hero. Gordon, for example, outlived almost all of the generals, and this “Chevalier Bayard of the Confederacy” used his good standing as a southern knight to launch a long, successful political career in Georgia. Southerners tended to see characters such as Bayard or King Arthur in most any of their famous Confederate men. In dress, character, and fighting exploits, men such as Gordon or Stuart reminded southerners of their special relationship to medieval-styled chivalry. Jackson stood apart, however, in that most did not conjure knightly imagery to describe him. In his memoirs, one of Jackson’s staff noted how the general’s looks, comportment, and style appeared so unlike the other leading men of the Army of Northern Virginia. Jackson was “the most awkward man in the army,” but Lee “was the handsomest man I ever saw,” Hampton looked “knightly,” and Gordon’s appearance was so perfect, he could have been “a picture for the sculptor.” Most saw something puritanical in Jackson: plain dress, diligent work habits, asceticism, a dogmatic religious faith, and a general stern temperament. In a place and time where it seemed all heroes were expected to be, or could be made to be, a knight, Jackson remained a man apart.¹⁷

General Nathan Bedford Forrest was assuredly not a Puritan, but many southerners noted similarities between him and Jackson. Forrest and his cavalry gained notoriety from their repeated harassment of Union armies in the western theatre. He began his military career as a private and ended it as a general with a reputation for audacious, swift strikes against the enemy. Like Jackson, Forrest cared little for education, and he seemed less refined and more ill-mannered than the average Confederate cavalier. Although it was mostly due to his fighting style that some believed Forrest to be “the Stonewall Jackson of the West.” Forrest’s campaigns recalled those of Jackson in the Valley; both relied on quickness and stealth to gain victories against a

force of superior strength. “There was nothing to bold for him to undertake,” wrote one southerner of Forrest, and he “was in great measure, to the Western army what Stonewall Jackson was to the Virginia army.” In 1896, *The Confederate Veteran* noted so many commonalities between Forrest and Jackson that they predicted “some artist will blend their likenesses and that they will be classed in history as the two most wonderful Commanders of men in battle that is of record to this time.” Both Forrest and Jackson represented a kind of self-made southern man who lacked the sophistication of the well-groomed southern gentleman.¹⁸

Much more than Forrest or any other, though, it was Lee who southerners most often referenced when recalling Jackson’s legendary exploits. Most of Jackson’s famed victories came while serving under Lee’s command in the Army of Northern Virginia. The Confederacy reached its zenith and achieved its most splendid successes largely from the combined work of Lee the ranking general and his reliable lieutenant, Jackson. It was believed that this was the supreme partnership of the war, and Lee and Jackson’s talents as generals helps explain Confederate triumphs such as Fredericksburg and Chancellorsville. This was not an equal partnership, however, because as Lee’s legend grew, Jackson’s dimmed. Jackson’s glories were not his alone, because most attributed his campaigns at least in part to the genius of Lee. In southern stories, Jackson’s superlative abilities as general were not diminished, yet his talents increasingly became subordinated to the master strategist, Lee. Also, it was Lee and not Jackson who set the example for the character of this army; from officer to private beyond to every man who wore the gray uniform. Therefore, Jackson’s Puritanism never became the representative model of soldierly manhood as did the idea of a knightly Lee. Though Jackson’s figure

remained a vital one, his close association with Lee assured that his type of manhood could never overcome the southern love of chivalry.

Jackson's name frequently followed Lee's in stories of the Confederacy's most celebrated duo, but southerners generally did not describe them in the same manner. It was not that southerners reevaluated Jackson and found him lacking as a hero. It was, however, that Lee set an unattainable standard by which all Confederate commanders were measured. *The Southern Cultivator's* "Stonewall Jackson and Robt. E. Lee" offered both generals as the premier examples of true manhood. While Jackson had "military genius," and "invincibility" on the field of battle, Lee remained the South's unsurpassed hero. In Lee was found "the most perfect embodiment yet developed of the ideal manhood of our Christian civilization...the purest and greatest man of all the ages." Though Jackson was an unflappable general, a warrior with few equals in History, ultimately he becomes the sidekick, the loyal subaltern of the master swordsman of war. Jackson was the epitome of courage and steadfastness in battle, one wrote," but the "godlike" Lee, "in courage a Caesar; in honor a Spartan...in all the graces of exalted character a second Washington" yet "as gentle as his own proud mother," exemplified the ideal type of southern man. When *The Confederate Veteran* compared Virginia's Civil War heroes, they offered Lee as "the kingliest soul that ever drew a sword," Stuart as "the Prince Rupert of southern cavaliers," and Jackson simply as "the lofty Christian hero." It is apparent that southerners loved Jackson and understood him as one of the people most responsible for extending the short life of the Confederacy, yet it is also clear they could not class him as the familiar cavalier so many imagined themselves to be.¹⁹

Though Lee and Jackson may have been different men, southerners emphasized the closeness and trust that each felt toward the other. Though Jackson's oddities and

introverted demeanor kept most everyone at arm's length, he confided in Lee as something of a father figure. He was the only man Jackson "would follow blindfold," as the story went, and Lee likewise knew his reliable subordinate would perfectly execute his plans. It was repeatedly remarked that "as commander and lieutenant they were exactly suited. When General Lee wanted a movement made...it was performed promptly, well, and thoroughly..." In many ways Jackson became the good soldier, the faithful follower of Lee. "Lee told him what he wished to be done" and Jackson promptly obeyed, it was asserted. Jackson "never volunteered opinions or advice to his superior in rank," as "his whole soul, mind, and strength were addressed to the discharge of duty." *The Southern Review* exhibited the southern proclivity to portray Lee and Jackson as "knit together in closest friendship," because "Jackson regarded Lee with veneration and love while Lee reposed in his renowned lieutenant unbounded confidence." Their closeness and dependency on one another helps explain Lee's reaction to Jackson's wounding and eventual death. Southern romantics loved to tell how Lee, after hearing of the loss of Jackson's left arm, feared for the loss of his "right," his most able general and the one he relied on to carry out his plans. Here, the conclusion was: never again did Lee find another right arm worthy to fill Jackson's exalted role.²⁰

As the right arm of Lee, though, Jackson's victories became less the product of his particular genius and more the result of Lee's directives. If Jackson could be fashioned as in some way as an appendage to the great Lee, then there could be little doubt who deserved the larger portion of responsibility for the gains of the Army of Northern Virginia. For those ultra sensitive, self-styled, knightly southerners, compelled to erase anything that detracted from Lee, it was necessary "to refute the statement which had been made...that the victories of Lee were due wholly to his (Jackson's) military genius

and ceased when he fell.” Chancellorsville provided the clearest challenge for those inclined to defend Lee’s war record. Here, at the Confederacy’s finest hour, one could easily postulate that Jackson’s bold plan was that which won the day for Lee’s army. Yet, so many contended that the flanking march resulted from the brilliant strategy of the Army of Northern Virginia’s lead general—again relegating Jackson to a right arm of Lee. Thomas Nelson Page discussed whether “the chief credit for the victory at Chancellorsville should be assigned to Lee or Jackson,” and he left no doubt that “the flank attack by Jackson” was the sole idea of Lee. Before a meeting of ex-Confederate Virginians, Fitzhugh Lee persuaded that Jackson, as well as all of Lee’s major officers, advised against an attack upon Hooker’s flank. “General Lee was the only one” who knew that Hooker was vulnerable, while Jackson seemed unable to predict the Union army’s intentions. It was not Jackson who selected the course of attack, nor the means to navigate through the thick Virginia wilderness, as instead “General Lee...took up the map, and pointed out to Jackson the general direction of his route...” Southerners needed to know the truth about “the ORIGIN of Jackson’s famous flank movement,” of course, so that Chancellorsville owed to Lee’s brilliance much more than Jackson’s. In this way, Lee remains the central actor of the story, and Jackson retains his place as his master’s most important lieutenant. Some southerners desired to depict Lee as the key force guiding *all* aspects of his army while making Jackson his hard-charging right arm.²¹

The conflation of the Lee and Jackson figures in part represented the desires of some to mold Jackson into something closer to a chivalrous, Victorian hero. From his death in 1863 forward, many harbored the impulse to turn Jackson from a Puritan into a knight. Some felt uneasy, it seemed, that their fellow southerners created Jackson as a hero not unlike the brilliant but despotic, and sometimes cruel, Cromwell. As for the task

of making Jackson a cavalier, Virginians generally and The Southern Historical Society in particular lead the way. The same group who most diligently defended Lee's every command decision promoted Jackson as only a slightly different form of Virginian knight. One could easily guess they did so to insulate Lee from the increasingly rare, Edward Pollard-type censure that suggested Stonewall's Way of warfare brought better results than Lee's honor-bound chivalry. It was not that they ignored other aspects of Jackson's character, but the SHS and others tended to accentuate his Christ-like gentleness over his dogmatic Puritanism. His death became likened to that of a martyred hero, and his life mirrored the self-sacrificing spirit of Lee. Jackson's humility, his kindness to strangers, his charity toward women and children paralleled how southerners constructed the Lee figure. According to many of the Virginians, Jackson's stainless Christian life ends as perfect sacrifice to the God he served.

Most southerners, though, did not equate Jackson with Christ and believed his unique fighting abilities distinguished him sharply from Lee. Infantryman John Worsham marched with Jackson and described his loss at Chancellorsville as irreplaceable to the Confederacy. "The South produced many generals of great ability," he wrote, "but for brilliancy and dash, the world never saw Stonewall's equal." It was not unusual that southerners perceived Jackson's death as the beginning of the end of the Confederacy, and some even surmised that he, and not Lee, represented the South's best hope for victory. *Debow's Review* called Jackson "the greatest military genius of the age" and "the only man who could have counterbalanced by the force of his genius the superior numbers and resources of the North." A former Confederate officer described the defeat of the Confederacy as "fated" because of the loss of General Albert Sidney Johnston at Shiloh, and Jackson at Chancellorsville. "God deprived us of Sidney Johnston," he

lamented, “and then, as if to make sure of our ruin, took from us our last hope—
Stonewall Jackson...” Another wrote in 1899 that, during the Civil War, most in the
army, in government, “and the men and women at home” thought of Jackson as “beyond
question, the main reliance of the Confederacy for the success of its cause.” Generally
southerners looked to Lee as their greatest warrior, but evidence suggests that plenty
others held Jackson in higher regard. More importantly, however, most recognized that
the Jackson figure could not be transposed onto Lee’s as one in the same. Southerners
expressed the awareness that Jackson’s spirit, his manhood, character, etc., produced a
fighting spirit within the Army of Northern Virginia independent of Lee’s chivalrous
swordsmanship, and that his way was instrumental to the success of the Confederacy’s
most valorized army.²²

Recognizing Jackson as his own kind of man, most southerners compared their
two favorite generals in order to underscore their *different* characters. The wartime
writings of Confederate William Blackford suggests that some very early on understood
Jackson and Lee as differing kinds of archetypal heroes. In his letters appeared almost all
of the symbols that southerners conveyed to distinguish the knight from the Puritan.
Blackford believed Lee and Jackson, “so utterly different in their characteristics and
style,” represented the “types respectively of the two classes of civilization which have
marked and classified the Anglo-Saxon world for more than two centuries.” Lee had “all
of characteristics of the Cavalier without their vices,” while Blackford wrote of Jackson
as a strict Calvinist and holy warrior reminiscent of an English Puritan. Jackson was a
“predestinarian by conviction to the extent of fatalism” and was “as distinct a Roundhead
covenanter as (Oliver) Cromwell.” Jackson possessed a “forbidding manner,” and
compared to English Puritans, “has all the fiery zeal which makes them successful and

formidable.” Randolph Mckim served in the Confederate army and his 1910 memoir mirrored Blackford’s earlier account. Mckim agreed that “these two great soldiers were types respectively of the Puritan and the Cavalier.” Jackson “was Oliver Cromwell, without his selfish ambition,” while Lee was “a Cavalier in bearing” with a “simplicity” and “purity” surpassing even the knights of European lore. As did Edward Pollard, Mckim also articulated a belief not uncommon among southerners: the genteel Lee needed, in order to win the war, more of Jackson’s hellfire fury. Lee could have used “more of Jackson’s sternness and inflexibility” which “would have been conducive to success on the field of battle,” Mckim wrote. In this story Lee’s masculinity is unquestioned. However, the manhood of Jackson is also celebrated, with it intimated that perhaps the Civil War South necessitated a hero resembling Jackson more than Lee.²³

Author John Cussons associated Jackson’s way of making war with the Sioux at Little Bighorn—undeniably something that southerners could not and would not do with the Lee figure. Cussons’ 1899 *A Glance at Current History* mostly followed the pattern of pro-southern, anti-northern broadsides which defended secession and blamed the North for the Civil War. Then, Cussons went further to criticize the Union Army’s actions against rebellious Native American groups, especially General George Custer’s infamous battle with the Sioux in 1876. For Cussons, if the Sioux be guilty of “treachery” simply because they used deception and skillful maneuver to win the day, “then the most treacherous man that every planted foot on this round globe was Thomas Jonathan Jackson...” The point here was that white Americans hypocritically denounced the tactics of Native tribes but made allowances when their own, like Jackson, used similar methods. Jackson, “the very prince and potentate of deceivers” always lied to his opposing commander, never doing what or being where he was supposed to. Both Jackson and the

Sioux “fought for hearth and home, for ancient right, for the freedom which they had inherited from their fathers,” and thus neither deserved dishonor. There were few like Cussons who imagined a kinship between Jackson and Native Americans, yet his commentary better elucidates the contrast between the Jackson and Lee figures. Lee could never be a “deceiver,” even when his carefully laid plans misled and then trapped Union forces, because he was simply too fatherly and genteel to betray anything false in his character. To put it another way, a knight cannot tell a lie. Jackson’s relentlessness, his aggression, and his concern only with the outcome and not the means of warfare inspired Cusson’s comparison.²⁴

Southerners did not routinely think of Jackson at Little BigHorn, but they very often dreamed of a world where he commanded at Gettysburg. Southerners loved to imagine Jackson’s course in the Civil War, those places where he would have led his soldiers, those battles he would have won, if his life had not ended after Chancellorsville. Jackson at Gettysburg, though, was the most fondly told story, because here his presence could have steered the South toward ultimate victory in the Civil War. Former artilleryman Edward Moore argued Jackson’s “absence in later battles, conspicuously at Gettysburg,” doomed the Confederacy to failure. This belief “that with Jackson at Gettysburg our success would have been assured” was “a feeling that was entertained throughout the army.” Southerners took it for granted that if Lee and Jackson’s partnership had remained intact just a while longer, the Confederacy would have assuredly won the war. According to a popular southern legend, even Lee declared, “not long before his death—that if he could have had Jackson with him at Gettysburg he would have beaten Meade’s army, and Southern Independence would have been established,” because “it is universally conceded that such a result would have surely

followed a southern victory there.” No observer could fail to conclude, another believed, “that the *absence* of Jackson was the most potent factor in the loss of that great battle and golden opportunity by the Confederates.” It was Jackson’s speedy and crushing strikes against the enemy, along with his faith in Lee, which would have made the difference, southerners reckoned. If Longstreet’s slowness, his plodding unwillingness to attack the Union was to blame, then surely Jackson’s unequalled capacity for stubborn, decisive assaults would have carried the day.²⁵

One of the attributes that would have aided their efforts at Gettysburg or anywhere else, southerners urged, was that quality which all agreed Jackson possessed: severe discipline. The frugal Puritan led a workday life; laboring every day for family and God, never shirking his duties as a man. In southern stories, this perception of the reliable, hardworking Puritan suited the Jackson figure perfectly. Jackson was the kind of man who committed himself absolutely to a cause, a man “of the sternest Puritan nature, who would come as near as any man could to doing what he thought best.” As told by one who knew him, Jackson lived a strictly regimented life, rising early each day, beginning his routine: “he invariably rose at a certain hour, which was an early one” then” issued the general orders of the day.” Jackson’s wife knew always when he would arrive, “for the clock was not more regular in its movements than he was...” His daily prayers, of course, were the most important part of Jackson’s strict schedule. Houston’s *Daily Post* called Jackson “more Puritan than cavalier in the stern principles of rectitude which governed his conduct,” because he “never sought the tent at night without going down upon his knees...in worship.” Southerners most always linked Jackson’s discipline as a man with his successes on the battlefield. Maybe his unforgiving nature sometimes went too far, perhaps he expected perfection out of himself and his subordinates, but

southerners little questioned that the Army of Northern Virginia needed such a man. On several occasions during the war, Jackson even arrested senior officers who somehow failed to implement his commands. One southerner admitted “there is no doubt that Jackson was sometimes too severe, and that he was not always just, and yet it would have greatly increased the discipline and efficiency of our service if others of our Confederate leaders had had more of this sternness and severity toward delinquents.”²⁶

Jackson’s intractable, uncompromising approach to life contributed to his reputation as the most feared general of the Confederacy. Southerners sometimes likened Jackson to a force of nature, a “blazing meteor of battle,” as Fitzhugh Lee called him. Jackson’s speed on the march and his unparalleled ability to inflict quick, covert, yet destructive blows indicated a power greater than any mortal general possessed. The wife of ex-Confederate Burton Harrison called Jackson “the stern Puritan leader” who always “launched himself like a destroying lightning bolt against the foe!” An author for Atlanta’s *Constitution* remembered Jackson’s “dark eye...blazing like an aureole” as he passed his awed soldiers “like a streak of light.” Most, though, understood the Jackson figure as a mere man infused with the puritanical zeal which made him so formidable. “He has oftener been compared with Oliver Cromwell,” one wrote, “but Cromwell was a great statesman, of far-reaching wisdom; we would be inclined to pronounce Jackson a warrior, pure and simple.” Jackson was “a warrior pure and simple” because it seemed he cared for nothing excepting the next fight; that his drive to conquer and destroy consumed him. His single-minded pursuit of victory made Jackson a southern hero, but it did not always endear him to the men under his command. Many stories of Jackson after the Civil War conceded that many of his troops could not comprehend his way of conducting war, and some even hated him. One of Jackson’s Civil War colleagues,

William Taliaferro, admired “the go-aheaditiveness of Jackson’s character” but admitted that his philosophy as general was not always popular. Taliaferro recalled one of Jackson’s campaigns that illustrated his legendary ability to ignore everything but the mission at hand: “It was in the depth of winter, in a harsh climate and over mountain roads which would have appalled and deterred most men, yet Jackson was apparently unconscious of either cold or suffering...His orders were to go and we had to go.” It seemed that both his enemy and his men feared Jackson to some degree, because they both knew he would tolerate nothing less than accomplishing the task at hand.²⁷

Jackson’s disciplined fearlessness before the enemy, his obsession with executing orders, and practically all that made him a puritanical type of hero, sprung from his well-known religious faith. It was no secret that Jackson “was indeed a soldier of the cross...religion was with him the philosophy of life—the controlling power of every wish and act in every hour and day.” No wonder some compared Jackson to a supernatural spirit, because when he entered battle, he did so with God on his side. John Esten Cooke wrote of Jackson as “the man who holds aloft his hand in prayer while his veteran battalions move by steadily to the charge,” resembling “the stubborn Cromwell, sternest of Ironsides, going forth to conquer in the name of the Lord.” One finds Jackson linked with Cromwell time and again. Throughout the nineteenth-century many tried to remove this association, hoping to make Jackson more of the Lee-like knight, fearing the connection with a military dictator hurt Jackson’s prestige. Still, it was simply too apparent that the source of Jackson’s power was his staunch, unchanging Presbyterian beliefs. Southern reverend James Graham felt the “*religious element* in Jackson’s character” ruled the man. “It was no ordinary faith that produced such a man. It penetrated his entire being and had him in thorough possession.” This unordinary faith

captured the essence of the Jackson figure as southerners created it. This was the kind of faith that tolerated no quarter to the un-righteous—and the kind that allows a righteous man, believing himself to be an instrument of the Almighty, to stand like a Stonewall before deadly fire and to undertake the type of bold campaigns that would make other men tremble.²⁸

Dogmatic Religious belief is the key to understanding everything that went in to creating the Jackson story. Raised a Presbyterian in the backwoods of Virginia, Jackson had only his faith to guide him and none of life's privileges. This awkward youth with little charm and no connection to the Virginia aristocracy worked his way up the ladder, first as a student at West Point and then as a professor at V.M.I. Mocked and disliked by most, Jackson appeared destined for obscurity until a great civil war finally unveiled his special calling. At every turn of his life, Jackson's trust in a higher power ruled his conduct as both a man and a warrior. His faithful determination to succeed drove him, as a student, teacher, and then general, and it made him a somber and sober man. Others saw this in Jackson the man and did not like it; most witnessed it in Jackson the general and fell in love with it. Southern novelist Mary Johnston wrote:

“In peace, to the outward eye he was a commonplace man; in war he changed. His inner self became visible, and that imposingly. The man was there; a firm man, indomitable, a thunderbolt of war, a close-mouthed, far-seeing, praying and worshipping, more or less ambitious, not always just, patriotically devoted fatalist and enthusiast, a mysterious and commanding genius of an iron sort. When he was angered it was as though the offender had managed to antagonize some natural law, or force or mass. Such a one had to face, not an irritated human organism, but a Gibraltar armed for the encounter.”

In time, the Jackson figure gathered around it a romance that, though unlike Lee's in nature, was only slightly less present in southern stories. The romance that attended Jackson summoned a type of manhood not wholly congruent with Victorian-era chivalry.

This romance recalled fighting priests and Old Testament warrior-prophets, men who talked to God directly and punished the sinful. There was enough room in southern hearts for a man like Jackson, as well as one such as Lee.²⁹

Former Confederate George C. Eggleston described his former colleague like this: “Jackson was always a surprise. Nobody every understood him, and nobody has ever been quite able...to penetrate his singular and contradictory character.” It is not unusual that southerners had difficulty pinning down the “singular” Jackson as one thing or another, because southerners expected their heroes to adhere to the knightly standard. Most saw something unique in Jackson and found it perfectly acceptable to describe him as a Virginia-version of a Puritan. Others disliked stories that equated Jackson to a Cromwell type and protested—perhaps too much—that the Jackson figure resembled Lee in most every way. The reunion spirit, however, allowed most southerners to embrace the Puritan archetype and therefore acknowledge Jackson’s way as distinct from the other knights of the Confederacy. A few even preferred Jackson’s generalship to Lee’s and wished that the South’s genteel generals had been less knightly and more like a Confederate Cromwell. However, taken together, stories about Jackson, Lee, and the Army of Northern Virginia point toward one very important conclusion: Lee, and not his right arm general, became the most important Confederate, Civil War hero. Most paired Lee and Jackson together as the perfect partnership, but always credited the former more than the latter. Perhaps this was not the case during and immediately after the Civil War, but as time passed, Jackson posed no serious threat to Lee as the South’s representative man. That the lives and experiences of the average southerner closer resembled Jackson than Lee did not seem to matter. Lee remained the master spirit of his age, the shining

model of southern manhood. Southern storytellers crafted all those subordinate to Lee as men of a similar type who in all things followed his lead.

This is not to say that the Jackson figure had no effect upon southerners. In a region where people jealously guarded their chivalrous heritage, Jackson exuded his own kind of manhood that remained vital. It was not blasphemous to argue that had there been a few more Puritans in the Confederate service, and better still if Jackson had lived longer, perhaps the Confederacy would not have also died prematurely. Famed southern diarist Mary Chestnut's wartime evaluation of Jackson rang truer than most. In her typically-perceptive style, Chestnut described Jackson and his importance to the Confederacy. For her Jackson obviously was not a knightly hero, but one who best knew how to fight and how to win. Jackson "had no sympathy with human infirmity" and "classed all men who were weak and weary, who fainted by the wayside, as men wanting in patriotism." Jackson's soldiers "feared him, and obeyed him to the death" because those under his command "begin to see that a few more years of Stonewall Jackson would have freed them from yoke of the hateful Yankee."³⁰

¹ *Southern Bivouac*, May and June 1883, 397.

² Mary Johnston, *The Long Roll* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1911), 404.

³ Charles Royster, *The Destructive War: William Tecumseh Sherman, Stonewall Jackson, and the Americans* (New York: Knopf, 1991) Royster's thesis is that Jackson, along with Sherman, more than any others understood the American want to seek to destroy the opposing side. His analysis resides on the notion that Jackson believed in aggressive instead of genteel warfare, and this basic understanding informs my reading of Jackson as Civil War general.

⁴ James I. Robertson, *Stonewall Jackson: The Man, The Soldier, The Legend* (New York: Macmillan, 1997).

⁵ David Hackett Fischer, *Albion's Seed, Four British Folkways in America* (New York: Oxford Press, 1989); Grady McWhiney is known for his thesis that attributes Confederate defeat to the overzealous fighting style of the Scot-Irish soldier. Most historians, including myself, do not accept the premise of his argument, but the longstanding belief that Confederates were mostly Scot-Irish and therefore behaved recklessly in combat helps prove the strength of the Confederate as Celtic warrior myth; Grady McWhiney and Perry D. Jamieson, *Attack and Die: Civil War Military Tactics and the Southern Heritage* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1982); Popular author James Webb recently has written a book that affirms the Celtic myth, arguing how the Scot-Irish have left a particularly fierce, combative legacy throughout American History, James Webb *Born Fighting: How the Scots-Irish Shaped America* (New York: Broadway Books, 2004).

⁶ Gary Gallagher, *The Shenandoah Valley Campaign of 1862* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009); Gary Gallagher, ed., *Chancellorsville, The Battle and its Aftermath* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008).

⁷ William Gilmore Simms, *Wartime Poetry of The South* (Arno Press, 1866), 230, 51, 343.

⁸ John Fain, ed., *Sanctified Trial: The Diary of Eliza Rhea Anderson Fain, a Confederate Woman in East Tennessee* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2004), 71; Matthew Page Andrews, ed., *The Women of The South in War Times*, (Baltimore: Remington Co., 1923), 180; John Q Anderson, ed., *Kate Stone, Brokenburn The Journal of Kate Stone, 1861-1868* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1972), 211; Earl Schenck Miers, ed., *When the World Ended, The Diary of Emma Leconte* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1957), 96.

⁹ John Esten Cooke, *The Life of Stonewall Jackson* (New York: Charles Richardson, 1863), 16; R. L. Dabney, *The Life and Campaigns of Lieut.-Gen. Thomas J. Jackson* (New York: Bielock & Co., 1866), 738; Oliver Cromwell was the victorious military leader of the Puritan armies during The English Civil War and for a time ruled England. Cromwell symbolized the Puritan archetype to the extent that southerners often considered "Cromwell" and "Puritan" as interchangeable terms.

¹⁰ Edward Pollard, *Southern History of The War* (Richmond: C.B. Richardson, 1866), 618; Royster, *The Destructive War*.

¹¹Michael Kreyling, *Figure of the Hero in The Southern Narrative* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1987), 107; Douglass Southall Freeman wrote biographies of Lee in the nineteen thirties and forties. He continued in the Virginian tradition to present Lee as the *beau ideal* of chivalry, and the premier authority on Lee.

¹²Mrs. Burton Harrison, *Recollections Grave and Gay* (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1911), 140; *Stonewall Jackson's Way* was recited in various forms from his death in 1863 to well into the twentieth-century. Repetition and placement of the poem indicates that southerners believed it was important to understanding the man.

¹³J. William Jones, *Southern Historical Society Papers*, vol. xiii, Richmond, January-December 1885, 318; Harrison, *Recollections Grave and Gay*, 138; John Robson, *How a One-Legged Rebel Lives: Reminiscences of The Civil War: The Story of The Campaigns of Stonewall Jackson, as Told by a High-Private in the "Foot Cavalry": From Alleghany Mountains to Chancellorsville: With the Complete Regimental Rosters of Both the Great Armies at Gettysburg* (Durham: Education Co. and Binders, 1898), 25, 149.

¹⁴*Southern Bivouac*, Louisville, vol. v., November 1886, 355; John Esten Cooke, *Stonewall Jackson* (New York: G.W. Dillingham, 1894), 9; *Confederate Veteran*, Nashville, vol. xx, May 1912, 217; John Wise, *The End of An Era* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1900), 236-240; Old Ironsides is a reference to Cromwell.

¹⁵George Cary Eggleston, *A Rebel's Recollections* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1959), 133; William C. Oates, *The War Between the Union and The Confederacy and its Lost Opportunities, With a History of the 15th Alabama Regiment and the Forty-Eight Battles in Which it was Engaged* (New York: Neale Publishing Co., 1905), 186; Edward Moore, *The Story of a Cannoneer Under Stonewall Jackson* (New York: Neale Publishing, 1807), 23.

¹⁶Clarence Stonebreaker, *The Unwritten South, Cause Progress and Result of The Civil War*, eighth ed., (n.p.: Clarence Stonebreaker, 1908), 88-92.

¹⁷Lucian Lamar Knight, ed., *Memorials to Dixie Land: Orations, Essays, Sketched and Poems on Topics Historical, Commemorative, Literary and Patriotic* (Atlanta: Byrd Printing, 1919), 27; Henry Kyd Douglas, *I Rode With Stonewall* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1940), 235.

¹⁸*Confederate Veteran*, vol. II, January 1894, 1; *Southern Bivouac*, vol. II, August 1884, 364; *Confederate Veteran*, vol. iv, September 1896, 288.

¹⁹*Southern Cultivator*, "Stonewall Jackson and Robt. E. Lee," Athens, GA, November 1875, 457; *The Atlanta Constitution*, Atlanta, April 27, 1894; *Confederate Veteran*, December 1893, 361.

²⁰In southern stories Jackson is often quoted as calling Lee the only man "he would follow blindfold." Captain Robert E. Lee, *Recollections and Letters of General Robert E. Lee* (New York: Garden City Publishing, 1904), 95; William C. Oates, *The War Between the Union and the Confederacy*, 187; *The Southern Review*, vol. viii, Baltimore, October 1870, 485.

²¹J. William Jones, *Life and Letters of Robert Edward Lee, Soldier and Man* (New York: Neale Publishing, 1906), 238; Thomas Nelson Page, *Robert E. Lee, Man and Soldier* (New York: Scribner's, 1911), 297; *Southern Historical Society Papers*, vol. vii., December 1879, 567-568.

²²James I. Robertson and Bell Irvin Wiley, eds., John Worsham, *One of Jackson's Foot Cavalry* (Wilmington, NC: Broadfoot Publishing, 1987), 103; *Debows Review, Agricultural, Commercial, Industrial Progress and Resources*, New Orleans, January 18 1868, 60; Nathaniel Cheairs Hughes, ed., St. John Richardson Liddell, *Liddell's Record* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1985), 76; Clement Evans, ed.,

Confederate Military History, A Library of Confederate States History, In Twelve Volumes, Written By Distinguished Men of The South, vol. III (Atlanta: Confederate Publishing Company, 1899), 393.

²³Charles Minor Blackford III, ed., *Letters From Lee's Army, or Memoirs of Life in and out of The Army in Virginia During the War Between the States* (New York: Scribner's, 1947), 116; Randolph McKim, *A Soldier's Recollections: Leaves From the Diary of a Young Confederate* (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1910), 93.

²⁴John Cussons, *A Glance at Current History* (Glen Allen, VA: Cussons, May & Company, Inc., 1899), 160-165.

²⁵Edward Moore, *The Story of a Cannoneer Under Stonewall Jackson, in which is told the part taken by The Rockbridge Artillery in the Army of Northern Virginia* (New York: Neale Publishing, 1907), 177; John Robson, *How a One-Legged Rebel Lives*, 139-140; Mary Anna Jackson, *Memoirs of Stonewall Jackson by his wife Anna Jackson*, "A Chaplain's Recollections of Stonewall Jackson" by J. William Jones, (Louisville: Courier-Journal Job Printing Company, 1895), 477.

²⁶Gilbert E. Govan and James Livingood, eds., John Cheves Haskell, *The Haskell Memoirs* (New York: Putnam, 1960), 22; *Memoirs of Stonewall Jackson*, "Reminiscences of Stonewall Jackson," by Rev. James R. Graham, 491; *Houston Daily Post*, Houston, TX, February 2, 1902; *Confederate Veteran*, January 1893, 19.

²⁷Fitzhugh Lee, *General Lee* (New York: Appleton, 1894), 142; Mrs. Burton Harrison, *Recollections Grave and Gay*, 140; *Atlanta Constitution*, February 4, 1894; *Confederate Veteran*, vol. vi, January-December 1898, 53; *Memoirs of Stonewall Jackson*, "Some Personal Reminiscences of Lt.-Gen. Thos. J. (Stonewall) Jackson" by Major-General Wm. B. Taliaferro, 510.

²⁸*Southern Bivouac*, vol. v., November 1886, 360; John Esten Cooke, *Wearing of the Gray: Being Personal Portraits, Scenes, and Adventures of the War* (New York: E.B. Treat, 1867), 46; Graham, "Reminiscences of Stonewall Jackson," 501.

²⁹ Johnston, *The Long Roll*, 144.

³⁰George C. Eggleston, *A Rebel's Recollections*, 132; Ben Ames Williams, ed., Mary Boykin Chestnut, *A Diary From Dixie* (New York: D. Appleton, 1905), 330.

CHAPTER 5

THE HERO IN TRANSITION: STONEWALL JACKSON AND THE NORTH

One man we claim of wrought renown
Which not the North will care to slur;
A Modern lived who sleeps in death,
Calm as the Ancient Marbles are:
'Tis he whose life, though a vapor's wreath
Was charged with the lightning's burning breath—
Stonewall, stormer of the war.

But who shall hymn the Roman heart?
A stoic he, but even more:
The iron will and lion thew
We're strong to inflict as to endure:
Who like him could stand, or pursue?
His fate the fatalist followed through;
In all his great soul found to do
Stonewall followed his star

O, much of doubt in after days
Shall cling, as now, to the war;
Of the right and wrong they will still debate,
Puzzled by Stonewall's star:
"Fortune went with the North elate"
"Ay, but the South had Stonewall's weight
And he fell in the South's vain war."¹

Henry Melville's tribute to Stonewall Jackson echoed northerners' substantial respect, and frequent admiration, for their greatest adversary of the Civil War. During the Civil War and long after, northerners recognized Jackson as one of the central characters of the Confederacy and one of its most talented generals. Stories about Jackson from a northern perspective routinely pay homage to his unique abilities as general; his

peculiarly effective method of making war. Strong criticism of Jackson was rare. As a general, northerners credited Jackson's military record more often than any other Confederate figure. They recounted nearly all his campaigns as masterful efforts and marveled at his unparalleled victories. If a poll had been taken, Jackson could have very easily surpassed Lee as the model of Confederate success. If Jackson had faults, northerners believed, they were not displayed on the field of battle.

Northerners attributed much of Jackson's greatness to what Melville called his "star"—that rigid, faithful devotion to long-held beliefs which steered his every movement. Throughout his poem, Melville uses a star as a metaphor for Jackson's single-mindedness and steadfast adherence to principle. One could easily interpret the star as an allusion to Jackson's well-known religious faith, but it could reference any guiding creed of human endeavor. The poem itself, to a great degree, is another way of expressing the sentiment of the southern standard "Stonewall Jackson's Way." In both Jackson follows an unworn path (as with Melville, a star) which allowed him a distinct edge over his opponents. His "way" gave him almost irresistible power because it is unlike the way of anyone else, and scarcely anyone other than Jackson understood his methods. Northern stories consistently testified to Jackson's speed on the march, his decisive, stunning movements, and his propensity to appear where the Union least expected. As did southerners, northerners also remarked how Jackson never shared his intentions with other officers, and that others interpreted his plans, until executed, as ill-conceived if not absurd. Northerners recognized Jackson's value to the Confederacy even more than did southerners. Thus there is much truth in Melville's assertion that northerners could never "slur" such a vaunted opponent as Jackson, even when he died for a cause unworthy of his greatness.²

Though northerners felt little want to criticize Jackson, they found it somewhat difficult to define him. There was a certain inquisitive fascination with this most singular of southern generals, and in northern stories, plenty strove to understand and explain Jackson's way. At every point in his life, Jackson seemed oddly out of place, but he somehow managed to achieve his goals and become a military leader. Stories of Jackson routinely placed him as the outsider, far removed from the southern aristocracy, who became perhaps the most successful of southern generals. Greatness seemed destined to elude Jackson until he found his calling due to the Civil War. For those with knowledge of the southern variant of the Jackson figure, the reasons for his unlikely perseverance, his rigidity, discipline, hardiness, stern cast of mind, relentlessness, and faith in a higher power, appeared familiar. Northerners understood that Jackson was a praying general, as pious as any man on either side. His awkward, odd appearance also became a part of northern legend, yet in battle this dashing, courageous figure could stand like a wall amid deadly enemy fire. Opinions varied, but taken together, northerners concluded that Jackson was less cavalier than Puritan. Still, northerners were less likely to refer to Jackson as a Puritan than were southerners. There remained something unknown and indescribable about the Jackson figure. There was an innate Napoleonic genius there, northerners said, and a little bit of the knight's code, but more than Lee or any other notable, Jackson seemed to believe in the righteousness of his cause as if he was God's own personal general. Maybe this was the secret of his "way," and maybe it was the same star that Cromwell once followed.

It must be reminded that northerners did not necessarily envision Jackson as a direct descendant of the original New England Puritans, but instead as a man who lived, thought, and fought in the Puritan tradition. The *idea* of what a Puritan was gained such

widespread acceptance that a Scot-Irish mountaineer from Virginia could fulfill this role without major dispute. Puritans were a particular sect of Christians who dominated early New England, but the term is also an archetype with certain characteristics describing one form of manhood. One could be a knight with no connection to feudalism or any manner of round table, just as a figure like Jackson could become a Puritan without direct relationship to the historical people of the same name. Northerners could and did use other types of symbolic holy warriors to describe Jackson. To some Jackson represented an Old Testament prophet or some manner of ancient warrior-priest. However, northerners knew the Puritan the best and understood him as one of the central actors in the history of the American nation. Like southerners, many northerners also understood themselves and their history through the Yankee/Puritan, cavalier/knight paradigm. Thus, the contrast between the two major types of western manhood figured prominently in northern stories about Jackson and many other major Civil War leaders. Thus, northerners understood that the long shadow of the Puritan in America could have birthed a man of uncompromising Confederate sympathies with the soul of a Roundhead.³

The puritanical Jackson figure was not without romance, but it could not match the long-lasting power of Lee as a knightly hero. The essence of romantic heroes is that they symbolize values which mankind has lost or are rapidly losing. The lives of most Americans bore little resemblance to either codes of chivalry or the ferocious religiosity of a Cromwell-like Puritan. Both were forms of masculinity that various Americans highly prized but increasingly associated with a world gone or at least slowly disappearing. Even so, northerners viewed Jackson mostly as a brilliant soldier to applaud and less a great man to emulate. The power of the Lee figure allowed it to become a symbol of Victorian gentility, the Old South, and in some circles, America itself. Lee's

presence in American culture extended beyond the battlefield, and his involvement at Appomattox, for example, became an endlessly repeated example of sectional harmony and the strength of national Union. Jackson simply could not compete with Lee as *the* master spirit of the Army of Northern Virginia and thus the South as a whole. After the Civil War, northern storytellers increasingly relegated Jackson to a supporting role in the life and legend of Lee. Still, northerners never forgot Jackson nor did they diminish his talent as a Confederate commander. Jackson always remained the interesting character, mostly Puritan but not entirely so, who aided Lee in the Confederacy's most important victories.⁴

Though his centrality in Civil War narratives diminished over time, between 1861-1863 northerners credited Jackson as the primary source of Confederate success. Wartime commentary suggests that most believed Jackson, and not Lee, was the Union's chief adversary and most troublesome threat. Northerners heard about how Jackson earned his nickname at Bull Run; how he rallied his men to stand and fight even after being wounded in the hand. At Second Manassas, Antietam, and other battles Jackson's corps played a key role that either assured victory or spared the Army of Northern Virginia a calamitous setback. More than anything else, though, Jackson's campaigns in the Virginia Valley alarmed and often terrified supporters of the Union. In the spring of 1862, as Jackson's men rampaged through the Shenandoah Valley, northerners must have deduced that no Union force could capably stop them. Powerless and outmatched, northern armies could not defeat Jackson in Virginia, and moreover, many worried they also could not prevent an invasion. Jackson presented the specter of an unstoppable Confederate general who could strike deep into the heart of northern territory. Northerners did not yet know the war would end in their favor at Appomattox, and cared

little about the character of a genteel Lee. Jackson was their enemy, and he provided plenty to think about.⁵

Civil War legends about Jackson took many forms and evidenced the degree to which northerners feared his generalship and potential to devastate the North. As one northern journal attested, “it is certain that no other man has impressed the northern imagination of our soldiers and the whole community as much as he” with his “rare skill, resources, and energy.” Jackson’s great defining character trait, his “fanatical enthusiasm” echoed and foreshadowed how northerners created the Jackson figure. More than a well-schooled tactical general, and more than a brave soldier, many argued, Jackson owed his brilliance to some semi-religious yet unknown force that distinguished him as unique. The uncertainty surrounding Jackson contributed to almost constant rumors which speculated where he would attack and what northern city he would capture or destroy. Army Surgeon Thomas Ellis recorded in his wartime diary the panicked worry that often attended “the famous Stonewall Jackson” during one of his rumored advances toward Washington D.C. Around the capital, many feared that Jackson, “with a large flying” corps “is approaching the White House, with the general idea...of breaking up our communication with the advance, and thereby of starving out our army” and maybe even “killing all the troops, camp followers, &c., &c., as sort of a by-play.” In 1862 *Vanity Fair* satirized the northern public’s obsession with Jackson and his growing legend. In appearance, “the notorious guerilla chieftain...wears a beard of such dimensions that he is obliged to tie it around his neck” and “his hair is also so long that it trails on the ground as he sits on horseback.” The personality of this mythic character matched his frightening looks. Jackson was a brutal taskmaster who expected total obedience from his men, “and after every battle, he arrests and punishes every soldier

who has not a wound, fatal or otherwise.” Parody of this kind indicates how often wartime northerners referenced Jackson’s ferocity on the battlefield. Perhaps humor helped mask the very serious fear of a man who they did not yet comprehend.⁶

Fear gave way to admiration, and some sense of relief, when news of Jackson’s death reached the northern public. Northern reaction mixed a lingering respect for a fallen warrior with gladness that the Union’s greatest foe could haunt them no more. “We cannot but respect the memory of one so brave and skillful,” one editor offered, “and deplore his premature fall” in service to a bad cause. Shortly after Chancellorsville *The Maine Farmer* declared “Stonewall Jackson the most able executive General of the rebel army.” More than mere respect, northern commentary often affirmed the popular perception that Jackson’s death deprived the Confederacy of its best military mind. One journal asserted that “Gen. Jackson was perhaps the most brilliant executive officer which the present war has brought forward” excelling “all others” in “celerity and skill,” and most certainly “his death will be an irreparable loss to the enemy.” After the Battle of The Wilderness in 1864, *The Round Table* criticized Lee’s generalship by praising Jackson’s—a tactic increasingly common in the years to come. “General Lee has won no victory and achieved no decided success since the death of Stonewall Jackson,” and “the whole face of history might have been changed,” had he lived to fight another day. In other words, Jackson was the central figure in the Army of Northern Virginia and the man most responsible for its victories.⁷

One of Jackson’s first biographies did not contradict his intimidating reputation but demonstrated the northern struggle to define the Jackson figure. Authorship of 1864’s *Old Jack and his Foot Cavalry* is sometimes credited to New York publisher John Bradford and other times to British-born author Markinfield Addey. Whichever the case,

the author proved that northerners had already learned from southerners about Jackson's humble upbringing, his personal quirks, and other legends which formed his hero story. Yet, here was a man who must have been teeming with contradictions. Jackson's religion made him conscientious of the welfare of others and it gave him a strict moral code to live by, but he also seemed particularly unmerciful to those considered his enemy. He followed a God known for forgiveness, yet Jackson did not tolerate the slightest failing of an inferior officer. There was much evidence to compare a man like Jackson to a Puritan warrior like Cromwell, the author wrote. Some who "have witnessed his vigor and prompt energy...say that once again Cromwell is walking the earth and leading his trusted and enraptured hosts to assured victory." The author labored to label Jackson as one thing or another—hinting always that one archetype did not perfectly suit him. Yet, as general Jackson consistently exhibited an almost perfect grasp of all military matters. He was "undoubtedly a man of very extraordinary military genius. His unconquerable will seemed to defy all opposing forces, and to wring victory from the very jaws of fate." Once again, the biographer agreed that Jackson exuded an overwhelming acumen for soldiering unlike any other Civil War general. It was not only that Jackson was good; it was that some directing spirit compelled he and his men to victory.⁸

European observers were among the first to attempt to describe Jackson and the strange star that drove him. Many in Europe closely watched the American war, and some actually visited the battlefields, spent time among the officers, and then wrote about their experiences. Prussian Justus Scheibert walked among Lee, Jackson, and others and then published a series of articles upon his return to Europe. For Scheibert, religious rigor was the source of Jackson's power: "A Presbyterian like Cromwell, he led his men not only as soldiers, he the general; but also as congregation, he the pastor." In 1870, Scottish

author David Macrae summarized Jackson as a “messenger of fate” who was “stern and remorseless in his discipline,” but Jackson was no fanatical fatalist. Jackson’s “belief in the Divine decrees was firm to rigidity: and yet no man of our time has exhibited” a stronger self-reliant individuality. More than most others, The British held a fondness for the South and its heroes. Catherine Hopley traveled from her native England to wartime Virginia, and she published a short Jackson biography in 1863. Her volume functioned as a tribute to a man she admired, but it also demonstrated the difficulty encountered by those who attempted to classify Jackson as hero. “Some slight parallel might be drawn between him and Cromwell,” Hopley maintained, but vast differences separated the two. Strangely enough, “Jackson fought among the descendants of the cavaliers...and he fought against the descendants of those Puritans who pretend to hold up Cromwell” as their “model.” Perhaps it was best left to admit that Jackson was some amalgamation of both cavalier and Puritan. Hopley wrote: “it was Jackson, in fact, who combined the religion of the Puritan and character of the Roundhead with the dignity of the Cavalier.”⁹

European rhetoric predicted how generations of northerners would ponder about Jackson, the key to his successes, and the nature of him as a man. The parameters of the debate still revolved around the understanding of the knightly/cavalier tradition set in contrast to the Puritan. There were those who cast Jackson as a chivalrous kind of man roughly aligned with the Army of Northern Virginia’s well established knight-heroes: Lee, Stuart, Hampton, Mosby, and Gordon among others. Plenty of stories told of a kind, forgiving soul who cared deeply about women and children. In this manner, Jackson’s way corresponded very nicely to Lee’s—something that the Virginians tried to endorse. Yet northern authors could not help seeing a significant difference between the two that so many tried to describe. One of Jackson’s most well-known biographers, British officer

G.F.R. Henderson, put it like this: “It would seem, however, that Jackson in one respect was Lee’s superior...he was made of sterner stuff. His self confidence was supreme. He never doubted his ability, with God’s help, to carry out any task his judgment approved.” If Lee was the ideal Victorian hero, then Jackson must have been something of a different sort. What that sort was, though, remained somewhat unclear.¹⁰

If the Jackson figure could not be drawn sharply, if it could only be roughly outlined, then this can partly be attributed to the beginnings of a new type of American hero: the cowboy. The origins of this most American of hero archetypes are likely many; but some would say that the cowboy, to a large degree, is a New World manifestation of the Old World knight. Scholar Marshall Fishwick argued that the figural cavalier “went west” after the Civil War. The hero figure adapted itself to changing times, and “now the cavalier was a cowpoke. The myth rode on.” The cowboy did not become a universally recognized symbol of American manhood during the nineteenth-century—while the people behind the Old West myths actually lived. The look, personality, beliefs, etc. associated with the archetypal cowboy became easily familiar to later American generations, however. This type of hero was rugged, tough, often easily to anger, averse to pretension, honest, usually quiet, more plebian than aristocrat, and individualistic. Interestingly enough, one finds strands of an emerging cowboy ethic in stories about American heroes of the Civil War generation. Jackson’s way, his star, all his singular ability and oddness have in common with the cowboy an independent spirit. Those traits that so many agreed belonged to Jackson: quirky habits, a strange appearance, almost constant awkwardness, and his against the grain, unbelievably daring battlefield maneuvers, made him a man apart from almost every leading man of the day. It seemed that Jackson lived by a code of his own making that was only somewhat borrowed from

ancient chivalry. The cowboy, too, as everyone who has seen a modern western film understands, lived by a self-made creed. As one interpreter of the Old West myths wrote, “nothing in the cowboy’s society was more important than the cowboy himself. The individual reigned...” It is unlikely that many northerners made the conscious link between Jackson and a figure only beginning to become a coherent bearer of American masculinity. Northerners did not know Jackson, it is possible, because they only were beginning to know the cowboy.¹¹

To know Jackson northerners would have needed to do what the figural cowboy accomplished: look beyond genteel traditions to something more uniquely American. Genteel masculinity permeated American culture in the Victorian nineteenth-century. It was that best represented by Lee and romanticized chivalry, and its core elements were New Testament Christianity, Christ-like humility, and upper class, courtly male behavior. This was the stuff that made the southern gentleman, the mythical Old South, and that knightly masculinity preferred by so many Americans. The cavalier/knight unmistakably adhered to the genteel tradition, but the cowboy did not. Despite his ties to the knight, the cowboy that became so ingrained in twentieth-century American culture lacked much of the refinement and tact of his archetype cousin. He was less religious, if at all, not always humble, and sometimes cared more about himself than protecting the weak of his community. In essence, this is the kind of hero who guards his own independence at all costs—a figure born from the knight but wholly American. Much in the same way, Jackson followed his own star that others could not see and did not comprehend. Northern stories collectively describe Jackson as unconcerned with his appearance, the customs of others, and even the rules of war. In most ways, northerners found Jackson unlike any other hero of the Civil War.

Echoing the Jackson figure, the cowboy tended to define his own goals irrespective of those of the larger community. Chivalric heroes customarily fought for a higher authority like king, country, and God. Moreover, knights protected the weak of their community, as well, and were charged with upholding the standards, the morals, etc. of their place and time. In many cases, knightly heroes were called to some duty vitally important to the integrity of their communities. The similarities between the cowboy and knight are plentiful, but America's western hero was less encumbered by tradition and less concerned with the rules of others. The twentieth century image of the cowboy, the lone figure, in a rough landscape, surrounded by danger, learned to survive on his own with few formalized institutions controlling his behavior. As a result, the cowboy represented democratic values more than the communal knight. For example, the vaunted southern honor code coexisted very peacefully with chivalric romance because both were grounded in the protection of community standards. The cowboy transcended the honor code of the Old World knight. He became a singularly American type of figure, and not coincidentally, the rise of the western hero coincided with the rapid growth of industrial capitalism. As democratic America began to escape from Europe's shadow, as its business and industry surged forward, an independent, more individualistic hero appeared in the national imagination. It is not strange, then, that a nation that boasted of its democratic, entrepreneurial spirit would create a hero like the cowboy.¹²

Apart from a self-reliant spirit, the cowboy's physical appearance also helped set him apart. There were many versions of the western hero, but generally he was "tall, tanned, sinewy," and "weather—beaten." His long days in the saddle probably made him look dust-covered, partially unkept, and in need of a change of clothes. Therefore, not only was the western hero of the more common sort, compared with knights, but he lived

and worked close to nature; without courtly dress and baubles which were only hindrances in a harsh environment. Jackson, storytellers indicated, did not care to make himself a handsome visage, and probably he was unaware of how others saw him. On the march, Jackson “rode an old sorrel horse, leaning forward in a most unmilitary seat, and wore a sun-browned cap, and a stock, into which he settled his chin in a queer way, as he moved along with abstracted look.” Though Jackson did not remind one of a gallant knight, beneath his simple, workaday exterior thrived a resourceful man of action. “At first glance he seemed an old Virginia farmer,” author Frederic Loring wrote, and “in spite of his old coat stained here and there with mud, and his awkwardness of position...,” Jackson possessed “an appearance of power,—power conscious and self-sustaining.” Here Jackson is both an earthy, roughhewn soldier and a man of insurmountable will—a hero who echoes heroes of the American West.¹³

Given that Jackson hailed from the sparsely settled mountains of western Virginia, it is not surprising that northerners characterized him as less refined than Lee. The rocky hills that nurtured Jackson, northerners pointed out, partly inspired his gruff personality. An unforgiving land, less civilized than the estates of lowland Virginia, thus produced a hero of an unforgiving sort. Stories about the western hero are almost always set in harsh landscapes mostly untamed by man. Powerful yet unpolished, Jackson was a man of action who exuded a self-confidence which defied all odds. Simply put, Jackson got things done despite the advice of others and regardless of any barrier. At Chancellorsville “in defiance of all ordinary military rules,” Jackson divided his small force in two and then won the day, because “numbers seemed to make no impression on Stonewall Jackson and his foot cavalry.” To many northerners, Jackson’s talent, his tendency to accomplish anything he undertook on the battlefield, knew no limitations. To an enemy,

Jackson “was here, he was there, he seemed everywhere,” always mindful of how to frustrate and destroy his rivals. More like a cowboy than a knight, Jackson cared more about the ends than the means; his *individual* code dictated his behavior. Jackson gave his foes “no formal warning,” wrote a former Union general, but instead “burst upon his flank” unannounced. Northern stories indicated that Jackson relied mostly on his wits and his ever-present want to advance and attack. “Jackson was an aggressive fighter,” one northerner observed, “and this we consider the most powerful cause contributing to his success.” Yet, Jackson combined aggression with an unwillingness to share his intentions with anyone under his command. Jackson “was thoroughly self-reliant,” never asking for advice or consultation about strategy. Northerners commonly related how Jackson did not divulge any information about his movements even to his most senior officers. Until proven otherwise, some thought him incompetent, and others, crazy. Northerners feared Jackson more than any other Confederate, because he did not try to be a gentleman nor fight a genteel war.¹⁴

Legends about Jackson’s determination to win-at-all-costs filled northern stories of the Civil War. Well-known stories, repeated often, told of how Jackson proposed to attack Union troops under the cover of night, preferred to shoot rather than take prisoners, and generally urged Confederates to ignore gentlemanly rules of war. Northerners often described how Jackson “once recommended a night attack to be made by assailants stripped naked and armed with Bowie knives, suggesting the novelty and terror of such an apparition would paralyze the enemy.” Many commonly held, as well, that “Stonewall Jackson was, from the beginning of the war, in favor of raising the black flag, and thought no prisoners should be taken.” As it was related, after one particularly brave but failed charge by Union soldiers, a Confederate officer lamented to Jackson the shame of

such a waste of valiant men. A grim, unmoved Jackson quickly retorted: “shoot them all; I don’t want them to be brave.” For the most part, this merciless Jackson was not a barbarous, despised villain. On the contrary, northerners applauded Jackson’s singular way of making war, and they praised his foresight and the wisdom of his guiding star. Like a hero from the Old West, Jackson blazed his own path in a dangerous world. He did what he had to do and harbored no regrets. *Putnam*’s magazine summarized this shade of the Jackson figure like this:

“He had another remarkable trait...a cold method, which has sometimes been taken for cruelty, but is really nothing more than the expression of the severe and supreme idea of war. He had no weak sentimentalism, and he was even averse to much of the ostentation and refinement of arms. War for him...was the shedding of blood, wounds, death...He had a gloomy, fierce idea of war, which we are forced to confess was sometimes almost savage in its expressions...It was not a natural cruelty, a constitutional harshness, but a stern conception of war and its dread realities—the soldier’s disposition for quick, decisive, destructive work.”¹⁵

In creating the Jackson figure, northerners merged an almost eager acceptance of violence with other qualities which would later mark the cowboy: honesty, brevity, and coolness under fire. Northern narratives attributed part of Jackson’s awkwardness to his penchant for always being direct and candid. He lacked tact and social graces, but even so, Jackson “was known as a simple, honest, unaffected fellow, rough, and the reverse of social,” who “commanded his companions’ sincere respect by his rugged honesty.” Most who wrote out Jackson also highlighted his quiet nature, or as some put it, his “abstracted” state of mind. There were those who “endeavored to draw him into conversation...,” as one wrote, but got only “short negatives or half-affirmative responses...” It was not unusual to ride alongside Jackson “for hours...without a word being spoken.” The cowboy of western lore would have respected this Jackson. Short on words, but always ready to spring to action, the cowboy best displayed his mettle during

confrontations with others. In his 1884 work about famous military legends, author Sanford Ramey recorded a near-violent showdown between Jackson the professor and a “dismissed cadet.” During one of Jackson’s evening walks, “he was surprised to find his pathway suddenly blocked by the wrathful student, bent upon murder.” Coolly, “looking his would-be assassin in the face, Jackson continued to advance” until “the defiant attitude of the angry student changed to one of humiliation, and slinking away, he disappeared into the depths of the forest.” Like a gunfighter staring down his rival, Jackson possessed an unblinking bravery and a steady hand.¹⁶

In 1893 *The Milwaukee Sentinel* published another account of Jackson’s level headed disregard of danger. “Stonewall Jackson’s Grit” is yet another attempt to explain the Jackson figure as an indefatigable force of will, strength, and focus. In this tale, Jackson’s unconcern for his own safety and confidence in himself resembles his well-known battlefield persona. No matter the severity of the engagement, Jackson the soldier appeared indifferent if not defiant amid the roar of rifle and cannon fire. Apparently, Jackson did not change even away from the battlefield. “I remember once how a student tried to kill him...” began the editor. The former student, “I forget his name—had a fancied grievance against Jackson. He took a bag which was used to hold soiled clothes and filled it with his bricks.” From “the top story of the building...one day as Jackson was passing under his window,” the disgruntled young man “dropped the bag of bricks,” passing “so close to Jackson that it grazed his cap, tilting it to one side.” Jackson, “without pausing or looking around...straightened his cap...the only notice he seemed to take of the occurrence being to step over several bricks that rolled out of the bag.” To frightened onlookers, amazed by Jackson’s serenity, he remarked: “Gentlemen...the bricks were on the ground when I saw them. They could not hurt me then.” The pattern

here and in other stories was to, first, recognize Jackson as a distinctive hero unlike any other of the Civil War, and then to try to unveil the mysterious source of his strength. Some likened Jackson's star to a supernatural spirit or to a stridently puritanical cast of mind. Still, other narratives evinced Jackson's similarity to an Old West-styled hero and struggled to identify that which could account for Jackson's unfailing grit.¹⁷

There were no tall tales about Lee dodging bags of bricks, and therein lies a key to solving the mystery of the Jackson figure. Northerners mostly categorized Lee and Jackson as patently different. Jackson routinely frustrated those around him, especially young men, with his lack of sociability, obsession with discipline, and overall ignorance of the ways of others. On the other hand, who would have any reason to feel malice toward Lee? As the idealization of genteel masculinity, Lee garnered only perfect obedience and reverence from all southerners. Lee was strong and brave, but he was at least equally warm and compassionate. Though several stories of Jackson highlight his gentility, northerners found it impossible to hide his rampaging intensity, his advice to fly the black flag, and his frequent order to "give them the bayonet." Jackson did not seek the counsel of others and rarely offered fatherly advice. Lee used his sword expertly, with exact precision, conscious of his knighthood and careful to show restraint, while Jackson preferred to run his man through, ensuring he never got up again. Gamaliel Bradford wrote about Jackson, Lee, and many other Civil War heroes, and he rather succinctly contrasted Jackson with the genteel Lee. As to religion, "it would be fairer to speak of Jackson's as a devouring fire, of Lee's as a pure and vivifying light. *Indeed*, especially in comparison with Jackson, the idea of light satisfies me better for Lee than anything else. His soul was tranquil and serene and broadly luminous, with no dark corner in it for violence or hate." Like so many others, Bradford thought of Lee as the representative

southern gentleman and clearly favored him over Jackson. His use of heaven vs. hell and light vs. dark were fitting symbols to compare Lee and Jackson, and most probably recognized how this model applied also to all aspects of each.¹⁸

For some, Jackson's dark contempt for the enemy made him the stronger, if not more successful, of the two most famed generals of the Confederacy. There were those who valued Jackson's straightforward aggression as the most practical means of prosecuting a war. *Putnam's* agreed that Jackson "did not have the charming amiability of Lee," that "he was naturally of an excessive temper, harsh and domineering." For partly this reason, Jackson remained the superior of the two generals, more than just Lee's right arm: "General Lee deplored the loss...of his 'right arm,' and the phrase has been too literally or narrowly taken," because Jackson deserved credit wholly apart from Lee. Those who lauded Jackson at Lee's expense most often did so to critique the latter's genteel manner of conducting warfare. Some argued that "Gen. Lee never won a success after his 'right arm'—Stonewall Jackson—was broken..."and without Jackson "he never took the offensive without being defeated." To *The Galaxy* in 1874, "Robert E. Lee appears as an engineer, excellent on the defensive, but entirely devoid of vigor on the offensive...when deprived of the only strictly *great* general the South ever possessed, Stonewall Jackson, on whom broad shoulders Lee mounted to fame." It remained easier to condemn Lee for Gettysburg than just about anything else involving the Civil War, and plenty of northerners used Jackson's absence as a means to this end. It could be argued that at Gettysburg Lee's caution on the second day led to Confederate defeat on the third. Unfortunately for the Confederacy, Lee "lacked that audacious self-confidence which takes at times an enormous risk in order to gain an enormous advantage." At Gettysburg, "if Stonewall Jackson had been alive to give to General Lee the confidence which in

himself he lacked, the issue might have been different.” A lack of confidence and an over-cautiousness under pressure represents a significant indictment of Lee’s manhood. Jackson was nothing if not self-confident. No one said that Jackson lacked the fortitude to do what was necessary in any situation, nor that he would fail to press his advantage at every turn.¹⁹

If Jackson’s matchless talent for getting things done separated him from all others, it logically followed that Lee found no one to replace him after Chancellorsville. For some, Jackson was more than just Lee’s right arm. That “the Army of Northern Virginia was never quite the same after his death,” appeared as a major part of the story of the Jackson figure. More than a severe blow to their cause, some said Jackson’s death, this “irreparable loss,” practically guaranteed northern victory. It would have been better if the South had not won its great triumph at Chancellorsville—if that great achievement had to cost them Jackson. “It was felt throughout the South that his death more than counterbalanced the advantages, great as they were, of the victory of Chancellorsville,” one northerner recorded. In his autobiography, Oliver Howard wrote “Jackson’s death was more injurious to the Confederate cause than would have been 10,000 other soldiers...” Even considering how invaluable to Confederate arms some considered Jackson to be, that did not mean that these northerners automatically assumed him the South’s greatest general. Some did, but a larger number expressed the widespread idea that Jackson represented a results-oriented spirit which Lee nor others could duplicate. Jackson’s way was essential to the southern cause, even to those who religiously hailed Lee as the South’s premier military man. It was Jackson’s way that struck so many as different and that closer resembled the kind of hero the cowboy later defined. In short, the

Army of Northern Virginia was filled with knights of varying ability, but there was only one Jackson.²⁰

Though northerners understood him as a unique character apart from Lee, and despite that they credited him with a large share of the Army of Northern Virginia's celebrated success, Jackson did not threaten the Confederate Arthur's standing as the premier military hero of the Civil War. During the war northerners may have thought him their greatest adversary, but over time the light from Jackson's star dimmed. Progressive Era Americans focused on Lee and Grant's bloody duels in Virginia more than Jackson's raids in the Valley or his flanking march at Chancellorsville. Jackson's chapter of the Civil War narrative became an interesting precursor to the defining hour of America's struggle with itself: Grant's Overland campaign against Lee. The influence of the Lee figure transcended battlefield heroics; he was the complete Victorian man, the perfect knight, and the ideal southern gentleman. Everything about Lee's physical appearance and comportment designated him as the model of manhood for young Americans males. Plenty of stories questioned his command decisions at Gettysburg and elsewhere, but few, after the Civil War and Reconstruction, impugned his sterling reputation. Almost the reverse is true with Jackson. Northerners rarely found fault with any of Jackson's tactics as general and routinely labeled him the Civil War's greatest military genius. At the same time, northerners could not honestly uphold Jackson the man as the shining picture of American manhood. He was a little too strange, short-tempered, violent, and independent for his day. Therefore, the trend became to acknowledge Jackson's impeccable martial abilities, briefly discuss his personal habits, review his biography, and then devote at least twice as much of the page to Lee's unending gentility. Simply put, Americans favored knightly heroes over those of a slightly different kind.

It would be fair to conclude that Jackson was not wholly a knight, Puritan, or cowboy, but represented the hero in transition. It was difficult for some not to think of Jackson sitting at the Confederate roundtable, alongside Stuart, Gordon and others, as “one of the knights of romance.” Yet, whatever his chivalrous qualities, the main current of northern stories consistently disproved Jackson’s knighthood. In fact, to compare Lee and Jackson is to reveal how America’s Old West man sprang, in large measure, from his knightly predecessor. Both heroes possess great strength and ability, but where Lee is almost womanly in his gentility, Jackson exuded a brooding, unsympathetic exterior. Lee surrendered quietly and gracefully at Appomattox, silently retiring to Virginia. Jackson, though, did not adhere to the genteel way of war. Fittingly, he died as he lived; pursuing a foe already defeated, scattered, and terrified. Conversely, so many Americans likened Lee to the ideal southern gentleman, the living manifestation of Arthurian legend. He reflected the imagined southern community in all its greatness and offered undisputable proof that a southern Camelot once flourished within America. Jackson was mostly a lone figure: behaving in a manner that others did not understand, fighting his fight his way in a land better known for cavaliers. That being said, commentary about Jackson only somewhat linked him with the still-developing cowboy figure. The Jackson figure *anticipated* the emergence of the cowboy much more than it exemplified the Old West hero’s arrival in finished form. In Progressive-Era America, the Jackson figure represented the relationship between an older Victorian gentility and a newer, rugged, American-born masculinity. Consequently, Jackson did not completely embody the age gone by nor the one Americans viewed on the horizon.²¹

If northerners were forced to cast Jackson as the central character of any age, it was still the world of the Puritan that best suited him. Though Jackson offered early

glimpses of the cowboy's emergence, northerners still considered him a close relative to the puritanical hero. Well into the twentieth-century, northern stories emphasized Jackson's religious zeal and his commitment to fighting a holy war. As one put it: "The influence of Puritan ideas has not so far lost its power upon the people of the North that they do not recognize in this man a spirit kindred with their own." In 1895 Denver's *Evening Post* contrasted Stonewall Jackson with the man who shared both his surname and his Scot-Irish heritage: Andrew Jackson. Both Andrew Jackson's extreme volatility and worldly fondness for gambling and dueling, and Stonewall Jackson's all encompassing religious devotion signified the two extremes of Scot-Irish manhood. "The men of this strain are apt to be radical. If they are religious at all they almost sure to be Puritans," it was assured. That northerners continued to see Jackson as a "general of the Cromwellian type" spoke to the long-lasting influence of the cavalier/knight vs. Yankee/Puritan model of American History. In his 1895 book about the heroic in the nation's past, Theodore Roosevelt depicted Jackson using the archetypal figures that Americans well understood, adding that cavaliers and Puritans populated the ranks of both northern and southern armies:

"It is often said that the Civil War was in one sense a repetition of the old struggle between the Puritan and the Cavalier; but Puritan and Cavalier types were common to the two armies. In dash and light-hearted daring, Custer and Kearney stood as conspicuous as Stuart and Morgan; and, on the other hand, no Northern general approached the Roundhead type—the type of the stern, religious warriors who fought under Cromwell—so closely as Stonewall Jackson. He was a man of intense religious conviction, who carried into every thought and deed of his daily life the precepts of the faith he cherished."²²

The age of Cromwell was long gone by the time of Roosevelt's take on Jackson, and like the knight, to some the Puritan had become a highly romanticized figure representing another era. The very notion that the Civil War could be summarized as a final

confrontation between Old World adversaries, the cavalier and the Puritan, is itself a romantic wish. The Puritan then and now has an uncertain standing among Americans. Some see Puritanism as a repressed, intolerant legacy from early America, but others note how this religious sect taught hard work, thrift, and loyalty to family. Even in stories about Jackson one sees both admiration and some lingering disdain for a Cromwellian hero. However, northerners found much more to like than dislike about Jackson, and this indicated a sentimental attraction to the symbols of the Puritan. Progressive Era Americans no doubt found kinship with a man of common birth, who without any outward signs of ability, made himself into one of the most noteworthy men of the nineteenth-century. They could admire his ferocious pursuit of any given goal, his individuality, honesty, quietism, and his personal code of honor. Jackson was not handsome and had little to no personal charm—but here was a man to be counted on, a practical, sturdy, Yankee. The romance of the Jackson figure is thus its ability to remind industrial-era Americans of their puritanical roots either real or imagined. Industry to one generation meant big business, factories, mass-production, but to an earlier one industrious meant to diligently seek the completion of tasks—like the Puritan. This was Jackson’s way, and to some degree, northerners recognized it was theirs, as well.

Partly a Puritan, not really a knight, and foreshadowing the Old West hero, Jackson rarely if ever reminded Americans of the Christ figure. At first, this would seem ironic. Few if any questioned Jackson’s commitment to his God. Clearly Jackson was the most religious man of the Civil War, Americans agreed. Equally as important, Jackson died for his cause and for the sake of others. Stories of Jackson feature that he died willingly, and among his last expressions, he uttered happy assurances that his passing had to be God’s will. Some wartime southerners even looked to Jackson as their savior,

as the only one who could assure their independence. However, Jackson was not the lamb of God, and he never did conform to the Christly standard of manly conduct. Lee and others turned the other cheek, but Jackson only knew how to move forward, again and again, until the un-righteous felt his soldiers' bayonet. The descriptors of the genteel, Christ-like Victorian simply did not match those frequently used to portray Jackson: fierce, dogmatic, invincible, unmerciful, violent, and strange. Some northerners and southerners tried to make Jackson into the mold of a genteel Christ, but it never quite worked. It could be said that to come to terms with Jackson as an American hero, northerners were forced to reconcile their Puritan founders with the more recent world of the rough and rowdy West. As the Puritan moved from New England and eventually reached the Old West, he brought with him a simple and hardy manhood that formed a large bulk of a uniquely American type of man.

Northern clergyman Edgar Iliff knew Jackson was not the Christ-like figure most Americans expected. He did not like Jackson because, as he saw it, linking Christianity with martial violence counteracted Christ's example of the meek and humble hero. In 1911, Iliff grouped Jackson and Theodore Roosevelt as similar types of a new kind of rugged man who was a little too willing to shed blood, and who, to paraphrase Lee's famous utterance at Fredericksburg, was too fond of war. The Christ that Jackson knew "was not only the Prince of Peace, but the Prince of War," Iliff related. Jackson "pictured heaven as a vast battlefield, the angels all soldiers, Christ in uniform, and God as a brigadier general." Iliff compared Cromwell to Jackson, but only to demonstrate that one crusaded for the principles of democratic government while the other hoped to perpetuate a slave empire. It seemed this northerner both despised what Jackson represented but admired something about his distinct ability. He wrote that "Jackson trusted no one, took

no one into his confidence” and “humiliated some of his most gallant officers by his austerity and lack of common civility.” At the same time, “he seemed indifferent to danger” exposing himself to terrible fire on the front lines. One can assume that Iliff preferred a genteel Christ and thus a more restrained model of Victorian masculinity. Perhaps northerners like Iliff sensed a transition from the age of the noble knight to one characterized by the rough cowboy. It would be even more accurate to say, however, that this evidence indicates Americans still gravitated toward romantic heroes in the genteel mold. Jackson’s way was rapid, successful, practical, and was filled with a romantic Puritanism, but all of this did not satisfy American cravings for chivalry. Therefore, in the northern mind the Army of Northern Virginia did not become a band of bayonet-wielding Roundheads. Instead, the Confederacy’s signature army consisted of Christ-like knights created in the image of its eternal leader, Lee.²³

Taking both southern and northern stories into account, it seems as if Americans understood Jackson best during the Civil War. Northern abolitionist Wendell Phillips criticized the Lincoln administration’s prosecution of the war against the rebel South, because he felt that the Union should act more aggressively to speedily end the war and the institution of slavery. To illustrate his point he compared Jackson with John Brown. “No one can fight Stonewall Jackson, an honest fanatic on the side of slavery,” Phillips said, “except for John Brown, an equally honest fanatic on the side of freedom.” His message could hardly be misconstrued: Jackson and Brown were kindred souls, both representing religious extremism and a willingness to commit violence. They were zealots of the same order, just for opposing causes. The comparison runs deeper, too, because Jackson was present while Brown died. Colonel Robert E. Lee of the United States stopped Brown and his would-be revolutionaries at Harper’s Ferry, Virginia in

1859. Brown's plans for a mass slave revolt never materialized, and all in his small band were either killed or captured. After his trial Jackson was one of the soldiers assigned to guard prisoner Brown as he breathed his last. There was something about Brown that Jackson respected. As he wrote his wife, Brown approached his end with "unflinching firmness." Jackson recorded how someone "asked him if he wished a signal when all should be ready—to which he replied that it made no difference, provided he was not kept waiting too long." Jackson even "sent up a petition that he might be saved" from the hangman's noose. Brown died before Jackson earned his fearsome reputation, and no one has ever confused the abolitionist martyr with a chivalrous type of hero. Then again, Brown never served under Lee in the Army of Northern Virginia.

¹Herman Melville, *The Works of Herman Melville: Poems, containing Battle-Pieces, John Marr and Other Sailors, Timoleon and Miscellaneous Poems* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1963), 59.

²Charles Royster, *The Destructive War: William Tecumseh Sherman, Stonewall Jackson, and the Americans* (New York: Knopf, 1991); Royster is the premier historian who has offered the idea that northerners respected Jackson as a general more than any other Confederate.

³David Hackett Fisher, *Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America* (New York: Oxford Press, 1989); Ritchie Devon Watson *Yeoman versus Cavalier: The Old Southwest's Fictional Road to Rebellion* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1993)

⁴My understanding of romanticism here comes from Michael Lowy and Robert Sayre *Romanticism against the Tide of Modernity* (Durham, NC: Duke Press, 2001).

⁵Royster, *The Destructive War*; See also James I. Robertson, *The Man, The Soldier, The Legend* (New York: Macmillian, 1997).

⁶Thomas Ellis, *Leaves from the diary of a surgeon: or, Incidents of field, camp, and hospital life* (New York: J. Bradburn, 1863), 91; *American Phrenological Journal*, New York, July 1863, 23; *Vanity Fair*, "To Country Editors" New York, July 19 1862, 35.

⁷*The Knickerbocker Monthly: A National Magazine*, New York, June 1863, pg. 572; *Maine Farmer*, May 21, 1863, pg. 2; *New York Evangelist* May 21, 1863, 5; *The Round Table: A Saturday Review of Politics, Finance, Literature, Society and Art*, New York, March 14, 1864, 338.

⁸*Old Jack and His Foot Cavalry, or, A Virginian Boy's Progress to Renown* (New York: John Bradburn, 1864), 247; 232; It is my opinion that Addey wrote the book, since he is credited with writing other books about The Civil War. Addey spent roughly forty years in America and worked in the publishing industry.

⁹Scheibert's work was not collected and translated into English until much later. Frederic Trautmann, ed., *A Prussian Observes The American Civil War* (Columbia, University of Missouri Press, 2002), 3; David Macrae, *The Americans at Home* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1952), 189-195; Catherine Hopley, *Stonewall Jackson, Late General of The Confederate States Army* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1863), 172-174.

¹⁰G.F.R. Henderson, *Stonewall Jackson and The American Civil War* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1988), 707.

¹¹Marshall Fishwick, *The Hero, American Style* (New York: David McKay Company, 1969), 61; Douglass Branch, *The Cowboy and His Interpreters* (New York: Cooper Square, 1961), 157; Richard Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth Century America* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1993).

¹²Jennifer Moskowitz, "The Cultural Myth of The Cowboy, or How the West Was Won," *Americana: The Journal of American Popular Culture*, Spring 2006, vol. 5; Craig Thompson Friend, "From Southern Manhood to Southern Masculinities, An Introduction," in Craig Thompson Friend, ed., *Southern Masculinity: Perspectives on Manhood in the South Since Reconstruction* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2009), vii-xxiii; I am also thinking here of Frederick Jackson Turner's Thesis, and the idea of western man as a democratizing force, making the Old West the most American at least Old World of places.

¹³Fishwick, *The Hero, American Style*, 61; Theodore Dodge, *The Campaign of Chancellorsville* (Boston: James R. Osgood, 1881), 121; Frederic Loring, *Two College Friends* (Boston: Loring, 1871), 132.

¹⁴Dixon Wecter, *The Hero in America, A Chronicle of Hero Worship* (New York: Scribner's, 1941); *The North American Review*, Boston, vol. 167, November 1898, 639; *The Phrenological Journal of Science and Health*, "Gen. Thomas 'Stonewall' Jackson," New York, April 1871, 255; Oliver. O. Howard, *Autobiography of Oliver Otis Howard, Major General United States Army* (New York: Baker & Taylor, 1907), 485; *War Papers Read Before the Commandery of the State of Maine, Military Order of The Loyal Legion of The United States*, vol. III, (Wilmington, NC: Broadfoot. 1992), 288-289; Royster, *The Destructive War*.

¹⁵*New York Evangelist*, January 7, 1869, 7; Rossiter Johnson, *A Short History of the War of Secession* (Boston: Ticknor and Company, 1888), 337; *Putnam's Monthly Magazine of American Literature, Science & Art*, "Stonewall Jackson—An Historical Study," December 1868, 737-738.

¹⁶Dodge, *The Campaign of Chancellorsville*, 119; *The Morning Oregonian*, Portland, "An Abstracted General," August 22, 1894, 6; Sanford Ramey, *Kings of the Battlefield* (Philadelphia: Aetna Publishing Company, 1884), 517-518.

¹⁷*The Milwaukee Sentinel*, "Stonewall Jackson's Grit," September 24, 1893.

¹⁸Countless northerners and southerners repeated in some form Jackson's "give them the bayonet" maxim. It was widely held that Jackson urged the use of the bayonet often on the battlefield. The story illustrates Jackson's fervor to destroy Union armies; Gamaliel Bradford, *Lee the American* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1912), 152.

¹⁹*Putnam's*, "Stonewall Jackson—An Historical Study," 736; *Salt Lake Semi-Weekly Tribune*, December 21, 1897, 4; *The Galaxy: A Magazine of Entertaining Reading*, "Broken Idols," August, 1874, 193; *Christian Union*, New York, "Vicksburg and Gettysburg," July 12, 1883, 33.

²⁰*The North American Review*, November 1889, 639; John Bigelow, *The Campaign of Chancellorsville: A Strategic and Tactical Study* (London: Oxford Press, 1910), 488; John William Draper, *History of The American Civil War, vol. III* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1870), 115; Howard, *Autobiography of Oliver Otis Howard*, 374.

²¹*The Youth's Companion*, "What A Gentleman Is," August 25 1881, 34; John Fraser argued that Americans viewed Jackson as a knight very similar to Lee and others. I do not concur. John Fraser, *Patterns of Chivalry*.

²²*The Loyal Legion of Maine*, "Stonewall Jackson," 278; *The Evening Post*, "Scot-Irish in America," Denver, April 2 1895; *American Historical Record* "Stonewall Jackson and Barbara Frietchie" November 1873, 496; Theodore Roosevelt and Henry Cabot Lodge, *Hero Tales From American History* (New York: The Century Company, 1895), 186-187.

²³*The Indianapolis Daily Star*, Indianapolis, Pennsylvania, "Stonewall Jackson and Cromwell are Compared," June 18, 1911; I refer to Lee's supposed words at Fredericksburg, while Confederate soldiers were systematically cutting down line after line of Union soldiers, that "it is good that war is so terrible, for we should grow too fond of it."

CHAPTER 6

TIME ON THE CROSS: JEFFERSON DAVIS AND THE SOUTH

When, in 1908, a scribe for *The Confederate Veteran* chose to remember the South's "uncrowned king," he did not allude to either Lee or Jackson. There was only one man for whom this moniker applied—only one king of southern hearts. Southerners needed only to tell his story to identify him to others and celebrate his life. As one declared: "he is our king, and will ever be. He led our fathers to battle, and was for all the rest of his life a vicarious sacrifice upon the altar of hate. Like Washington, he obeyed the call of his countrymen to lead a battle for the dearest rights of men. Unlike Washington, the fortunes of war made him victim instead of victor; and, unlike Washington, adversity and suffering and poverty were his. But by this token he is dearer to us than if our armies had won the field at Gettysburg and planted the stars and bars on the granite hills of New England. Therefore is he our king. Therefore does he reign within our hearts. Therefore will we teach our children and our children's children to the last generation to hold in everlasting honor and reverence his name and fame." For the most part, white southerners did this very thing.¹

Jefferson Davis was the only southern hero of the Civil War who seriously rivaled Lee's popularity as a regional icon. Davis served as the Confederate president through the turbulent years of the Civil War and remained the South's unofficial head of state *at least* until his death in 1889. Countless southern stories featuring Davis attests to his power as

a hero figure for multiple generations of post-Civil War southerners. Davis certainly assumed his place among that great triumvirate of Confederate leaders who, for so many, defined the Civil War experience and even the South itself. Even more so than with Jackson, southerners coupled Lee with Davis as the master spirits, the defining characters of southern manhood. Though what differentiates Davis from Lee can be explained, in part, by a difference in time. Lee died comparatively quickly after the war in 1870, away from the public spotlight, mostly without commenting on the political issues of Reconstruction. On the other hand, Davis outlived almost every other noteworthy Civil War leader. He survived well past the aborted end of Reconstruction, gave interviews and wrote books, and often remained the subject of political commentary North and South. Lee was a more convenient hero because he seemed always frozen in time as an Old South knight, while the reputation of Davis remained more open to debate. There was very little controversy or disagreement about Lee, because he so perfectly fit the hero southerners expected and wanted. Southerners knew the kind of hero Davis represented, but it always felt like some cloud of controversy attended the mention of his name. Still, by the turn of the century, southerners probably alluded to and venerated Davis even more often than they did Lee. By then, the romantic Lee figure was so aligned with the past, and a world which could be found mostly in the imagination, that he was far removed from the actual lives of most Progressive-Era southerners. Davis indeed provided a reminder of the past, but in his sometimes-volatile legend southerners also found a man who symbolized the virtues, and the failings, of the New South.²

Davis bequeathed somewhat of an ambiguous southern legacy, because his Confederate administration was racked with controversy and criticism. As Union armies gained victory after victory, and Confederate hopes of success grew bleak, wartime

southerners often turned their frustrations toward Davis and his cabinet. Beginning the war a relatively popular statesman, Davis increasingly became the target for practically anyone unhappy with the course of the war. There was evidence to back the claims of the multitude of Davis' detractors. As president, Davis made plenty of questionable decisions in military and civil affairs while struggling to unite and inspire his people. He found it difficult to work with some of his key generals and demonstrated a favoritism toward his friends that was clear to most. Davis was a good, but not great, president, and wartime southerners tended to accentuate his flaws over his strengths. Still, this imperfect president became an ideal southern hero *in spite of* his well-documented shortcomings. That Davis could not match the perfection of Lee's character nor the daring brilliance of Jackson's generalship did not make him any less of a revered figure. It was the fate of Davis to travel a path toward immortal southern fame that contrasted sharply with either Jackson's or Lee's.³

Unlike Lee or Jackson, Davis did not inspire devotion from wartime southerners. It would overstate the case to say that most thought Davis incompetent and considered him the primary cause of Confederate setbacks. More accurately, southerners generally felt unsure of his leadership and decision-making, and some even considered him unfit for his office. Sometimes, these disgruntled Confederates made a strong case. Davis naturally was a very prideful man, and those who questioned his decisions often became his enemy. In turn his working relationship with some of the Confederacy's top leaders, such as General Joseph Johnston and Vice-President Alexander Stephens, were harmed beyond repair. Davis was remarkably stubborn, had trouble delegating work to others, and could come across as cold. With that being said, his people were divided among class lines and had trouble identifying one theme that all could rally behind. War tested the

unity of a region ruled by a small number of large slave-owners but populated mostly by yeoman farmers. Did the South secede to protect slavery? Were poor white southerners fighting and dying, for states' rights, to protect the human property of rich planters, or was it something else? Southerners never answered these questions in a manner that created harmony on the home front. Thus, Davis faced a Confederate populace at war with itself who increasingly grew frustrated as military defeats mounted. Davis was a capable statesman but could not overcome the inherent problems of the short-lived Confederacy. For Davis, the journey from maligned leader to southern hero was a long one, and it must have been an unexpected turn for southerners once critical of their president.⁴

The hero journey of Davis began rather inauspiciously during the last few months of the Civil War. The end of the Confederate South appeared all but assured once Lee abandoned Richmond to Grant on April 3, 1865. Davis left the capitol behind, went west, issued public statements, all while desperately trying to rally the Confederate people and what remained of his armies to keep fighting. Even after Appomattox Davis pushed forward, groping for any opportunity to turn the course of the war, even though all but the most hardened Confederates had accepted the inevitable. The Confederate president lived out his last days in office with his small band of officials, friends, and family running from Union troops assigned to capture him. His last act as a Confederate, that lasting image that helped compose so many stories of his life, did not occur at the height of his success (like Jackson), nor after a humble act of magnanimity (Lee), but it played out as Davis hastily fled from the small tent that now served as the de-facto capitol of his country. The president of the Confederacy gave up the fight in Georgia only after staring down the barrel of a cavalryman's rifle. Here again is a monumental turning point for the

reputation of Davis and for his future as a southern hero. Davis spent the next two years of his life as a prisoner of the United States, awaiting a trial, while the public hotly debated his fate. At the same time, accusations and rumor swirled all around of his guilt, or innocence, of all manner of alleged crimes. Perhaps of all the rumors, no other riled Davis, and upset the manhood of proud southerners more, than the widespread notion that their president was taken into custody while wearing full female dress. A damning charge to be sure and one much more persistent that Davis wished it.⁵

It was during these bitter days of his capture and confinement that southerners began recreating Davis as a hero almost without peer. Davis earned the devotion of his section by becoming a martyr for the Confederate cause exactly at the moment the white South felt defeated, shamed, and unsure of its future. The end of slavery threatened the racial hierarchy as defeat itself vanquished hopes of a South free of northern rule. Reconstruction only promised subjugation by their recent foes, and no one could be sure the extent to which the North would exact revenge against a helpless South. The immediate postwar environment, it must be remembered, differed from a later time of national reunion and a common celebration of genteel heroes like Lee. Here, fear, hatred, and insecurity colored the thoughts and actions of both northerners and southerners. At the same time, the life of Davis became a public spectacle open to almost constant scrutiny. Southerners worried what would become of their president—fearing that Davis could be executed. Media all over the country reported, and often erroneously, on some new torture meted out by his guards, his failing health, his imminent death, etc. Southern fear of the future and general anger over the present state of affairs turned to respect and then devotion for one who, it appeared, suffered grievously for themselves. As a result, Davis unquestionably became the southern version of the Christ figure. Much like Christ,

Davis paid the cost for the actions of others, and in their stories southerners reminded the world of this theme, over and over again.

To understand how Davis became a Christ-like hero, it is instructive to review the words of southerners as they heard/recorded news about Davis as a captive of the United States. Southerners exhibited mixed feelings toward their president's refusal to give up after the Army of Northern Virginia's surrender. Some thought it brave and some foolhardy, but almost all expressed deep regret and anxiety upon hearing of his capture. An acquaintance of Mary Chestnut exclaimed in horror that "I will pray for President Davis till I die," horrified and distrustful of the rumor that Davis was "taken in woman's clothes!" South Carolinian Grace Elmore was at least equally outraged at the reported treatment of Davis by his guards and by a scornful North. "How indecent their jeers, over our fallen lot," she mused, "how low their jokes over the capture and imprisonment of the fallen Statesman and patriot Davis, how fiendish their anticipation of his death." Responding to the many press accounts of his numerous abuses, another Confederate insisted that "President Davis is in a dungeon and in chains." This was just another part of southerners' general trepidation and dread of Yankee rule, which "dwells here, haunting us, tracking us, running like an accursed discord through the music tones of our existence." Most were not as poetical but nevertheless sounded a similar sense of profound grief about the condition of Davis. Confederate Kate Cumming worried that some of the South's own might hurt Davis or betray him to the enemy for a reward. "I do hope and pray that Davis will get off," because "I am so afraid that some of our men will be tempted to betray him for the love of gain." She bemoaned those who still continued to malign Davis, arguing that "if Davis has committed errors, they have been, as even those who condemn him say, errors of judgment, for a truer patriot never lived." More and

more southerners would take this course, as so many sought how to transform Davis into a Christ-like hero.⁶

In the minds of some, the transformation of Davis occurred very suddenly, as they heard of the alleged abuses perpetrated on the Confederacy's first and only president. Southern diaries and commentary of all kinds revealed how drastically sudden Davis transformed from an often-maligned, marginally popular figure into an acclaimed hero of the South. Daniel Harvey Hill was a general in the Army of Northern Virginia, and like many during the Civil War, had little faith in Davis as the leader of the southern cause. In his short-lived postwar journal *The Land We Love*, Hill admitted he had been no fan of Davis the Confederate president but came to revere him in time. In Hill's typical straightforward style, he told his readers he had "no feeling of private friendship for the man" and felt "no admiration of him as a ruler." Yet in his journal from 1866-1869, Hill routinely offered Davis as an exemplary symbol of southern manhood on par with Lee. As Hill put it in early 1866, no one could rightly "harbor resentment against the scapegoat of the Confederacy, the vicarious sufferer of our whole people." Catherine Devereux Edmonston filled her war journal with passage after passage of contemptuous broadsides aimed at Davis. She seemed to think that almost every military or civil problem was rooted in the incompetence of her president. Yet, she expressed unwavering loyalty to Davis after his capture and was downright terrified of the thought of him in the hands of the Yankees. She wrote: "our President is in their power actually manacled to an iron bar, loaded with a weight of iron which his feeble frame can scarcely sustain...& the Yankee nation at large pour out their petty spite & venom upon him, clamoring for his blood." Here Edmonston spoke for many of her fellow southerners who felt the same.⁷

Southerners heard and took to heart the reports of Davis' ordeal, and the publication of *Prison Life of Jefferson Davis* was one of the primary vehicles that spread the message. Dr. John Craven, Davis' principle doctor at Ft. Monroe, reportedly authored the 1866 account of the daily life of Davis in prison. However, the book's real author was not Craven but Charles Graham Halpine, a northern Democrat. Halpine wrote *Prison Life* after a few brief conversations with Craven, and the book was primarily published for political reasons. By depicting Davis in such a way, Halpine hoped to stir anti-Republican sentiment. Even so, initially *Prison Life* claimed to be an accurate, first-hand telling account of Davis' experiences and thoughts while in captivity. It detailed his various misfortunes and chronically poor state of health. Clearly and forcefully pro-Davis in outlook, readers of *Prison Life* likely gathered that humiliation and physical hardship only strengthened the resolve of a proud and brave Davis. In one passage, Halpine explained that death was perhaps the only thing that could relieve Davis' horrid condition. Davis' "intolerable sufferings and wretched state argued for the grave as a place of rest," but "his duties to the cause he represented" would not allow him to die unvindicated. The point here and throughout the book was: Davis could have more easily relieved his torment by death, but he felt he must survive to tell his story and defend the Confederacy's reputation. To southerners, it mattered little that *Prison Life* was a sensationalized version of Davis at Ft. Monroe that had little factual basis. With great momentum, the story of Davis as southern Christ had begun.⁸

The fast emergence of Davis as a Christ-like hero, which steadily gained in its acceptance and power, owed greatly to one of the most crucial aspects of the story: the shackling of the one time president of the Confederacy. After they learned that guards bound together his hands, outraged southerners added endless elements to their retelling

of the “torture” of Davis. Most southerners had no idea of knowing for sure, so the notion of Davis chained up in some dank cell, defenseless and near death, seemed, for some, a plausible scenario. So many feared for the life of Davis, because, as one southern paper reported, “he cannot strike; his hands are manacled.” As an author for *Debow’s Review* wrote: “the imprisonment and cruel treatment, to which he has since been subjected, are enough to inspire one not only with contempt, but a loathing and disgust for human nature.” The act of “putting manacles upon” Davis “will forever remain a disgrace of the Government of the United States, and of the age in which we live.” Southerners so vehemently protested the shackling of Davis that their collective anger can hardly be overemphasized. Southerners exclaimed that northern treatment of Davis, by his guards, the United States government, and by anyone who voiced their approval of what transpired was conduct befitting only the most base and common criminal. Practically all white southerners agreed that the leader of a proud people, whether victorious or not, should not be equated to a thief or murderer. There was something wrong “in the very idea of an old and honored citizen...a senator and statesman...a man of eloquence and thought...a soldier whose body is scarred with honorable wounds...a pure and upright public servant...manacled and fettered, with barbarous violence, in a fortress of this Republic.” Essie Cheesborough’s poem *MANACLED* is an early example of southerners trying to come to grips with the public humiliation of their former head of state. Her work expressed both bewilderment and scorn toward what most southerners viewed as injustice:

Stop, soldier, stop! this cruel act
Will ring through all the land:
Shame on the heart that planned this deed—
Shame on the coward hand
That drops the sword of justice bright

To grasp these iron rings!
On them, not me, dishonor falls;
To them this dark shame clings.

Manacled! manacled! words of woe,
But words of greater shame:
I've that within me which these wrongs
Can never, never tame;
And standing proud in conscious worth,
I represent my land,
And that "lost cause" for which she bled,
Lofty, heroic, grand.⁹

Backlash against the scourging of Davis was not a short lived phenomenon confined to only a divisive postwar period, and in fact, this episode became a central element in stories about the ex-Confederate president. Southerners never forgot the alleged abuses that Davis endeared, and they never completely forgave those responsible. In his 1905 memoir, Civil War veteran William C. Oates remained highly critical of Davis, even blaming him for trying to extend the life of the Confederacy after Lee's surrender. "The idea," Oates wrote, "that he could, by any means, induce men who deserted the service," or in any way refused to fight "to return, could scarcely have emanated from a sane mind." Still, it was disgraceful how the North "treated him as the worst of criminals...and put irons on him to further humiliate him." Thus, though Oates thought him a poor leader, "no man since Washington was every so highly honored by the southern people during all the years of his life, thereafter, and in his death and burial." Davis survived with "heroic endurance of unmerited suffering," one typically overdramatic southerner declared, and "when feeble, sick, and helpless, and in prison indignities and chains were added." One even considered Davis' shackles "anklets of gold, for he wore them for us." His chains made for "relics of his sufferings, which in our keeping would be held as Christians hold the wood of the cross." It was not just that

Davis was treated unfairly, because southerners also understood that he never gave in—that he bore his trials heroically and never shamed the Confederate banner. Southerners perceived that Davis withstood abuse fit only for the basest criminal, but emerged with his honor intact. In other words, he was tempted but remained true to the South.¹⁰

Though he passed the test of loyalty amid suffering, a handful of southerners reminded that Davis failed in his role as Confederate president. Of his early postwar critics, Edward Pollard most forcefully and consistently disputed the view of Davis as a Christ-like hero. Pollard edited the South's most outspokenly anti-Davis paper, *The Richmond Examiner*, during the Civil War. In the 1860s he authored several books about Confederate governance and focused on Davis in particular. In many works including *The Lost Cause*, Pollard portrayed Davis as a bumbling failure who helped hasten the Confederacy's demise. In his *Life of Jefferson Davis*, published in 1869, Pollard made his case as to why the southern people should not honor him as a great hero. He maintained that southerners loved Davis only because they pitied his plight. Pollard urged that "if the Federal authorities, capturing Jefferson Davis, had turned him loose, or had wisely refrained from treating him with invidious or exceptional rigor, he would have remained the to-day the most unpopular man in the South." Probably more than any white southerner of the Civil War generation, Pollard stressed that Davis, despite a manly courage displayed while in prison, did not deserve so much admiration. In one of his more strongly-worded passages, Pollard wrote "we hold that Mr. Davis, so far from being the impersonation of what was good and reverential in the lost cause of the South, represented only its follies and the reasons for its failures."¹¹

Pollard represented an anomalous case. Most of those who criticized Davis were high-ranking civilian or military ex-Confederates who had personal grievances with the

former president. Vice-president Alexander Stephens, General and Secretary of State Robert Toombs, and Generals Pierre Beauregard and Joseph Johnston were likely the most prominent Confederates to hold a long term grudge against Davis. Johnston, more than any other Confederate, became known as Davis' enemy. What began as personal enmity escalated when Davis removed Johnston from command in 1864. Davis made Johnston the lead general of the Army of Tennessee and assigned him the crucial task of defending the major city of Atlanta. Outnumbered, Johnston retreated time and again, which prompted Davis to promote the more aggressive John Bell Hood to replace him. Essentially, to Davis the removal of Johnston was what Gettysburg was to Lee; that event most open to southern criticism and most difficult to explain away. Hood led the Confederacy's most important western army into brave but disastrous attacks which crippled it as an effective fighting force. Observers then and since almost unanimously felt that Davis should not have elevated Hood to general, and most all concurred that this mistake cost his cause dearly. Johnston agreed and wrote his 1874 *Narrative of Military Operations* in large measure to defend himself and cast Davis as chiefly responsible for Atlanta's fall. What must have seemed to some as the squabbling of old men actually could be very important to the reputations of the South's Civil War heroes.

Though some were sympathetic to Johnston's argument, most southerners defended Davis and dismissed his detractors. Loyalty to Davis, and public expressions of his greatness, became something of a sign indicating one's standing in the white southern community. In other words, to be a good southerner without question one had to celebrate the Davis story. In 1885 when Toombs condemned Davis for a bias toward West Point-educated generals, it was Fitzhugh Lee who answered the call. "We elected Jefferson Davis because he was able and pure," Lee assured," two essential qualifications in

statesmanship and private life,” hinting that Toombs possessed neither. Another declared that, once again, Toombs was “merely firing off one of his too frequent phrases in which sense is much sacrificed to sound.” Here, as was usually the case, it was not necessary to claim that Davis was a great president—it was just a matter of confirming his greatness as a southern symbol regardless of imperfections. Alexander Stephens made for an easy target because during the war he openly sought to end the war through peace negotiations, thus making it easy to conclude that he did not give his all to the cause. Contrasting the heroic Davis with Stephens, Atlanta’s *Constitution* concluded “Mr. Stephens’ heart was never in the struggle.” In 1885 Nat Tyler, a former editor of the *Richmond Enquirer*, wrote that Stephens’ “views were visionary and impracticable,” and “his ‘balance’ was decidedly out of plumb in the last year of the war, and he wobbled whenever he discussed public affairs.”¹²

The slings and arrows of a few had little impact as stories of Davis, the long suffering, loyal, representative of the South only increased with time. The release of Davis in 1867 did not end his burdens or his trials, southerners said. The shackling and various alleged tortures of Davis only began a long life of tests which he unfailingly passed. If southerners had perceived that he had somehow betrayed them for an early release or better treatment, or if Davis had ever expressed any form of regret over secession, slavery, or anything related to their beloved Old South romance, then he could not have become their uncrowned king. Davis embraced the mantle southerners offered him, and survived a long life of personal tragedies, financial difficulties, and public accusations. Thus, the image of Davis wearing his chains, completely at the mercy of his enemies, followed him the rest of his life, and in many ways defined him as a hero. In some regard, Davis always appeared to southerners, in their various tributes to him, as a

suffering servant. In their stories it was evident that southerners believed that Davis endured his long time on the cross with his character unblemished and died with his honor intact. In this way, southerners viewed the unsuccessful leader of the Confederate rebellion as a perfect sacrifice, a Christ-like hero for all time.

A Christ-like Davis reflected and buttressed the story of the white South as victims. Southerners made Davis the strong, proud sufferer—a genteel cavalier subjected to gross physical abuse and public slander. In doing so, they created a character much like the paternalist gentleman-planter, or cavalier/knight they preferred. Southerners, in telling about their beloved Old South, and explaining why it lost to a morally inferior but more advanced society, made perfect use of the Davis-as-victim scenario. That is to say, Davis assumed the role of the genteel southern cavalier who nonetheless suffered the same fate as every Confederate soldier: to fall before the overwhelming force of the industrial North. In basic outline, this is the same story southerners told about the fall of the grand Old South. This time, though, northerners could not be praised for acting like gentle conquerors, as southerners perceived that they mistreated their former president. More than this, northern victors, from the perspective of most southern whites, unleashed a terrible Reconstruction upon the broken South. Radical Reconstruction meant forced rule by outsiders, Republicans, and the free, political participation of former slaves. To southerners, the tragedy of defeat and Reconstruction mirrored the plight of Davis; in each case either the chivalrous South or one of its leading representatives suffered unduly. In reality, all of the real or fictive injustices inflicted upon Davis gave southerners more material to use in their stories. If Davis was a true gentleman then he did not deserve to be caged for two years, and neither should the chivalrous South fallen to the modern North, the story implied.

Noble suffering was indeed the centerpiece of the Davis story and essential to the theme of the defeated, but superior, Old South. The idea that Davis willingly sacrificed himself for the South, accepting extreme humiliation and deprecation for his people's sake, appeared often in southern stories. Self-sacrifice embodied the genteel hero as well as any other character trait, and it also compromised the key element of the Christ-like kind of man. When talking about Davis, southerners almost always said something like: "Of all the men connected with the Southern side of the civil war, this man suffered the most persecution...He was imprisoned, manacled, and ostracized...He was the one vicarious sufferer for the heroic experiment of his heroic people." The United Daughters of The Confederacy considered Davis' "immolation upon the altar of The Confederacy....a sacred light that shall never be dim for us, needing neither apology or explanation." Davis was "our sublime exemplar in years of humiliation and sorrow, the martyr who suffered with heroic fortitude the persecutions intended for his people," wrote one eulogist in 1889. Very directly and very often, southerners repeated the story of Davis in chains and then extended it to include the rest of his life. Like Christ's crown of thorns, southerners recalled the manacling of Davis as a mocking affront intended to expose the South's chosen representative as a mere pretender. As was the case with the biblical account of Christ, physical abuse did not destroy the reputation of Davis but instead had the opposite effect. Basil Duke served as a general in the Confederate Army and became one of the South's most able writers after the Civil War. In 1911 Duke summarized, better than most, how Davis became the uncrowned king of the South. Duke offered that "whatever feeling of disappointment or bitterness any one entertained toward Mr. Davis...was of brief duration, and was completely eliminated by his vicarious punishment and suffering..." and "as the years roll on, his people understand him better

and love and revere him more...” Southerners learned how Davis bravely absorbed cruelties meant for them, and they repeated the story over and over again.¹³

Not only did Davis bear the South’s burdens during his captivity, but, the rest of his life, misfortune and bad luck continued to haunt him. After he served as Confederate president, Davis never found another reliable occupation. Unlike many former high-ranking Confederate men, Davis did not become a noted governor or senator, and nor did he seek a political career of any kind. Without many options for work, Davis mostly lived off the charity of friends and admirers. His frequently poor health, as well, often plagued Davis and sometimes severe nerve pain left him bedridden for days and even weeks. Then there was the issue of a pardon. President Andrew Johnson’s Amnesty decree left open the possibility that Davis would be restored to full citizenship. If only he would apply, then perhaps Davis would be pardoned. However, Davis refused to apply and for the rest of his life lived as a non-citizen of the United States. Davis’ family life also suffered devastations during his declining years. In 1875, news came from San Francisco that bereaved both Jefferson and his wife Varina deeply. Jefferson Davis Howell, Varina’s twenty-eight-year-old brother, died at sea while captaining a steamship. An even greater tragedy came in 1878; one that perhaps grieved Davis more profoundly than any other event in his long life. A yellow fever epidemic took the life of the Davis’ fourth and last son, Jefferson Jr. A despondent Davis wrote that “the last of my four sons has left me, I am crushed under such heavy and repeated blows.” Grant became president, Lee died gracefully while presiding over Washington & Lee University, Confederate generals such as John Gordon and Wade Hampton enjoyed long and popular careers as public servants, but it seemed as if Davis continued to be punished for his part in the

Confederate rebellion. At least this was how southerners interpreted the life of Davis and what appeared as almost endless calamities.¹⁴

In stories about the suffering Davis, southerners accentuated his misery so much that he became a pitiable hero; persecuted by others, usually afflicted with some malady, in financial trouble, and generally tormented by all of life's trials. His spirit could not be broken, southerners reminded, yet illness and troubles of all kinds racked his physical body. It was common that southerners described this "emaciated, bowed, haggard" Davis in stories about their uncrowned king. Southerners took Davis' real life problems, exaggerated them, and then reckoned that he suffered more than any other figure of the Civil War. Once more, he did all of this for the southern people and the fated Confederate cause. "Jefferson Davis deserves our reverence," one wrote, "because he has stood for a quarter of a century in our place. He endured a cruel captivity for two years," and since "has been the vicarious victim of obloquy and reproach due to us all, and heaped upon him alone by the press and the people of the North." Southerners never grew tired of allusions to Davis as the Christ-like bearer of their burdens. Southerners combined different elements of the Davis story, his shackling, declining health, money problems, etc, into one master narrative. Mention of Davis in almost any context instantly conjured a common symbol of the Christ-like hero: wrongful persecution. North Carolina's *Landmark* honored Davis' "undying self-sacrificing devotion to the land and people for whom he suffered, and his noble dignity of bearing under the scorn, the revilings and vituperation heaped upon him by his enemies and ours." In 1910, the United Confederate Veterans recalled a Davis who faced torture and near-death at Fort Monroe, but much like the biblical account of Christ, emerged triumphant in the end. To Davis, "came every sorrow and humiliation that can prey upon a human being, a heart laden down with

calumny, drenched with aspersion, torn to shreds by false friends, trampled on by a frenzied foe, and left bleeding to pine away in fetters behind the ghastly bars of a prison fortress.” All of this happened for a reason though, because “those who had chosen him their leader were spared his trials; and peacefully await the day of vindication and the hour of the South’s resurrection.” White southerners expressed a strong desire to compare their own troubles and fears, and the region-wide trauma due to defeat and the end of slavery, to the life of Davis. In stories, they indicated numerous times how Davis became their example and inspiration.¹⁵

Despite his ill treatment, the Christ-like Davis never complained about his plight, southerners said. Southerners perceived that Davis bore his sorrows like a true man—without self-pity of any kind. More than this, though, it seemed that Davis offered himself up to be sacrificed without regret or any pleas for mercy. As one southern author declared: “none can truthfully deny that Jefferson Davis has borne all his bitter disappointments and extreme trials of the past twenty-five years with the utmost dignity...” adding that “in all that he uttered, none can justly find” any “bitterness toward any of his opponents.” As one from *The Veteran* explained in 1893, Davis “presented in his own person a sublime instance of an uncomplaining and heroic endurance of unmerited suffering. When feeble and helpless chains were added. He loved the people of the South, and was true to them to the last.” Southerners understood being “true” meant Davis upheld the right of secession, defended the institution of slavery, and glorified Confederate history while still quietly accepting his fate. “The most painful part” of Davis’ ordeals, was “his long and severe imprisonment, and then his retirement from participation in active affairs during the remainder of his life,” noted a former Confederate. Despite “physical sufferings” and “the responsibility of so bearing himself

as to bring no reproach on the Lost Cause,” he spoke out publicly “only on rare occasions, when attacks upon this cause...did not permit him to remain silent.”¹⁶

The white South created Davis as a heroic figure in large measure because they too felt abused, slandered, and misunderstood as a region and as individuals. Southerners spoke repeatedly how Davis wore his shackles for them; that he paid a price really owed by all those who supported the Confederacy. Civil War defeat, and a long, extremely unpopular military Reconstruction, scarred the South and left a lasting legacy. The South after the Civil War seemed always on the defensive, forced to explain, not only slavery and violent racism, but an overall lack of the hallmarks of American modernity: public education, a sound infrastructure, rapid transportation, urban centers, etc. Americans reminisced fondly about the Old South, and shared in a common glorification of a knightly Lee, but northerners found the New South much more distasteful. In short, the northern idea of “The South” and what it symbolized slowly but steadily declined, and only the romance of Old South chivalry remained. Sensing themselves under constant attack, many white southerners created the outline of a persecuted hero that paralleled their recent history. Thus when southerners spoke of Davis as representative of their cause, or as their chieftain, or as the leader of “his people,” they referred not only to his Confederate presidency. His troubled life made Davis much more.¹⁷

There was another side of the Davis figure, however, that southerners saw also in themselves and that, at first glance, did not exactly fit the genteel, self-sacrificing pattern. Jesus spent his time on the cross wearing a crown of thorns, but as the bible relates, he also aggressively kicked out the merchants who dared to conduct business at the Jewish temple. Southerners stressed the determination of the Davis figure, the uncompromising way he would not back down on any issue or idea related to the Civil War, and his

general stubbornness despite his many northern detractors. His obstinacy served him well as a hero but poorly as Confederate president. Confederates often claimed that Davis would not listen to others' advice and that he foolishly clung to his principles at all costs, but postwar southerners valued this very thing—best exemplified by his refusal to ask for a federal pardon. As he put it himself in 1884, speaking before the Mississippi legislature: “it has been said that I should apply to the United States for a pardon; but repentance must precede the right of pardon, and I have not repented.” Davis here summarized, in what became a repeated and inspirational maxim for the New South, a persistent, lifelong disdain for anyone who assailed the South for secession or for the bloody war that followed. White southerners again created Davis in their own image, because many of them also felt some degree of resentment toward northerners. They equated Davis defending his prewar record, his decision to join the Confederacy, and his lack of “repentance” with their own feelings of regional pride. Thus, the two key elements of the Davis figure, self-sacrifice and defiance, merged together to make a unique and very important southern hero. Davis answered the question of those wondering how a proud southerner could accept the outcome of the Civil War yet still retain a sense of regional identity.¹⁸

Nothing better explained Davis, and the Civil War as white southerners saw it, than *The Rise and Fall of The Confederate Government*. Davis finished his massive two volume history of the Confederacy in 1881. If the world hoped to hear the intimate details of the inner workings of the Confederate government, they must have felt disappointed. Throughout his work, Davis defended secession and his Confederate presidency while responding to critics such as Joseph Johnston. Though more than anything, *Rise and Fall* represented the most important pro-southern, pro-states' rights manifesto written after the

Civil War. To the proud southerner or the unreconstructed rebel, *Rise and Fall* was one of the most important books ever written about the South. Davis provided the lawyerly arguments that, for many, washed away any doubt that the Confederacy stood for states' rights and the original intent of America's founders. He offered piles of evidence that made seceding southerners into American patriots while erasing any traces of treason from their past. More forcefully than did others, Davis divorced the ugliness of slavery from the history of the Confederacy; painting himself and thereby all Confederates as merely earnest adherents to a time-honored political doctrine. *Rise and Fall* became an essential part of the telling of the Davis story. It attested to his undying loyalty to the South and his unapologetic refrain that, whatever the outcome of the war, and whatever any northerner said, the South had been right all along.

Without always admitting it directly, Davis, and those who supported his thesis, campaigned for a racially stratified society. Most celebrations of the Old South offer some kind of romanticized view of slavery. A racial caste system offered Americans a sense of order that romantics tend to value. However, the association of Davis with secession and states' rights, his lifelong mission to defend both, and the relationship of both to, not just the protection of slavery but to its *extension*, meant that race was tied to the Davis figure more closely than to Lee or Jackson. That is to say, Lee and Jackson were cast as warriors who did their duty and served their homeland, but Davis' position as Confederate president and protector of the postwar Lost Cause put him in a different position. By stridently supporting the right of secession, it was clear that Davis also promoted an alternative vision of America where all men were not created equal. Davis somehow seemed to go beyond just a calling to his duty in order to rail against the North and insist that the South had been right. Even the most unreconstructed southerner had

difficulty divorcing the arguments in *Rise and Fall* from the obvious connotations to slavery. Lee was the image of the Old South in human form, but Davis made the case for why it was right to secede and wage war to protect it.

For the most part, southerners did not openly talk about race, as they instead spoke of the “cause” and Davis' fierce fidelity to it. Southerners received the various messages of *Rise and Fall* very warmly, to say the least. If anyone still doubted that Davis has been treated unfairly while a prisoner of the United States, if the South was justified in leaving the Union, or if Confederates were traitors or patriots, here was the last word on the subject. That Davis rendered this final verdict on these issues, that he stood up for the South once again, only fed his legend even more. *Rise and Fall* furthered showcased “the invincible spirit of the great and gifted chieftain, who when compelled to sheath his sword, only relinquished that weapon to defend his cause and people with another;” proving “that the pen was mightier than the sword.” Southerners looked forward to Davis’ work partly because they constantly complained that northerners, and even some of their own, always got their history wrong. Davis offered the opportunity to expose the truth of the South’s past, setting the record straight hopefully for the final time. According to Charleston’s *News and Daily Courier*, Davis “vindicated himself and his cause in which he suffered” due to *Rise and Fall*. In 1887 Mississippian Richard Wilmer called the work of Davis the “fairest” treatment of the right of secession. “If you would understand him and the history of his times, read his book,” Wilmer wrote, “unanswered and unanswerable, as we of the South think.” Another southerner eagerly anticipated the completion of *Rise and Fall* because it surely would provide “an unprejudiced, large minded and authentic account” of the Civil War, and once it becomes available, “I intend to possess those coveted volumes if I have to scrimp my wardrobe for

the next forty months.” Southerners so routinely spoke of *Rise and Fall* in glowing terms, one might get the impression it was a great work of literature instead of a dry, intricate, political tract. The United Confederate Veterans believed “the greatest monument that has been erected to the Confederacy; its people, its government, its army, its navy, and above all its women,” was Davis’ history of the Civil War. The UCV asserted “these volumes contain all that is really essential for history in the future, and will live as a classic for all time.”¹⁹

Classic or not, most southerners probably never read a word of *Rise and Fall*, but it offered further proof, along with Davis’ stance against applying for citizenship, and his overall stubborn attitude, that he remained a rebel to the last—still fighting the good fight against the South’s enemies. For historical evidence of this steadfast Davis, southerners could look to the last few months of the Civil War. No critic could claim that Davis quit on the Confederacy too soon, which became something that postwar southerners celebrated. As they often said, “when ruin and defeat encompassed us on every side; when the army of Lee had been, not defeated, but destroyed...the indomitable southern chieftain was still defiant, and was still busy and intent on schemes to rally the remains of his shattered forces...” Many emphasized that Davis did not abandon the South when defeat appeared inevitable, neither during his two years of captivity, nor during any other moment of his life. The opposite was true, in fact, because instead of giving up Davis stubbornly defied all who challenged him or the South. Southerners reveled in the fact that Davis “proudly maintained an unrepentant attitude, refusing to sue for pardon or seek relief from political disabilities.” This kind of southern sentiment did not exactly fit with the reunion spirit of Progressive America. Stories telling of the defiant Davis figure equaled a rebuke of racial equality and a not so-genteel assertion of southern nationalism.

As former Confederate Frank Montgomery put it, “the high place he had held” and “the indignities to which he had been subjected while a prisoner in Fortress Monroe... in my opinion, justified him in living and dying an unrepentant rebel, as the government chose to consider him—a consistent and uncompromising confederate as he lives in the hearts of his own loved people of the south.”²⁰

Even though southerners loved his defiant posturing, Davis remained firmly in the South’s tradition of the genteel hero. Much about the Davis figure fell in line with the order of southern knights which Lee best represented. Southerners commonly used chivalrous language in Davis stories and sometimes even referred to him as a knight. On rare occasions someone even elevated Davis above Lee in the South’s knightly order, considering that, as commander-in-chief, he ranked above Lee, Stuart, and every other Confederate Bayard. Davis “was not only among these knights,” wrote a southern editor, “but the head of that Table Round, the Arthur of that illustrious company.” Storytellers ensured that everyone knew, as well, that Davis was nothing short of an Old South gentleman. Always kind to his slaves and courteous to women, the Davis figure echoed the Victorian hero southerners knew well. After all, any true knight modeled himself on the character and life of the West’s foremost role model: Jesus of Nazareth. The Davis figure did not contradict nor obscure other southern heroes of the Civil War. Though unique in many ways, southerners understood Davis as a hero and placed him alongside, and sometimes above, other Civil War figures of the Arthurian type.²¹

Southern romantics tended to cast Davis with Lee as the Confederacy’s most ideal and influential partnership. Southerners sometimes included Jackson with Lee and Davis as the South’s most trusted and most revered men. All three “were great because they embodied in themselves the noblest virtues of this civilization and the highest

characteristics of southern manhood; and it was fortunate for the South that such characters as theirs stand as representative figures of The South of that day.” Jackson certainly played the most minor role of the triumvirate, and just as often as otherwise, southerners cast only Davis and Lee as the defining men of the Civil War generation. Former Confederate Congressman Ben Hill paid tribute to Davis and Lee as the closest of friends, both sharing a similar chivalrous character. Hill decreed “no two leaders ever leaned each on the other in such beautiful trust and absolute confidence,” as Davis and Lee. Both “moved in front of the dire struggle of their people... a noble pair of brothers,” exemplifying “fidelity to right, endurance to trials, and a sacrifice of self for others.” It seemed that most thought Davis and Lee alone were plenty symbolic of the South and its ideal man, and that no other was needed to epitomize their region. Southerners commonly argued that “Mr. Davis and General Lee will stand in history, side by side, the foremost figures of the southern struggle,” and in time “they will appear not to one section only, but to the country at large, in their true proportions, as the highest exemplars in modern times of the disinterested patriot, and the Christian soldier.” References to knightly behavior and gentlemanly manhood reinforced the idea of the Confederacy as the paragon of chivalrous behavior, and likening Davis to Lee reminded that this spirit permeated the character of both of the South’s premier heroes.²²

The story of Davis paralleled with Lee’s because only the disinterested service of their people motivated each to join the Confederate cause. According to most any source on Lee, he held grave doubts about leaving his nation of birth and did only to protect his beloved Virginia. More specifically, Lee fought to save the lives of friends and family who lived near the future battlegrounds between Richmond and Washington, D.C. The Davis story was formed using the same basic outline. The conservative statesman, Davis,

agonized over secession and urged his colleagues to show patience before acting rashly. He pleaded for compromise and hung pathetically to the hope of avoiding war, the story went. Davis never sought the presidency and accepted his position only to honor the desire of the southern people. To some degree, southerners accentuated Davis as the humble Patriot to counter northern stories of Davis as the leader most responsible for secession and civil war. In addition, it was central that the prewar Davis echoed the self-sacrificing spirit of the southern Arthur. In comparison, Jackson's prewar story never entirely matched Davis and Lee's, and most felt little need to make him *the* representative of the South. Stonewall's way could be greatly admired, but it was Davis and Lee who were pronounced the greatest of southern heroes. Both typified the kind of chivalrous gentleman that southerners claimed populated the Old South world.

Though southerners formed them as the same type of man, the Davis and Lee figures should not be confused as duplicates of one another. Davis and Lee were all southerners needed to prove that the South was "right" after all: that slavery caused little harm and much good, that the belief in the rights of states precipitated secession, and that the Old South should be lionized as a near-perfect, golden age. Still, Davis represented not *only* Old South chivalry, but he also exuded plenty of New South intractability. Davis assuredly was a gentleman, but he also seemed to harbor lingering resentment toward northerners—especially those brazen enough to disparage the southern past or present. He wore his non-citizenship proudly for all to notice. Though, Davis remained just defiant enough to suit southern tastes while also maintaining the dignified comportment of a southern knight. It could be said that the Davis figure marked a transition between New and Old Souths, offering southerners a Christly hero adapted to suit post-Civil War America.

This transition too often meant that southern chivalry became little more than a buzzword that promoted white supremacy, however. The darker side of the stories about Davis prefigured how romanticism could directly lead to the exclusion of any ideas or people white southerners disliked. Stories of genteel men of the past could not mask southern attitudes toward violence and race which began to change how others perceived the former Confederate states. In the Progressive Era South, outsiders increasingly viewed the region as a brutish relic of the past instead of a place charmingly pre-modern. Southerners still talked about chivalrous manhood often, but Arthur and his knights might not have felt at home in the New South. In truth, chivalrous language factored into thousands of black lynchings and various episodes of stark cruelty. White men anointed themselves as the protectors of white, feminine virtue, and black men often paid the price. Bertram Wyatt Brown contended that postwar southerners still espoused belief in Old World honor codes, but they mostly left out any genteel pretensions. No longer a culture of gentlemanly dueling, the South became known for its sudden and frequent violence—whether motivated by race or anything else. To some degree, assertions of southern manhood amounted to a defiance of all outside opinion that threatened the status quo. The white, southern male always felt forced to explain himself to other Americans who could not understand his ways. In explaining Davis, though, the white South told their own story. When they needed a stubborn hero, Davis fulfilled the role just fine.²³

Southern stubbornness was not just a general attitude but became a tangible part of the political culture. States' rights and the Davis figure became almost synonymous terms. In most of his public utterances, and most especially in *Rise and Fall*, Davis ensured that all knew that he believed in states' rights as the fundamental creed of the Confederacy. Davis essentially wrote the South's Confederate history and made clear that

his people had no reason to feel ashamed of it. He argued for a constitutional basis for secession that likened the failed Confederate movement to a conservative stand for the ideals of the founders. More than any other one individual, Davis articulated the arguments southerners used to defend themselves to northerners. Major politicians down to the common sort clung to states' rights as a justification for secession, war, a racially stratified society, poor education, and an overall rejection of the North as the model of American success. That many after the Civil War continued to uphold states' rights as a valid alternative to federalism suggested at least two things about white southerners: they emphasized the power of states as a practical means to prevent intervention into racist state policies, and they considered it, not only a political philosophy, but an essential part of what it meant to be a southerner. Many referenced Davis long after his death in 1889 partly because he became the symbol of resistance to federal authority. One did not have to actually believe in Davis' ideology to understand that he stood for an unapologetically pro-southern view of American History. It was enough that Davis stood up for them, wrote a book that many northerners did not like, and remained unreconstructed until his death.

In addition to Lee, white southerners needed *both* sides of the Davis figure, the unrepentant rebel and the Christly martyr, to describe their model man. Southerners framed their ideal man, Lee, as above any political doctrine or issue of the day. A pure knight such as Lee did not concern himself with questions of governmental authority, and he did not care about petty criticism. The Lee figure had nothing to say about states' rights, Reconstruction, why the Confederacy lost, what should have been handled differently, nor what general would have best led the defense of Atlanta in 1864. In the minds of most, the Lee figure was not intrinsically tied to racial violence that began to

define life in the New South. In contrast, Davis lived much longer than Lee and occasionally reminded everyone why the stubborn Confederate chief refused to give up until the very last. Lee graciously sheathed his sword at Appomattox, but Davis fought desperately to keep the Confederacy alive despite all signs of its death. If Lee proved that Old South men fought only because of a chivalrous, self-sacrificing spirit, Davis ensured that their memory would not be tarnished nor their deeds besmirched. The Christ-like Davis figure too reinforced the genteel ideal of the knightly southerner, but he provided something that the Lee figure did not: the southern gentleman as recalcitrant rebel. The link between their pre and post-Civil War worlds was vital to how southerners understood themselves and their special place in America. Despite losing the Civil War, southerners boasted that they remained a unique civilization much different from the North. In their stories, southerners claimed that Civil War defeat could not change the fact that the southern man was simply the best kind of man. Statements about the timelessness of the knightly ideal assuaged fears that the southern gentleman died at Appomattox. “The old rhyme tells us that the knights of old are dust and their good swords corroded in the dews of time,” one wrote in 1907, “but the knights of the Southland live; their forms sealed in bronze and marble, their memories vivid and ever-present in the hearts of all.” Southern-styled chivalry could not be destroyed, but occasionally it needed someone to defend it. Davis became the champion of everything southerners assumed distinguished them from other Americans. Lee could not speak up, and probably would not have anyway, but Davis would and did.²⁴

Due to his knightly character and fierce loyalty, to southerners Davis became as associated with the short-lived Confederacy as Lee or any other. Over and over, southerners found methods to ensure that Davis’ story was glorified, drawing themselves,

their past, and their future ever closer to his life and legend. For proof of southern loyalty to the Davis figure one did not have to search very long. The Davis clan enjoyed a long career as the first family of the South. After her husband's death, Varina Davis starred as one of the more prominent heroines of the South; making appearances, delivering speeches, dedicating statues, writing about her late husband, etc. The "First Daughter of The Confederacy," Winnie Davis, also enjoyed a celebrity of her own. Both became the darlings of the influential Daughters of the Confederacy—who presented each as the standard bearer of the genteel lady. Though never completed, the Daughters also initiated a grand plan to build a transcontinental Jefferson Davis highway. When southerners invented Memorial Day to honor the Confederate dead, they first chose Davis' birthdate to commemorate the occasion. Both Davis' wartime home in Richmond and his last residence on the coast of Mississippi became perhaps the two most important non-battlefield shrines to the Confederacy. All of these evidenced Davis' stature in the former Confederacy, but his funeral in 1889 provided probably the most obvious example. The demise of no other Confederate hero prompted the same massive turnout and outpouring of sympathy. As one southern observer noted, "when Jefferson Davis died, broken-hearted men, women and children gathered in funeral assemblies everywhere in that vast area from Mason and Dixon's line on the north to the Mexican border on the south, wept over his bier, and hung the air and heavens with black." With Davis gone, the most obvious link to the Old South, to chivalry, and to military heroes such as Lee also disappeared. So many swore to remember Davis, and all that he and Lee represented, due to the real fear that coming generations might not so fervently remember their heroes. With a public show of devotion to Davis, however, southerners would hopefully

demonstrate to the world, and to each other, that the memory of their hero would only grow stronger after his death.²⁵

True to form, Davis rose again from the grave. Davis died in New Orleans and was buried there despite the protest of some. Almost immediately after his passing, southerners debated where their eternal leader should ultimately reside in death. Plenty of suitors made their case. Kentucky, Mississippi, and Virginia all made strong arguments, as did many others who literally fought for the bones of the southern Christ. It seemed that southerners were not content with allowing Davis to remain in New Orleans when there were so many other places of importance connected with his life and career. Scores of southern letters found their way to Varina, and she finally chose Richmond's Hollywood Cemetery as the winner. In the end, the Davis family believed the Confederate president should be buried there among the thousands of Confederate privates, and officers such as Jeb Stuart, who offered their lives for the cause. Eventually Varina and Winnie were also interred at Hollywood beside Davis, creating yet another of the holiest shrines for Confederate pilgrims. Plans were made to begin a southern tour on May 30, for what surely surpassed in numbers and in pomp the first ceremony of the death of Davis. Beginning in New Orleans, the Jefferson Davis funeral train made stops in Mississippi, Montgomery, Atlanta, continued through North Carolina, and eventually settled down at Richmond. Along the way, many thousands gathered to see or touch the coffin, thousands more simply watched the train from their porches, and some wept. At some of the stops, church bells tolled, flags were flown at half mast, and businesses were closed. For Davis and for no other, southerners needed two funerals to express their sorrow and love for their uncrowned king.²⁶

Yet, it was several years earlier in 1882, when Davis received likely the most remembered and repeated tribute of his entire life. In 1882 Davis attended the funeral of his friend, Benjamin H. Hill. A former Confederate congressman and postwar politician from Georgia, Hill aligned himself with Davis during the Civil War and remained a loyal public friend after it. For his consistent support of Davis, Hill himself became a minor hero of the New South. Before Davis offered his eulogy, prominent southern spokesman Henry Grady introduced Davis to the crowd. Grady's brief speech popularized Davis as "the uncrowned king of our people." He repeated the outline of the well-worn Davis story; how he endured great pain in order to serve the will of the southern people, how he lived without a country yet was still honored by a section of America who would always cherish his name. It was at "this moment—in this blessed Easter week—that, witnessing the resurrection of these memories, that for twenty years have been buried in our hearts, have given us the best Easter since Christ was risen from the dead." It was southerners' privilege, and duty, to sing praises to the life of Davis, Grady indicated.²⁷

Henry Grady died seventeen days after Jefferson Davis. There was something very felicitous about Davis and Grady departing the stage at almost the same time. Though a newspaper editor, author, and talented orator, southerners knew Grady mostly as the most able advocate of southern modernization—sometimes called the New South movement. Grady and his kind preached about sectional reconciliation in order to increase southern education, industry, and wealth. Though a modernizer, Grady firmly cast himself as a southern romantic, urging all to remember Confederate heroes and the greatness of the Old South. Davis taught boosters like Grady, and in fact all white southerners, how to honor the past and live in the present. Though he suffered, Davis retained his dignity and pride, keeping that rebellious spirit of 1861. Never giving up or

giving in, Davis consistently defended states' rights and southern superiority. Furthermore, he did so when all the world aligned against him, and Davis would not apologize nor beg his old nemesis for the opportunity at citizenship. In all Davis endured, he never asked for leniency, only showing a quiet, lofty, contempt that southerners admired. Here, in one heroic figure, was the Old South gentleman with plenty of the irreconcilable spirit of the New South. Southerners remembered Davis as the Christ-like martyr who nonetheless well suited the present age. The story of the Davis figure told how a race of self-appointed knights survived the disgrace of defeat to emerge triumphant on the other side. Though not perfect like Lee, southerners chose Davis as their representative for all time.

¹*The Confederate Veteran*, January-December 1908, vol. xvi, 118.

²For studies of southern romanticism that give at least some attention to Davis see Gaines Foster, *Ghosts of the Confederacy: Defeat, the Lost Cause, and the Emergence of the New South* (New York: Oxford Press, 1987); William Davis, *The Cause Lost: Myths and Realities of the Confederacy* (Lawrence: University of Kansas, 1996); Gary Gallagher, Allan Nolan, ed., *The Myth of the Lost Cause and Civil War History* (Bloomington, Indiana Press, 2000); Charles Reagan Wilson, *Baptized in Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause 1865-1920*, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1980); *The Romance of Reunion, Northerners and The South, 1865-1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997).

³For Davis biographies see William Cooper *Jefferson Davis, American* (New York: Knopf, 2000); William Davis *Jefferson Davis: The Man and His Hour* (New York: Harper Collins, 1991) Steven Woodworth, Herman Hattaway, and Jon L. Wakelyn, eds., *No Band of Brothers: Problems of the Rebel High Command* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1999).

⁴Paul Escott, *After Secession: Jefferson Davis and the Failure of Confederate Nationalism* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1977); Emory Thomas, *The Confederacy as a Revolutionary Experience* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1991).

⁵Silber, *Romance of Reunion*; Davis, *The Man and His Hour*; Anne S. Rubin, *A Shattered Nation: The Rise & Fall of the Confederacy 1861-1868*; (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2005).

⁶Ben Ames Williams, ed., *A Diary From Dixie by Mary Boykin Chestnut* (Boston: D. Appleton, 1905), 536; Marli Wiener, ed., *A Heritage of Woe: The Civil War Diary of Grace Brown Elmore* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1997), 124; Mary Roberston, ed., *A Confederate Lady Comes of Age: The Journal of Pauline DeCaradeuc Hayward* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1992), 539; Richard Barksdale Harwell, ed., *Kate: The Journal of a Confederate Nurse by Kate Cumming* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1959), 284.

⁷*The Land We Love: A Monthly Magazine Devoted to Literature, Military History and Agriculture*, May-October 1866 (Charlotte: D.H. Hill, 1866), 278; Beth Crabtree and James Patton, eds., "Journal of a Secesh Lady" *The Diary of Catherine Ann Devereux Edmonston, 1860-1866* (Raleigh: Archives and History, 1979), 713-714.

⁸John Craven, *Prison Life of Jefferson Davis. Embracing Details And Incidents In His Captivity, Particulars Concerning His Health And Habits, Together With Many Conversations On Topics Of Great Public Interest* (New York: Carleton, 1866), 225; Edward Eckert, introduction to *Fiction Distorting Fact* by Edward Eckert, ed., (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1987).

⁹*Petersburg Index*, "The Fallen President," Petersburg, Virginia, July 8 1865; *DeBow's Review*, "Last Days of The Confederacy," New Orleans, July 1870, 739; *The Southern Review*, "Imprisonment of Davis," Baltimore, vol. vi, January 1867, 253-254; Ida Raymond, ed., *Southland Writers: Biographical and Critical Sketches of the Living Female Writers of the South with Extracts from their Writings*, vol. II, (Philadelphia: Claxton, Remsen & Haffelfinger, 1870), 878-879.

¹⁰William C. Oates, *The War Between The Union and The Confederacy and Its Lost Opportunities* (Dayton, OH: Press of Morningside Bookshop, 1974), 519; *The Confederate Veteran*, Nashville, vol. 1, January-

December 1893, 2; J. William Jones, ed., *The Davis Memorial Volume; Or Our Dead President, Jefferson Davis, And The World's Tribute To His Memory* (Richmond: B.F. Johnson, 1890), 514.

¹¹Edward Pollard, *The Lost Cause* (Philadelphia: National Publishing Company, 1867); Pollard, *Life of Jefferson Davis, With a Secret History of The Southern Confederacy Gathered "Behind The Scenes in Richmond."* (Philadelphia: National Publishing Company, 1869), 525-536.

¹²*The Shenandoah Herald*, Woodstock Virginia, August 18, 1885; *Southern Bivouac*, vol.2, 254; *The Constitution*, 4 June 1905; *Davis Memorial*, 367..

¹³*The Atlanta Georgian and News*, "One Last Tribute to Jefferson Davis," June 1, 1907; J. William Jones, ed., *The Davis Memorial Volume*, 480; *Minutes of the Twenty First Annual Convention of The United Daughters of The Confederacy* (Raleigh: Edwards & Broughton, 1915), 301; Basil Duke, *Reminiscences of General Basil W. Duke, C.S.A.*, (Freeport, NY: Books For Libraries press, 1969), 344.

¹⁴Davis, *The Man and His Hour*; Hudson Strode, *Jefferson Davis American Patriot 1808-1861* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1955), 420.

¹⁵*The Weekly Constitution*, Atlanta, September 7, 1875; John Daniel, ed., *Life and Reminiscences of Jefferson Davis By Distinguished Men of His Time* (R.H. Woodward & Company, 1890); *The Landmark*, Statesville, North Carolina, December 12, 1889; *Minutes of the Twentieth Annual Meeting and Reunion of The United Confederate Veterans* (New Orleans: Press of Schumert & Warfield, 1910), 125-126.

¹⁶*Southern Bivouac*, June-December 1886, 130; *The Confederate Veteran*, January-December 1883, 2; Daniel, *Life and Reminiscences of Jefferson Davis*, 194.

¹⁷For classic studies of The New South see C. Vann Woodward, *The Origins of the New South, 1877-1913* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1951); and Ed Ayers, *The Promise of the New South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); For classic books that review the defensive cast of the southern mind see Wilbur J. Cash *The Mind of The South* (New York: Knopf, 1941); and Twelve Southerners, *I'll Take My Stand, The South and the Agrarian Tradition* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1977); Also see Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *The Shaping of Southern Culture: Honor, Grace, and War, 1760s-1880s*; James Cobb, *Redefining Southern Culture Mind & Identity in the Modern South* (Athens: Georgia Press, 1999).

¹⁸ Jones, *Davis Memorial Volume*, 451.

¹⁹*The Landmark*, December 12, 1889; *The Sunny South*, Atlanta, July 23, 1881; *The News and Daily Courier*, Charleston, South Carolina, December 6, 1889; Richard Wilmer, *The Recent Past, From a Southern Standpoint: Reminiscences of a Grandfather* (New York: Thomas Whittaker, 2 and 3 Bible House, 1887), 28; *Twentieth Annual Meeting of The United Confederate Veterans*, 37.

²⁰Charles E. Fenner, "The Ninety Third Anniversary of the Birth of Pres. Jefferson Davis," in *Southern Historical Society Papers*, vol. xxxii, January-December 1901, 22; "Address of J.A.P. Campbell before the Mississippi Legislature," in Jones, *The Davis Memorial Volume*, 672; Frank A. Montgomery, *Reminiscences of a Mississippian in Peace and War* (Cincinnati: The Robert Clarke Company Press, 1901), 110.

²¹*Atlanta Georgian And News*, "One Last Tribute to Jefferson Davis"; Michael Kreyling, *Figure of The Hero*, 4.

²²Twentieth Annual Meeting and Reunion of The United Confederate Veterans, 76; *The Constitution*, May 28, 1895; David Gregg McIntosh, *Address Delivered Before the Maryland Chapter of The Confederacy*, January 19, 1912, Special Collections, Alabama State Archives, Montgomery.

²³Brown, *The Shaping of Southern Culture*; Fitzhugh Brundage, *Lynching in The New South: Georgia and Virginia, 1880-1930* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993).

²⁴Thomas DeLeon, *Belles, Beaux and Brains of the 60s* (New York: G.W. Dillingham, 1907), 464.

²⁵ Donald E. Collins, *The Death and Resurrection of Jefferson Davis* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005); John C. Reed, *The Brothers' War* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1905), 328.

²⁶Karen Cox, *Dixie's Daughters: The United Daughters of the Confederacy and the Preservation of Confederate Culture* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2003); Caroline Janney, *Burying the Dead But Not the Past: Ladies' Memorial Associations and the Lost Cause* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007); Collins, *Death and Resurrection of Jefferson Davis*; Davis, *The Man and His Hour*.

²⁷Benjamin H. Hill, Jr., *Senator Benjamin H. Hill of Georgia, His Life, Speeches, and Writings* (Atlanta: H.C. Hudgins & Co., 1891), 227.

CHAPTER 7

THE TYRANT-KING: JEFFERSON DAVIS AND THE NORTH

“It is not strange at all” one northerner observed, “that Jefferson Davis should be regarded in the South as a hero and in the North as a traitor,” because “he was both.” Though southerners reconstructed Davis to fit their liking, in the North, he never approached anything resembling an American hero. Davis thus occupied the dual roles of both hero and villain for Americans—almost entirely dependent on one’s sectional affiliation. It would be an understatement to say that the Davis figure failed to produce a spirit of common bonding between northerners and southerners. In fact, few if any other notable Americans created as much sectional discord and argument as did Davis. Throughout the Progressive Era and even after, Davis presented some Americans with the troubling reality that not all Civil War romanticism led directly to a reunion spirit. Southern stories about Davis tended to unsettle or anger northerners much more than did the endless tales about Lee or Jackson’s greatness. Northerners responded to southern claims of a heroic Davis in one of two interrelated ways: they either ignored him as an irrelevant, antiquated figure, or they formulated a counter narrative which cast him as the ideal villain. The second reaction is closely tied to the first because both sought to undermine the growing refrain, sounded almost entirely from the South, that Davis should be considered an icon equal to Lee, Jackson, Grant, Lincoln, or any other Civil

War legend. In short, northerners heard stories about the Davis figure and universally rejected them as false.¹

It would be only slight hyperbole to call Davis, from the northern view, the sum of all Civil War evils. Considering the history of civil conflicts in the world, northerners showed a remarkable restraint toward the defeated South. However, much of northern resentment coalesced around the identification of Davis as the central miscreant of the southern side—the embodiment of secession, slavery, and the evils of war. Northerners created both plausible scenarios, possible instances of Davis’ cruelty, cowardice, or treachery, along with pure fictions to create their own distinctive type of stories. There was little of his life, real or imagined, that northerners did not seek to link with a most unheroic type of man. For many, Davis personified whatever northerners felt was wrong with the American experiment before, during, or after the Civil War. Americans often blamed the southern elite generally and Davis especially for causing the Civil War, sustaining it for far too long, and then subverting the motives of Reconstruction. It seemed that Davis more than any other bore the responsibility of instigating a horrific war, and then after he played a major part in losing it, refused to accept its results. In April 1861 Davis had the reputation of a benign, conservative politician, but by his death he had gained the unenviable role as the mastermind behind southern sectionalism. No matter what southerners said, most in the North found nothing in Davis worthy of emulation.

Northerners rejected the notion that they should class Davis alongside Grant, Lee, Lincoln, and Jackson as the great, representative men of America’s Civil War. Most respected the muddy-booted hero, Grant, for his plain-spoken determination to accomplish the task at hand. A man of common birth but uncommon fortitude, Grant

exhibited the great American will to simply get things done. Though alike in some ways, Jackson's genius was more singular than Grant's. This most peculiar of generals echoed Cromwell and foreshadowed a self-reliant type of American hero that most would grow to love. None were greater than Lee, the chivalric knight in modern form. His dutifulness, honor, humility, and sacrifice for others made him the self-evident hero—a man who seemed lifted from the pages of the great romantic authors and placed upon the stage of the Civil War. In stories told again and again, northerners made it clear that Davis lacked all of the qualities that made legends out of his contemporaries. Stories about Abraham Lincoln, of course, provided northerners with a hero in almost every way the direct opposite of Davis. The skillful, wise, Lincoln guided the northern war effort with clarity and daftness, while the unsuccessful Davis helped grind his own cause into the ground. Davis' poor performance—the idea that he was a meddling fool of a president—was only the starting point of the northern version of the Davis story. Northerners cast Davis as the privileged son of the southern aristocracy who made a mess of his life and career. Despite all his advantages, Davis managed to spurn his own country then incite and lead a failed rebellion. Nurtured at West Point, and instructed by luminaries like General Winfield Scott, Davis wasted America's investment in him. Davis possessed none of Grant's honest determination, Jackson's unique vision and talent, Lee's selflessness, or Lincoln's simple genius. Northerners believed that Davis did not measure up as a man, and they let the world know in countless ways.

To express the idea of Davis as a false hero, northerners implicitly measured him against Lee. Through their stories, southern romantics hoped all would understand Davis and Lee as different sides of the same coin; two individuals rooted in the same southern codes of manly gentility. Davis linked the Old South (embodied by Lee) with the New.

Southerners said both Lee and Davis were in the genteel tradition, but northerners disagreed. Northerners left no doubt that Davis only pretended to be a southern gentleman/cavalier/knight, and almost everything about his life betrayed his true self. Davis' facade of chivalry inevitably led to the conclusion that many northerners made about the former president of the Confederacy: he was a liar. Being known as a liar, or any rough equivalent, was probably the gravest insult to the reputation of a nineteenth century man. More than most, southerners understood the importance of one's public honor and how it could be easily and irrevocably damaged. They recognized the severity of Davis' northern critics which in turn only contributed to their want to defend him. Northerners did not only conclude that Davis was less perfect than Lee or less-able a leader than Lincoln, charges many if not most southerners agreed with. For most northerners, Lee signified the glory of Old South chivalry, while Davis reminded them of the worst of the South: narrow-mindedness, obstinacy, cruelty, wastefulness, boastfulness, and violence, among others. As the North went about separating Davis from what they loved about the South, as they started the process of reunion, distinguishing Davis from Lee served as an essential part of the process. No matter how many southerners protested, northerners would not agree that Davis deserved a seat anywhere at Lee's roundtable.

Though they both owned slaves, race played a very different role in stories about Lee and Davis. Northerners saw Lee as they did Washington: a family-oriented planter who, by some circumstance, had the welfare of slaves thrust upon him. This was his responsibility or duty more than a vocation or pursuit. The business of slavery, such as slave-trading, the drudgery of the work, the violence, etc., had nothing to do with stories about the Lee figure. With Davis, his close affiliation with the secession movement (in

the northern imagination) and his long, postwar career as the spokesman for states' rights differed sharply from the paternalist Lee. Northerners equated Davis with southern radicalism and the want to extend slavery across the nation. Northern attitudes toward race were far from enlightened, but they preferred that southerners were more like the fatherly Lee than the scheming Davis. This had nothing to do with reality, of course. Both Lee and Davis owned a large number of slaves and probably governed their plantation kingdoms in a similar manner. Northerners considered Davis, not a racist in the modern usage of the word, but as someone who exploited black southerners and lacked the paternal compassion of the classic southern gentleman. One could think of how antebellum Americans divided slave traders from slaveholding planters. Traders perpetuated slavery and profited from it; they had no concern for the interest of slaves and were not considered gentleman. Simply put, Lee fit the mold of the slave-owning aristocrat that northerners deemed acceptable, and Davis did not.

It took a little while for northerners to separate Davis from Lee, Jackson, and all other leading Confederates, however. In the immediate wake of the Civil War, northerners had not yet identified its heroes and villains to the extent it would in coming years. At this point, Lee seemed very much like Davis and any other slave-holding Confederate who recklessly led the nation into armed conflict. In a short time, though, northerners began to formulate stories about Davis which forever marked him as different from any other southerner. The events of the summer of 1865, as the Confederacy came crashing down, are undoubtedly a key to understanding stories about Davis. It must be noted that before Lee surrendered to Grant no one could conclusively predict the exact end of the Civil War. Though the Army of Northern Virginia could little resist Grant's vast host, northerners still worried that the fighting could last many more months or

years. Lee put an end to the speculation, but Davis played no part in any Appomattox-like gesture which halted more bloodshed. In fact, with Davis it was exactly the opposite. He secretly sneaked away from Richmond in hopes of continuing an armed resistance somehow, somewhere beyond the reach of Union armies. In his final message as president, Davis appeared to urge civilians to take up arms and fight until the last man. When Union troops eventually caught with him, Davis, most believed, put on a dress to evade capture. These events in the last months of the Civil War forever followed Davis and defined him as a figure. In later years Davis' well-known defiant temperament further cemented the image of him northerners had already created.²

In an atmosphere of misinformation, rumor, and speculation about if and how the war would finally end, northerners were apt to believe almost anything about Davis and his intentions. Northerners perceived Davis and company's abandonment of Richmond on April 2 as a cowardly act. Here, northerners would often say, Davis evaded taking responsibility for secession by shamefully skulking his way out of town. Northerners typically described "how Davis, at the approach of danger, hurried southward... with his fugitive government fast crumbling to pieces around him." Despite this, Davis "maintained an appearance of confidence and a degree of assurance which fooled no one." Considering the nature of Davis' retreat west, it was no leap of faith to then reason that he probably looted Confederate funds before he left. In late May *The New York Herald* assumed that Davis likely would steal from his own people after Richmond's fall. "The gold which Jeff. May be able to grab will be divided between him and his accomplices on their way to Mexico, leaving behind them the curses of their victims," it was assured. Later, after Grant moved in to the city and Davis moved out, *The Herald* urged that their prior suspicions had been proven correct. *The Herald* concluded "one of

the first movements of Jefferson Davis and his clique was to secure all the specie in the Treasury,” and then destroy any evidence so “no one might be able to discover how much had been stolen.” Most northerners likely believed these and other similar stories. Instead of a strong-willed hero, intent to rally the Confederate fighting spirit no matter the odds, most depicted Davis as an ineffectual scoundrel. Allegations of theft were probably the *least* damning of all the northern indictments of Davis. Many more would follow Davis during his flight and after his capture, and all held in common that he was a man without honor.³

An assassin surely was one of the least honorable of men; especially if he participated in the plot to murder the American president. The country’s mourning over Lincoln’s death quickly turned to rage toward his killers. For a short time many believed, including President Andrew Johnson and others in Washington, D.C., that Davis employed agents who helped Booth plan and fund his plot against Lincoln and his cabinet. “Jeff. Davis an Abettor of Assassination!” thundered across the headlines of northern journals and aroused clear indignation. For a few weeks at least, northerners tended to report and believe “evidence...connecting Jeff. Davis with the assassination of President Lincoln” existed and would probably prove his complicity in the “commission of the deed.” Many northerners preferred Davis to Booth as the real villain. Stories tended to offer Booth as a mere dupe and Davis as the mastermind who created the plan and then ordered its execution. In any case, the varied tales about Davis’ involvement only deepened the northern ridicule of this most dis-honored of public men. According to the *Syracuse Daily Courier*, evidence of Davis’ guilt in the Lincoln conspiracy assured that he would be tried, and surely convicted, and thus the last question remained: what should we do with the body? One proposed that “the punishment due traitors be meted

out to him,” and his “body be hidden where mortals will never find it or be aware of its existence.” Or, considering that most agreed that Davis committed treason of the highest order, then perhaps remedies of the medieval sort should be applied. It was not unthinkable to presume that Davis might be “disemboweled alive, hung, drawn and quartered and the decapitated head and severed limbs exposed to rot in the public view.” Torture fantasies probably appealed to northerners eager to pour out their frustrations of four years on the head of one man.⁴

A complete lack of evidence ensured that Davis would not face punishment for Lincoln’s murder, but linking him with assassination seemed to fit the emerging northern story, nonetheless. The character of an assassin was congruent with that of a coward and liar, two traits northerners had already attributed to the Davis figure. Northerners already knew that he refused to go down with the Confederate ship at Richmond—that he preferred self-preservation to a more manly fate. They also knew that he probably swindled money somewhere somehow, proving again that Davis cared only for himself. Considering the favored, genteel way of the knight, and the example of Christ on the cross, Davis’s *selfishness* contrasted sharply with *selfless* Christian chivalry. Northerners easily believed, and perhaps took for granted, that Davis probably took some part in the demise of their president. Northerners deemed it both logical and probable that Davis inflicted a last desperate blow at the enemy, even though the act itself could do nothing to win independence for his people. Storytellers created a Davis figure that cared little about protecting his people or even acting in the best interest of the Confederacy. The resulting lesson of this interpretation was that self-aggrandizement, and not the protection of the defenseless, motivated Davis. Northerners evaluated Davis and found no sense of duty nor faithful service to a higher calling. Here was the antithesis of the Victorian-era,

chivalrous hero. Over time, different elements of the Davis figure materialized that confirmed northerners' first impressions. Even though Davis proved no abettor of assassination this time, northerners portrayed him as one easily capable of such a crime.

Though innocent of the murder of a president, northerners insisted on Davis' responsibility for the deaths of many thousands of Union prisoners. The problem of inadequate facilities for holding captured enemy soldiers and the difficulty of prisoner exchange plagued both Union and Confederate authorities. To the already long list of grievances against Davis, northerners added the abuse/neglect of captive Union soldiers. By far, the Confederacy's open-air pen at Andersonville was known as the most dangerous and ill-equipped destination for northern troops. Northerners enjoyed some retribution for the thousands who died here by executing Andersonville's commandant, Henry Wirz. Still, many northerners found Davis at least and sometimes more culpable for Andersonville and all other cases of prisoner mistreatment. Some felt if Wirz deserved a death sentence then "what must be the guilt of Jefferson Davis, his Commander-in-Chief?" If "Jeff Davis planned and carried forward a system of starvation against our soldiers" then he "deserves hanging, as much as poor Wirz did." Most understood in time that Davis played no part in Booth's conspiracy, but large numbers in the North remained convinced of his involvement in the deaths of thousands more. Many reasonably implored that Davis *had* to have known and possibly approved of Wirz's methods. If this was the case, one wondered in 1866, "in the name then of over TEN THOUSAND UNION SOLDIERS cruelly murdered by him, I ask why is he not brought to trial!" Various stories abounded about Davis' involvement in war crimes which intensified the desire to see him fairly tried then fairly put to death. The growing feeling was that Davis had been proven so insidious, that he simply was too egregious a man to ever go free.⁵

Northerners never came close to hanging Jefferson Davis, but that did not mean they ever forget he was an assassin. He exuded the qualities of a murderer, a liar, and a thief, and no amount of evidence to the contrary could make Davis anything other than what northerners wanted him to be. The northern public did not indict other Confederates, like the secretary of state, secretary of war, or the governor of Georgia, for example, as the architect of Andersonville, though any of these could have been just as accountable as the Confederate president. History has mostly acquitted Davis of any intentional wrongdoing, but that mattered little to those who told the stories. The unmasking of Davis as a false hero invited the exaggeration or invention of stories which told the world his real character. This is especially true of the latter days after Davis' release from prison. Once tempers cooled to a degree and dead Union soldiers, and a dead American president, became less of an everyday concern, northerners needed to occasionally remind themselves and everyone else of Davis' villainy. A select few felt obligated, as well, to combat the torrent of southern stories which hailed Davis as Christ-like and/or chivalrous.

Nothing stripped Davis of any chivalrous pretensions faster, or more completely, than did stories of the Confederate president in drag. Historians mostly agree that after mounted Union soldiers startled Davis's encampment on the morning of May 10, he grabbed his wife's shawl and exited his tent before being compelled to surrender. Though, the northern press publicized a sensationalized version of events that did not fade away for a very long time. Northern journals like *Harper's Weekly* initially reported that Davis wore full female attire, including some kind of ladies' hat. The basic story was told like this: once Union soldiers' unknowingly reached Davis' tent, "a woman came from one of the tents, and asked that the females within might have time to dress." After

this was granted, three figures who were “apparently women” exited their sleeping quarters. Two of them asked Union officers if “their poor old mother might be allowed to go to the spring for water.” This old woman “proved to be Jefferson Davis” after “a sharp-eyed trooper detected a pair of heavy boots below the (Davis’) cloak.” As early as July 1865, some already began the task of defending the legitimacy of the tale. “The question as to the attempt of Jeff. Davis to escape in a woman’s cloak and shawl would seem to be set finally at rest,” now that testimony did “amply refute the slander that the story is an official invention.” One might expect that northerners pieced together the “facts” of Davis’ arrest with glee, cobbling different rumors together, embellishing here and there, and enjoying the comic image of the emasculated ex-Confederate president. The stories multiplied and spread so quickly, it was extremely difficult to convince the northern masses that it never happened. Whatever the reality of what actually occurred, northerners did not need tangible proof to know that a man like Davis would resort to anything in order to evade trouble. After all, why *wouldn’t* a thief, a liar, and a murderer of thousands put on a dress to save his own neck?⁶

The mainstream of northern opinion apparently could think of no reason why Davis would not have pretended to be a female. Besides written stories, songs and especially cartoons supplied the northern imagination with various sordid details about Davis. Across the North, there was no shortage of visuals depicting Davis in some form of feminine attire. The images were so abundant that millions of northerners must have seen them. A cartoon entitled, “Jefferson Davis as an Unprotected Female,” for example, appeared in *Harper’s* in May 1865. Davis, surrounded and mocked by Union soldiers, was depicted wearing a woman’s hoop skirt. These satires usually put Davis in some type of female dress, and sometimes he was wearing a bonnet, as well. United States Secretary

of War Edwin Stanton claimed that owned the infamous dress and engineered a press conference to display it. P.T. Barnum even offered a reward in exchange for the dress that Davis wore when captured. Davis' dress never appeared, but Barnum did create a wax figure for his American Museum that he dubbed "The Belle of Richmond." The figure, which was displayed for the public, showcased Davis in his petticoats.⁷

If a man chose to hide behind a skirt once, then perhaps this was not the first time. In May, 1865, the *Adams Sentinel* persuaded readers that while a senator from Mississippi, Davis and a man identified as Colonel Bissell engaged in a war of words in Congress that almost led to a duel. The fictional story was based on a real confrontation between Davis and the senator from Illinois, William Bissell. Both Mexican War veterans, Davis and Bissell each believed that the other disparaged the fighting abilities of their respective units. Davis challenged Bissell to a duel that never happened, because both sides evidently negotiated a satisfactory peace before any shots were fired. That is not the version northerners heard, though. In this account, Bissell challenged Davis to a duel, and after the Mississippian accepted, both agreed when it would take place. President Zachary Taylor heard about their plans, so he "placed guards around the houses of the two belligerents to prevent their fighting." In order to escape his situation, Davis disguised himself as a woman. The *Sentinel* asserted that "Davis donned one of his servant girl's skirts and bonnet and left the house, passing safely by the guards." Unlike this episode, the *Sentinel* derisively stated, "the second *ruse* of Jefferson D. was less successful." Bissell here is the real man, the aggressor, the one who issued the challenge, and Davis' methods of sneaking away clearly revealed himself as something less. It was a short fable told to reflect and to amplify the lessons that northerners had learned about Davis when he surrendered in Georgia, many years later.⁸

There were numerous northerners willing to draw conclusions about Davis based on his arrest, and some did so with an overtly comic touch. George Arnold wrote poetry and humorous fiction, and he contributed several articles about Davis to *Vanity Fair*, which began as a satirical magazine. His short 1865 work *Life and Adventures of Jefferson Davis* had to be among the most farcical, and genuinely funny, gibes at Davis ever written. Arnold sketched out the high points of Davis' life and ended with his capture in Georgia. Behind the bald mockery resided a real critique of Davis and all he came to symbolize to most Americans. Arnold classed Davis as a mere social climber and mercilessly skewered the privileged upbringing of the faux southern gentleman. The father of Davis "succeeded in accumulating the property of several wealthy neighbors in a high-toned and chivalrous manner," which set the stage for his son's career. Davis rose up the ranks by his ability to make the finest "gin cocktail" around, and entered politics after many "tranquil years of cotton planting and negro raising." George attributed the success of Davis in the military and politics to luck, connivance, flattery, gin-making, and his social status. All of his life seemed destined toward that disgraceful morning of May 10. It was here when "clearing the trunk of a fallen tree, Old Mother Davis' skirts yielded their folds to the wanton will of the morning breeze, and an observant trooper saw" beneath the layers of fabric, "an unmistakable pair of top boots!" For George and others, the exposure of Davis in women's clothes also exposed him and his entire life as a lie. It appeared to most that Davis' "last movement, in his wife's petticoats, clapped the climax of all his strategy." Just as he put on the dress of a woman, Davis wore the costume of a gentleman and statesman. Most all agreed that none of his disguises fit him particularly well.⁹

Most did not possess the scorching wit of Arnold, but many agreed with him that the Davis-in-drag incident represented more than one embarrassing case of bad judgment; it was the perfect illustration of Davis' life, character, and tenure as Confederate president. Northerners did not respect those believed to have instigated and prolonged the Confederate rebellion, and they made Davis number one on this list. Storytellers imagined the pre-1861 Davis as the man behind the curtain of secession who secretly worked to plunge the nation into war. In this telling he became the chief of the fire-eaters, even though in reality Davis often found himself at odds with more radical southern politicians. Davis earned the unwanted title of "arch-traitor" or "arch-criminal" to signify his leading role in the rebellion. The repeated use of arch-traitor eventually served to isolate Davis from Lee, Jackson, and basically all his former Confederate colleagues. If northerners ever forgot why this was the case, the image of Davis in petticoats was sure to remind. The boots peeking from below his skirt disrobed Davis entirely, revealing him as a base liar and the secessionist movement as a conspiratorial scheme. Northerners often said they could respect a worthy foe or a conquered hero, but added they felt no admiration whatsoever for Davis.¹⁰

Northerners found several ways to link the capture of Davis in a dress to their utter contempt for him as an enemy. Most northerners took it for granted that "Jefferson Davis in his wife's clothes is not a sufficiently elevated character to attract our regard and admiration," and that "a man detected in female garb cannot be accepted as a genuine type of hero..." Beginning with this assumption, northerners added commentary to the story in order to prove their point. In 1865 clergyman and author George H. Hepworth publicized Davis' various misdeeds, including the events of his arrest, and justified the need for his execution. His account linked Booth and Davis as similar types of men who

conducted their great crimes in a very comparable manner. The natural deceiver, Booth, shot Lincoln then ingloriously ran away before the police finally found and killed him. Booth would have been owed some honor if he had immediately killed himself, “instead of skulking away, and disguising himself in various ways—like any coward who has done a deed which the remembrance of frightens him...” For Hepworth, Booth and Davis both exemplified the assassin’s mentality, because they worked in secret and hoped to hide their real identities. If Davis had surrendered manfully and accepted defeat “the pen of the historian would hardly have placed him in the niche he is now likely to occupy.” Hepworth used two images, “the petticoat and the bowie knife,” to explain Davis and his career. The knife represented secession, violence, and the coercion of the southern people toward war, and the petticoat emblemized deception and cowardice. “These are the symbols of weakness and cruelty,” Hepworth asserted. At his core, Davis was no different from an assassin like Booth, the author implored. One slayed a president and the other attempted to do the same thing to the American nation.¹¹

Comparing him to a murderer, calling him a liar, an assassin, the ultimate arch-traitor, all should not overshadow northerners’ relevant and heartfelt critique of the Davis figure. It would be tempting to consider Davis as simply a scapegoat for northern rage or a convenient target for four years of pent up frustrations. One should not misconstrue stories about Davis as *only* an impulsive wish to quickly identify a villain. The Davis figure came to personify a combination of qualities which northerners rejected and identified as unmanly. Haughty, greedy, arrogant, violent, unsympathetic, and basically gutless—this was how northerners pictured the southern oligarch. Davis possessed a power and authority earned only by deception and fortunate circumstance. As George Arnold outlined, Davis’ successes were symptomatic of Old South privilege and

corruption among the advantaged few. Davis and those like him advertised themselves as chivalrous knights and genteel, paternalist gentleman. Northerners tended to believe, though, that Davis used the cavalier tradition to hide bald ambition. At heart, his paternalism was little more than authoritarianism, his statesmanship nothing but the want to extend the slave power. Hepworth wrote that had the Confederacy won Davis probably would have “hurried us back to the superstition, the despotism, and the immorality of the dark ages.” Davis would have created a fixed feudalistic class system, “razed to the ground every educational system in the South” and basically rescinded any measure of progress. Northerners created Davis, then, as the very opposite of the humble hero, the self-sacrificing Christ, the duty-bound knight. Time and again, northerners conjured the Davis figure, not as an uncrowned king, but as the tyrant-king. Davis summoned the image of a coercive and violent leader who cared not at all for his people. He was incompetent, and his lust for power thrust the South into a war that cost the lives of many thousands of Americans.¹²

Taking into account how Davis mismanaged Confederate affairs and revealed himself as a self-seeking, despotic leader, many figured that southerners welcomed the day when they no longer lived under his dominion. In the last few days of his Confederate administration, northerners often reported how Davis, “in fact,” was “rapidly losing his hold upon the people, if he had not already become actually odious.” In many ways, northerners likened Davis to an unpopular emperor. They tended to believe that his controversial measures turned public opinion against him and the name of Davis would only become more infamous as time progressed. To establish this notion as fact, northerners sometimes quoted remarks from anti-Davis southerners. For example, in May 1865 Wisconsin’s *Janesville Gazette* published an interview with former South Carolina

Governor William Aiken. Opposed both to secession and Davis personally, Aiken made a good source to verify the general detestation of the Confederate president. Aiken said “Davis was not the man for President” and “had not the ability nor weight of character” to perform his duties. His home state had “denounced him” from the beginning, and Davis “had been unpopular ever since his election.” *The New York Herald* persuaded that southerners celebrated when Davis left Richmond and welcomed Lincoln as their savior. There could be little doubt to the “intelligent reader” of the “horrible character of the despotism of Jeff. Davis, and the frightful sufferings which it has brought upon his deluded followers.” Given everything that has occurred, “who can doubt that they are anxiously awaiting their deliverance, or that the end of their remorseless tyrant is close at hand?” Northerners were aware of the many southern complaints against the Davis administration, and they believed his rapaciousness had become common knowledge. Added together, this surely made Davis a universally-repugnant man, northerners supposed.¹³

Northerners gradually realized they had gotten it very wrong. It did not take long for northerners to see that their former foes began speaking about Davis as their representative a little more each day. Sometimes in incredulous tones, northerners themselves questioned why a dishonored tyrant could suddenly become a cherished hero. During his 1866 tour of the former Confederacy, journalist Whitelaw Reid discovered that southerners openly praised Davis and retained a strong rebellious spirit. Northerners wrongfully assumed that ex-Confederates now denounced Davis, and “that the desolation wrought by war, would lead to an intense hatred of the leaders who brought it on.” Reid noticed that “the unjust detention of Mr. Jefferson Davis was everywhere deplored,” and “instead of hating their own leaders they hate ours.” Clearly, Reid admonished

southerners for not rejecting Davis. He indicated that although all southerners declared themselves “Union men,” their affection for the United States was marginal at best. Reid therefore concluded that “to talk of any genuine Union sentiment...any intention to go one step further out of the paths that led to rebellion,” appeared a “preposterous” notion. Reid described a retrograde people who, though American in name, remained Confederate at heart.¹⁴

In the coming years many in the North would question southern loyalty, but few changed their minds about Davis. An angry American public took it for granted in 1865 that Davis was not long for this world. As Davis wasted away at Fort Monroe, most everyone expected him to die in prison or soon face a trial and quick execution. The trial never came, and his death occurred much too late to suit most northerners. Just as Davis never recanted secession or anything else in his career, northerners never changed their basic view of the arch-traitor. To some degree their perspective softened slightly, as most admitted that responsibility for secession and a long war wrested with many and not Davis alone. Yet Davis stood out more than any other southerner as the symbol of American violence, short-sightedness, radicalism, slavery, and authoritarianism. For example, San Francisco’s *Overland Monthly* regarded Davis as combining together all of the worst aspirations of the antebellum slave-owner. Assuredly, “Jefferson Davis, haughty, self-willed, and persistent, full of martial ardor and defiant eloquence, was the symbol, both in his character and his situation, of the proud, impulsive, but suppressed ardors and hopes of the southern mind.” He was the relic that no one wanted, a reminder of the sins of the past, a stain upon the future of the nation. In the northern mind, he was the most tyrannical of that class of slaveholding tyrants that caused the Civil War.¹⁵

Tyrants like Davis lacked basic leadership abilities and were generally dim-witted, storytellers said. Benevolent, wise, kings were not oppressive despots. No, a tyrant not only lusted for power and acted cruelly against his people but also was incompetent, wasteful, and generally ineffective. At best northern stories likened Davis to a bumbling emperor and at worst a murderous dictator. Nineteenth century historian John Draper surmised it impossible to study the Civil War “without being struck with the shortcomings of Davis as a ruler.” Due to Davis, there was “nothing but failure” because “the best officers in the army were put down to make way for favorites,” and “the means lavishly given (from the southern people) to secure independence were squandered, not used.” No wonder the end of the Davis administration felt something like a “departing nightmare,” another wrote. Not surprisingly, a reviewer of Joseph Johnston’s Civil War narrative wrote that Davis hurt the Confederate cause much more than he helped it. Davis made “nearly every mistake possible,” surrounded “himself with ignorant and corrupt personal favorites,” and “could never keep his hands, for a week together, out of affairs which the commander of an army can conduct.” In a rather unique story, a northern traveler aboard a southern train casually asked a fellow black passenger why he would not “feel very grateful to Jefferson Davis for what he did for you.” As the stranger explained, “he was chief among the secessionists,” and “as President, he made so many mistakes, he did more than any man to prevent the success of the Confederacy.” Therefore, “he did more to bring about the freedom of the slave than any other man.” To make a tyrant, it helps that one adds selfish motives and brutality *with* idiocy and futility. For their audiences, northern storytellers invoked the image of the conceited king, issuing curt demands, wasting life and resources, humorously out of touch with reality.¹⁶

One of the easier methods to tell the story of Davis as a tyrant was to juxtapose the record and character of the two opposing presidents of the Civil War. Even impartial observers usually confessed that Lincoln outclassed Davis in almost every category of leadership. In some regard, northerners needed only to repeat the complaints Confederates voiced during the Civil War. Northerners retold how Davis chose his personal friends as his colleagues, destroyed the careers of enemies like Johnston, and subverted the good of the country to his own will. It was a well known idea that while “Mr. Lincoln” promoted or removed subordinates based solely on merit, “it was an open secret that Mr. Davis’ preferences and dislikes interfered, in the opinion of many good judges, with his management of the military affairs of the Confederacy.” The conspicuous differences between the northern hero and the quintessential arch-traitor ran deep. One fled his fate in disgrace, the other died a hero after saving the nation. Davis made “a neat contrast to the grand figure of Lincoln enshrined in the people’s memory,” and all Americans “after laughing at the live jackass, will turn with deeper love and reverence to thoughts of the dead Hero.” Northerners made a distinction between “the haughty and proud” Davis and the humble commoner, Lincoln. George Arnold among many others had already articulated why Davis fell terribly short as a true statesman. Lincoln rose to a position of importance by his own talent, while Davis never earned anything. Davis was a flatterer and a deceiver—a man who advertised himself as a gentleman but was bankrupt of honor. For northerners, there was practically no end to the possible comparisons:

“Davis was the narrow exponent of a bombastic, self conceited, self-styled chivalry; Lincoln was broad as the prairies upon which he lived. Davis was a born aristocrat; Lincoln was a great commoner. Davis was vain, pompous and self-satisfied; Lincoln was modest, simple hearted as a child, and tender as a

woman...Davis, clothed with almost absolute power, wielded it for his own glory; Lincoln, clothed with like power, used it tenderly for the people..."

Almost all who talked about Lincoln and Davis from the northern perspective laid bare the pretended manhood of one, and the real manhood of the other.¹⁷

Northerners reasoned that Davis could not measure up to Lincoln's simple but hardy manhood, and they also believed he fell short of the *real* ideal of southern chivalry: Lee. Northern stories featured Lincoln and Lee more than any other heroes of the Civil War. Lincoln belonged to the tradition of the Puritan, while Lee manifested the virtues of the knight. For English author John Formby, Lincoln and Lee towered "above the rest...one a true son of the people, rugged-featured and gaunt, the other strikingly handsome, and the highest type of aristocrat." The message in northern stories was clear enough: Lee possessed the real gallantry, humility, and bravery of a southern knight, while Davis only pretended to. Stories about Davis stressed how he did everything possible to extend the life of the Confederacy and therefore his power as the chief tyrant. One wrote that "it is well known that Davis, after his flight from Richmond, refused to consider his cause as hopeless, and was determined to continue the war even after...further fighting was useless." It was widely believed that even though Lee and most others dissented, Davis planned to fight Union armies to the death of the last Confederate man, and possibly woman, and child. "It is fairly appalling to consider what in 1865 must have occurred if Robert E. Lee had been of the same mind as Jefferson Davis," said a northern editor. One of Lee's chief American admirers, Charles Francis Adams, wrote that "Davis had not for an instant given up the thought of continuing the struggle" after Richmond's fall, but Lee's overwhelming influence with the army aborted his president's intentions. "You must remember we are a Christian people," Lee purportedly told one of his generals at Appomattox, and "we have fought this fight as

long as, and as well as, we know how.” Then, “there is now but one course to pursue. We must accept our situation.” Stories told about the end of the Civil War highlighted Lincoln’s death and Lee’s heroic acceptance of defeat. In most northern versions of the story, both the armies of Lee and Joseph Johnston gave up the struggle despite orders from Davis to carry on. This story did not make Davis brave or steadfast. It was not “the cause,” the Confederate people, or anything honorable that drove Davis, northerners insisted. Instead, in their view Davis only strove to maintain and spread his power.¹⁸

The self-centered motives of Davis helped explain his role in the secession movement. The southern interpretation of the Davis figure portrayed a man hesitant to leave the United States and form the Confederacy. Much like Lee, Davis met the prospect of secession with great regret and sorrowfully but sincerely obeyed the will of his native Mississippi. For those outside the South, the story could not have been more different. In sum, most non-southerners supposed that Davis engineered secession as part of a purposeful design to become some manner of king. In other words, he did not fall backward into secession, because Davis worked to make it a reality. After all, as a United States senator and a secretary of war, Davis could have used his power to create a crisis or at least strengthen the South’s position. Stories explained how Davis “shaped out the scheme while a Senator at Washington” over and over again. Some offered that while secretary of war Davis funneled guns and various materials to the southern states and dispersed the United States army into remote, disconnected parts of the country. Apparently, this aided the Confederate military effort while weakening the North. As secretary, “Davis was busy but not in the interest of the republic,” one wrote. Due to Davis “the regular army had been ordered to distant” places, “northern fortifications had been neglected,” and “the muskets of the disbanded militia companies of the Northern

states were shipped to Washington, and thence were distributed through the Southern States". Old accusations about Davis needed little to no basis in fact for northerners to accept them as true. Northerners expected that Davis sought secession because he wanted prestige, wealth, and all the trappings of absolute rule. That was what tyrants did, and that was who Davis was.¹⁹

A tyrant to some and an uncrowned king to others, Americans just did not agree about Davis, his character, or his role in secession and war. The very same stubbornness that made him an endearing southern hero ruined his northern reputation. Not only did it seem that Davis helped start the Civil War and attempt to sustain it indefinitely, but he never showed any regret for it. More than this, northerners sensed that Davis defied even the reality that the Union won the Civil War. His attitude, public statements, etc., indicated to northerners that Davis would fight the war over again if given the chance. This is the man, it should be remembered, that boldly declared no interest in applying for American citizenship. More disturbingly, scores of southerners readily pronounced Davis their representative. Southerners heard and resented the northern stories about their uncrowned king. Censure of Davis only induced them to greater and more elaborate statements of his worth. Thus, unlike Lee and, for the most part, Jackson, the Davis figure did not further sectional reunion. In fact, the Davis figure divided Progressive-Era Americans like few if any others in American History. The occasional mention of Davis in the public sphere sparked interest and usually disagreement. These intermittent wars of words recalled how the Davis figure meant something different to northerners than to southerners.

When it came to Davis, almost anything could invite debate and outrage. For instance, in 1875 many northerners protested after Illinois' Winnebago Agricultural

Society invited Davis to speak at their annual meeting. It was not unusual for former Civil War notables to speak at fairs and other functions across the country. In this case, though, the specter of Davis addressing Illinois farmers caused a sizable northern backlash. Davis first accepted the invitation and then changed his mind after some in the press campaigned against the event. *The Chicago Tribune* reported that “the startling announcement that Jeff Davis would speak at the fair this year” induced “an indignation that will not be easily allayed, unless” he “cancels his engagement.” Such an occasion would “insult every soldier who wore the army blue...” and betray “every widow and mother whose husband or son were starved to death at Andersonville.” Chicago’s *Prairie Farmer* did not understand why any would want Davis to stand before Civil War veterans and families of slain soldiers as a respected guest. They urged Winnebago to “withdraw your invitation, and let Mr. Davis go down to his grave a despised specimen of a traitor to his country.” Certainly, if the fair were in Mississippi, Georgia, Virginia or some other southern state, Davis would have been met with a much warmer reception.²⁰

Even in the halls of Congress, northerners and southerners disputed Davis’ place in America. Throughout the 1870s and 1880s, several episodes of congressional politicking revived interest in Davis and re-ignited sectional discord. Many in America expressed hope in a post-Civil War renewal that would usher in a period of prosperity and sectional agreement. Many nineteenth-century northerners easily contrasted this optimistic view of the future with him most associated with an antiquated, cruel, and tyrannical past: the Davis figure. The Republicans billed themselves as the party of material progress and of Civil War victory, and therefore they especially were inclined to view Davis unfavorably. In 1876 Republican and presidential hopeful James Blaine attempted to amend a bill that would have feasibly restored Davis to full American

citizenship. In statements and speeches published in the press, Blaine repeated the northern story of Davis and urged that he remain a castoff from America. As most did when the topic of Davis arose, Blaine presumed to speak for all northerners. In 1879 Congress debated authorizing a pension to Mexican War veterans. Again, several northern senators recoiled at the thought of Davis receiving any benefits from the government he almost destroyed. Various declarations were again made and distributed across the nation. In 1885 Senator John Sherman led a contingent of northern senators who believed evidence existed which proved Davis conspired to bring about the Civil War. The question arose of Davis' guilt after the senator's famous brother, William Tecumseh Sherman, called out Davis in a highly-publicized speech. Every time a northern congressman sullied the reputation of Davis, a southern colleague responded in kind. In 1879 Mississippi's long-tenured statesman Lucious Q. C. Lamar, for example, diligently defended Davis and rebuked several northern senators due to the war pension affair. Meanwhile, Indiana's Zachariah Chandler spoke out against Lamar for praising the arch-traitor, Lamar replied, law-makers chose sides, and on and on it went. In each case political wrangling in Washington reached the public and became a topic of interest for a short while. To be sure, Blaine, Sherman, Lamar, and others were all political heavyweights using Davis to profit their careers. Still, the back-and-forth squabbling in Washington echoed a deeper American disjuncture of opinion on Davis and the Civil War.²¹

Response to the Davis controversies revealed that northerners both resented any allusion to Davis as an honorable American and expressed bewildering surprise that southerners chose to prop up a tyrant-king as a genuine hero. Northerners demurred when they heard prominent statesman like Lamar hail Davis as anything other than a traitor.

Unlike with Lee, Jackson, Alex Stephens and many others, northerners never depicted Davis as a remorseful rebel conflicted about the prospect of secession. Why would Congress restore Davis' citizenship, wrote *The Stevens Point Journal* in 1876, when "back in 1851, ten years before the outbreak of the Rebellion, Jefferson Davis and other conspirators were plotting to destroy the Union." The claim that Davis purposefully sought to force a civil war held considerable weight among the masses. Northerners had already made up their minds about Davis and did not need evidence to convict him of any conspiracy—including the one to starve Union prisoners. As one northern journal recorded, Blaine was right to exclude Davis from exemption "on account of his barbarous and inhuman violation of the laws of war in the treatment of Union soldiers." In 1885 former General John Beatty similarly concluded that Davis deserved no grand tributes from Lamar or any other senator. Why could they not see that "Jefferson Davis and his fellow conspirators began the war!" Beatty hoped that the "conspirator, rebel and traitor" of the Civil War would not be remembered fondly, lest it be lost that true men stood loyal to the government. Commentary lauding Davis led many northerners to grasp the terrible reality that their stories about assassination, hoop skirts, stolen gold, conspiracy, etc., had not persuaded southerners at all. We must face the truth, one offered in 1885, "that the spirit of Jefferson Davis is the spirit of the South." How could it be "if Jefferson Davis is no longer regarded with favor in the South, that on every possible occasion the leading men in active life, chosen to represent the southern states, speak for him as they do?"²²

Northerners eventually got the message that southerners had not and would not ostracize Davis. During the tumult of his capture, confinement, and release, northerners maintained that Davis stood apart from the mainstream South. They told stories that described a cruel, selfish, and murderous man who was also at times comically inept. His

gentlemanly exterior was all false, and he could claim no rightful place as a worthy leader. Certainly, northerners then deduced, only the most unreconstructed rebels would show any allegiance to the unmasked Confederate president. Along with burying Davis, they hoped that most Americans would forever entomb southern radicalism and all that led to the Civil War. They believed Davis belonged “to the past, not to the present, and” even “less to the future” having “no place in the new caste of things.” Ideally, the grave of Davis would be a marker for a dead past instead of a shrine to inspire subsequent devotion. During Reconstruction northern hope turned to frustration and then to the realization that the South could not be remade wholly in the image of the North. All across the South, a conservative and some would say backward white elite regained power and slowly turned back the clock to the prewar, authoritarian South. Simply stated, many northern observers looked at the New South and did not like what they saw. A large number of northerners found nothing romantic or chivalrous about rigged elections, racial intimidation and vigilante violence, rampant government corruption, poor education, etc. Davis was one of the most often cited symbols of the unreconstructed South. One northerner complained that Mississippians were such a violent and un-democratic people that the only thing left for them was to once again elect Davis to the Senate. The “bloodiest man on earth” was “pre-eminently the best representative from Mississippi,” he asserted. An un-democratic society, based on the domination of the powerful, without constraints, compassion, or wisdom—this so called New South might as well still have Davis as its president.²³

Without question, most considered *The Rise and Fall of the Confederacy* the defining statement of southern intractability and the best expression of Davis’ unfortunate legacy. Northern reviews of Davis’ “dreary mass of rubbish” were not kind. In short,

northerners resented that Davis showed no signs of contrition, and they sensed a hostility to the North that had not changed since 1861. In “Rise and Fall of the Confederate Government,” Lincoln biographers John Nicolay and John Hay noticed “very guarded undertones” which “revealed an undying animosity to the Government of the United States, whose destiny he had sought to pervert, whose trusts he had betrayed,” and “whose honors he had repaid by attempting its destruction.” Evidently, a reviewer for *The Atlantic Monthly* declared, “Mr. Davis is a man who has learned nothing and forgotten nothing...the world in its progress has moved by him, and he is no wiser and no better than before.” The northern response to *Rise and Fall* amounted to yet another way to publicly unmask Davis. Only a fool would write such a book, only a man petty and vengeful could not let go of a cause so gloriously wrongheaded, northerners agreed. Most concurred that secession was a “mistake” so “stupendous” that “no amount of writing from his pen can rectify it, or alter the final judgment of mankind.” It was apparent that Davis in 1861 “neither understood the people of the North nor of The South,” and “nor does he now.” As Davis insisted, “in repeating, as he does, his old delusions, he exhibits himself to the public in the full shadow of a prime disqualification for a historian or a ruler.” *Puck* was another of the many northern journals that offered a reaction to *Rise and Fall*. The popular magazine used humor to discuss various issues of its day, but their take on Davis and his book only got it half right. The editor correctly estimated that northerners had long looked upon Davis as a deluded fossil, but he misjudged his meaning to southerners. Supposedly, the Davis figure extinguished

“from the Southern Heart any lingering sentimental attachment for the ‘lost cause.’ The mad dream of reviving the rebellion, or of living to all eternity an ‘unreconstructed’ people within a people, might have had a certain ghastly dignity about it if it had not been for Mr. Jeff Davis’s course since the war. The cause was

dear to many embittered spirits—it might have remained a vital force, an eternal menace to the nation, if the leader had been any other than Jeff Davis. But he crushes it down with the weight of his corpse...though: a corpse has sense enough to know when it is dead.”²⁴

Though Davis lived eight years after *Rise and Fall*, almost all agreed that states’ rights had passed away long before. Northern stories often described Davis as lacking the ability to learn from the past, to change, or to see how the Civil War had exposed secession as an un-American evil. Plenty of northerners preferred a small government that limited the authority of Washington D.C., but almost all abhorred the southern tradition of states’ rights. Most associated southern radicalism with John C. Calhoun and nullification, slavery, the arrogance of the antebellum fire-eaters, secession, and by that time, Davis. Northerners regarded states’ rights as a dead language no longer spoken, or perhaps more accurately, as an invention notable in theory that simply did not work in practice. The obsession of Davis with an outmoded and destructive political philosophy, to many Americans, just did not make sense. There was no logic behind Davis’ elaborate exhortations about the Constitution and the sacred liberty of the individual states. His talk did not matter when the issue at hand had long been settled.

To northerners, states’ rights, nullification, and the Davis figure were all basically the same thing: a vestige of America’s Old World roots which, thankfully, no longer mattered. Part of the problem was his constant defiant posturing. Northerners expected former Confederates to praise Union victory as probably the best thing for America and be at least semi-apologetic concerning secession. To be good Americans, southerners needed to show they had renounced the sin of rebellion; that they had come forward to be born again. Davis, though, appeared to actually foment sectionalism by lacking any sort of regret and saying so in his public addresses. Basically, his course placed him as the

opposite of the ever-conciliatory Lee. In most of his comments, northerners usually heard an “unrepentant disloyalty” that distinguished Davis from other former rebels. Therefore, northerners agreed that nothing from Davis should be taken seriously. As was reported after one of his speeches, Davis, “the senile old rebel...changed by unrepentant years to a mere Confederate scarecrow, gibbered and snarled yesterday over the defeat of the bloody attempt to create a slaveholders’ oligarchy.” It was a common opinion that “a few faded old men like Davis hang over the extinct fires and turn their mental vision backward,” while “the rest of the world is looking forward.” Davis was merely “a curiosity of the time, an archaic relic.” In his last few years, the image of Davis as a tired, rambling, old man littered northern stories. To most Americans of today, urged a Philadelphian, Davis “will represent to them a remoteness as far away from their personal experiences as would the ghost” of any forgotten, failed revolutionary. Another believed a speech of Davis “has put back the South several years in its social and political relations with The North...” This northerner could only hope that “people will never again be afflicted with his damnable political heresies” at any southern gathering. The unmistakable message was that Davis had nothing of value to offer the world. Northern stories regretted his very existence, that physically he had not suffered the same fate as his extinct beliefs.²⁵

When Davis actually did pass away, northerners did not grieve him. Mourners from the South made the death, burial, and re-burial of Davis into one of the most grandiose spectacles in American History. On the other hand, the rest of America had little nice to say about Davis. In many cases, storytellers at his death restated their case that a traitor and tyrant should have not been allowed to die a natural death almost twenty-five years after Appomattox. Many shared the feeling that Davis “should have

died long ago” as an “arch traitor right after the war.” That Davis continued to speak out on behalf of secession, that he was even allowed to live freely as if he had not committed treason, approved a system that killed thousands of Union prisoners, or helped inaugurate the Civil War, was a national insult. Others voiced the hope that someday southerners might renounce any allegiance to the tyrant-king. Maybe his spirit would be forgotten, and perhaps now he could finally be alienated from the masses of white southerners. It was a reasonable expectation “to hope that he represented only what was worst in the southern character, and that, as he departs from the stage, the narrow, dictatorial and vindictive spirit, which he so sharply represented, may also fade away.” Those more observant knew this was false, however. Northerners had been telling stories about Davis for a long time, but the cumulative effect of their work only encouraged southern reverence for a Christ-like hero. A writer for Ohio’s *Sandusky Daily Register* came closer to the truth about Davis and the South than did the wishful thinking sort. He asserted that anyone

“is mistaken if he supposes that the death of Jeff Davis has broken the last link that connects the South with the Rebellion. The death of Davis has been utilized by the Southern leaders to bind the South more firmly to the lost cause. The children, who, if left to themselves would know little and care less for the lost cause, have been told to honor the memory of Davis as the great martyr to the highest principle, and the lost cause today has today as strong a hold on Southern sentiment as it had twenty years ago.”

Thus the idea predicted here is that the death of Davis made him and the South ever more indistinguishable. This trend that many envisioned quite possibly had no end, and northerners had little recourse to stop it.²⁶

Despite disagreement from southerners, northern stories retained their essential moral: Davis exemplified the empty bluster of *some* of the southern chivalry who were really just tyrants in disguise. Northerners prized chivalric qualities and preferred to

identify these values in their heroes. Well into the twentieth-century Americans put forth Lee as an ideal man, exuding selflessness, honor, honesty, bravery and everything associated with the knight. They remained loyal to the archetypes of the past, but they judged Davis unworthy of a place among their heroes. Northerners maintained that Davis twisted and subverted southern gentility into a mockery of the knightly ideal. He corrupted everything that northerners idealized in Lee and the Old South, leaving him isolated from the tradition of the southern gentleman. What made things worse was that Davis would not go away despite obviously (from the point of view of non-southerners) being unmasked as cowardly, incompetent, and cruel. Americans during the late Victorian period varied between conceding, with great disappointment, that the South embraced Davis as their own and calculating that one day they would not. As former general and statesman Carl Shurz did in his 1907 memoirs, more often than not Americans at least allowed that the southern people tended to see Davis as man representative of noble suffering. Shurz deemed it a lamentable thing that Davis chose to use his southern celebrity to strain rather than unite sectional bonds. He expressed great insight into the northern view of the Davis figure, and how that differed from Lee. Shurz wrote that Davis

“used his influence, not as General Lee did in his frank and generous way, to encourage among his friends a loyal acceptance of the new order of things and a patriotic devotion to the restored republic, but rather to foment in a more or less veiled way, a sullen animosity against the Union. He stimulated the brooding over past disappointments rather than a cheerful contemplation of new opportunities. He presented a sorry spectacle of a soured man who wished everyone else soured too. Thus he forced unprejudiced observers to conclude that, measured by the true standards of human greatness, he, with all his showy and by no means valueless qualities, wound up his career a small man.”²⁷

By discrediting Davis, northerners cast a judgment upon the New South itself. Americans tend to both romanticize and criticize the South. In American stories, the southern man has been a paragon of honor, a throwback to some time when men were real men. At least equally so, the southern male has been described as brutish, unlearned, quarrelsome, and helplessly old fashioned. One is a romantic figure and the other is antiquated. One is Lee, and the other Davis. Behind the stories about Davis is an admonition to the South. On one hand, stories revealed how the South let a few tyrants like Davis ensnare it into the fiendish secession plot. Likewise, stories told how the postwar South embraced a man who at every opportunity railed against United States authority. Davis' South was the one twentieth-century Americans finally left behind to its own obstinacy and vileness. This was the solid South that derailed Reconstruction. This was the unreconstructed South increasingly out of step with modern America. The Davis figure recalled elitism, slavery, bigotry, and exploitation. Davis represented an un-American South that proudly fought against the results of the Civil War: the northern right to dictate the terms of reunion and the future course of the nation at large. When angry northerners often spoke how Davis kept rousing sectional feeling, they meant that his statements about states' rights or some other topic constituted a perversion of Union victory. He kept fighting the Civil War, ignoring its lessons, its conclusions, and the North's right to make the South in its own image. In effect Davis tried to reverse history, hoping to blot out the reunion story Lee set in motion at Appomattox. In sum, the Davis figure countermanded the great reunion narrative of the Civil War as a cleansing baptism that produced a new and better America.

Northerners made use of the Lee and Davis figures both to admire the Old South and repudiate the New. Northerners had no problem making Lee the ideal southerner.

After all, northerners enjoyed the romance of chivalry and stories about King Arthur and other characters of the same mold. They believed that this enchanting Old South existed somewhere before the Civil War, and they knew that it had mostly died—only remnants here and there survived. Southerners disagreed, arguing that the South could be both Old and New at the same time while claiming a Davis figure firmly in the tradition of southern chivalry. Northerners dehistoricized the Old South, making it something akin to a dreamy, Camelot world of men like Lee. This South was not violent or oppressive. There was no forced labor here, no buying and selling of human beings, no whippings or anything of the like. This was only the South at its best and had little to do with secession and radicalized states' rights. As northerners saw how many in the former Confederacy stood with Davis and his message, the Old South drifted further into the past. Northerners wanted to see more southerners who fit the mold of Lee rather Davis, but often they were disappointed.

To exact a little revenge on Davis, and remind the world why he could never be confused with a southern gentleman, northerners always could remember when he wore a skirt. The story of Davis fleeing from Union troopers in full female dress simply was a tale too good *not* to be true. Some retold it long after most Americans had come to think of the story as an exaggeration. In 1884's *Young Folks' History of The United States* the capture story mostly resembled the same one reported in the summer of 1865. Here, "the fallen president was disguised as a woman, wearing a 'waterproof cloak gathered at the waist, with a shawl over his head, carrying a tin pail.'" From another source in 1890, "Davis had on a black dress" and "a black shawl," and his "identity was confirmed by the removal of the shawl from his face." Still another remarked in 1893 how Davis "wore on his person a woman's long, black dress, which completely concealed his figure, excepting

his spurred boot heels.” Americans had long learned the lesson that Davis was an assassin, a liar, a thief, and a man who wore a dress. All of these stories supported the idea of Davis as a tyrant-king, and northerners needed no further verification of these claims. The North stripped the manhood of the recalcitrant, rebellious South’s representative man. The layers of his pretended chivalry had been peeled back. If the South could or would not see this blatant reality, then northerners could do nothing but leave them and Davis alone in their shame. Americans saw that the South’s emperor wore no clothes, and then they went on about their business.²⁸

¹*Sandusky Daily Register*, Sandusky, Ohio, December 19, 1889.

²Burke Davis, *The Long Surrender* (New York: Random House, 1985).

³Davis, *The Long Surrender*; *The New York Herald*, “Jeff Davis and His Congress—The Senate Report Against Him—A Dismal Picture,” March 24, 1865; *Ibid*, “The Rebel Flight From Richmond—The True Rebel Character Revealed,” April 11, 1865; Thomas, Kettell, *History of The Great Rebellion; from its commencement to its close, giving an account of its origin, the secession of the southern states, and the formation of the Confederate government, the concentration of the military and financial resources of the federal government...together with the sketches of the lives of all the eminent statesman and military and naval commanders, with a full and complete index* (Hartford, Conn., L. Stebbins, F.A. Howe: 1866), 754.

⁴*The Daily Gazette*, Fort Wayne, Indiana, July 26, 1866; *The Adams Sentinel*, Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, May 9, 1865; *Syracuse Daily Courier and Union*, Syracuse, New York, May 20, 1865.

⁵*The Herald and Torch*, Hagerstown, Maryland, June 20, 1866; *Davenport Daily Gazette*, Davenport, Iowa, September 17, 1866.

⁶Nina Silber, *The Romance of Reunion: Northerners and The South, 1865-1900* (Chapel Hill: North Carolina Press, 1997); *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, vol. xxxi, July 1865, 260; *The Janesville Gazette*, “Davis’ Disguise and Davis’ Irons,” July 27, 1865.

⁷Kristen Smith, ed., *The Lines Are Drawn Political Cartoons of the Civil War* (Athens, GA: Hill Street Press, 1999).

⁸*The Adams Sentinel*, May 23, 1865.

⁹George Arnold, *The Life and Adventures of Jefferson Davis*, (New York: J.C. Haney Publishers, 1865); *The Elyria Independent Democrat*, Elyria, Ohio, June 7 1865.

¹⁰Nina Silber devotes considerable attention to the symbolism behind the Davis capture in Silber, *Romance of Reunion*.

¹¹*The Adams Sentinel*, May 23, 1865; George H. Hepworth, *The criminal; The crime; The penalty* (Boston: Walker, Fuller and Company, 1865), 7-8.

¹²Hepworth, *The Criminal; The Crime; The Penalty*, 18.

¹³Joseph Hartwell Barrett, *Life of Abraham Lincoln, presenting his early history, political career, and speeches in and out of Congress; also a general view of his policy as president of the United States; also, a general view of his policy as president of the United States; with his messages, proclamations, letters, etc., and a history of his eventful administration, and of the scenes attendant upon his tragic and lamented demise* (Cincinnati: Moore, Wiltstach & Baldwin, 1865), 721; *The Janesville Weekly Gazette*, “Interview with Ex-Governor Aiken of South Carolina,” May 25, 1865; *The New York Herald*, March 24, 1865.

¹⁴Whitelaw Reid, *After the war: a southern tour, May 1, 1865 to May 1, 1866* (London: S. Low, Son, & Marston, 1866), 366-367.

¹⁵*Overland Monthly, and Out West Magazine*, vol. 6, San Francisco, September 1885, 300.

¹⁶John W. Draper, *History of The American Civil War*, vol. III, (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1870), 115; John Schouler, *History of The United States of America Under The Constitution*, vol. vi (New York: Dodd,

Mead, & Company, 1899), 620; *Appleton's Journal of Literature, Science and Art*, New York, May 9, 1874, 602; *The American Missionary*, vol. 44, "Southern Notes," New York, 33.

¹⁷*Papers of The Military Historical Society of Massachusetts, vol. x, Critical Sketches of Federal and Confederate Commanders* (Wilmington, North Carolina: Broadfoot Publishing, 1989), 253; *Puck*, New York, June 22, 1881, 224; *War Papers of The Commandery of The State of Wisconsin, Military Order of The Loyal Legion of The United States, vol. II*, (Wilmington, North Carolina: Broadfoot Publishing, 1993), 129, 135.

¹⁸John Formby, *The American Civil War: A Concise History of its Causes, Progress, and Results* (New York: Scribner's, 1910), 439; *War Papers, Being Read Before the Commandery of The State of Wisconsin Military Order of The Loyal Legion of The United States, vol. III*, "The Capture of Jefferson Davis," 120; *The Des Moines Leader*, Iowa, November 3, 1901; Charles Francis Adams, *Lee at Appomattox and Other Papers* (Boston: Riverside Press, 1901), 3-11.

¹⁹James Schouler, *History of The United States of America Under The Constitution, vol. vi*, (New York: Dodd & Mead, 1899), 53; *Granite Monthly, A New Hampshire Magazine Devoted to History, Biography, Literature, and State Progress, vol. xxii*, "Northern Troops at Disadvantage," (Concord, NH: Granite Company, 1897), 4.

²⁰*The Tribune's* comments repeated in *The Decatur Republican*, Decatur, Illinois, August 19, 1875; *The Prairie Farmer*, "Making Treason Odious," Chicago, August 14, 1875, 46.

²¹William Davis, *Jefferson Davis: The Man and His Hour* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1996); William Cooper, *Jefferson Davis, American* (New York: Knopf, 2000).

²²*The Stevens Point Journal*, Stevens Point, Wisconsin, April 8, 1876; *The Independent, Devoted to the Consideration of Politics, Social and Economic Tendencies, History, Literature and the Arts*, Boston, January 20, 1876, 16; *The Coshocton Age*, Coshocton, Ohio, February 7, 1885; *The Oregonian*, Portland, "Is He Representative?" August 24, 1885.

²³*The Edwardsville Intelligencer*, Edwardsville, Illinois, June 8, 1871; *Christian Advocate*, "Dixon and Mississippi," New York, September 4, 1879, 569.

²⁴*The Fort Wayne Daily Gazette*, Fort Wayne, Indiana, June 28, 1881; John Nicolay and John Hay, *Abraham Lincoln A History* (New York: The Century Company, 1886), 345, 276; *The Atlantic Monthly*, vol. XLVIII, Boston, July 1881, 406; *The Literary World; A Monthly Review of Current Literature*, "Jefferson Davis' Book," June 18, 1881; 207; *The Independent*, "Jefferson Davis Speaks For Himself," June 23, 1881, 11; *Puck*, June 22, 1881, 268.

²⁵The sources here are taken from a sampling of editorial opinion about Davis representing many different states: *Public Opinion: Representing A Comprehensive Summary of The Press Throughout The World On All Important Current Topics, vol. I*, (Washington, D.C.: The Public Opinion Company, 1886), 61-65.

²⁶*The Sunday Republican*, Mitchell, South Dakota, December 8, 1889; *The Independent*, "The Southern Press Eulogize the Dead—The New York Journals Quite the Reverse," Massillon, Ohio, December 11, 1889; *Sandusky Daily Register*, "The Last of Jefferson Davis," Sandusky, Ohio, December 18, 1889.

²⁷*The Reminiscences of Carl Shurz, vol. 3*, (New York: S.S. McLure Company, 1907), 143.

²⁸Emma Cheney, *A Young Folks' History of The Civil War* (Boston: Estes and Lauriat, 1884), 539; *The Century, a Popular Quarterly*, "The Pursuit and Capture of Jefferson Davis," February 1890, 593; *War*

Papers of The Military Order of The Loyal Legion of The United States, vol. I, (Wilmington, NC: Broadfoot Publishing Company, 1993), 186.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

World War I changed lots of things. King Arthur would not have felt at home in the trenches of wartime Europe. Here chivalry and honor seemed as vital, as alive to soldiers as would a sword to an artilleryman, or a horse and lance to a tank captain. What appalled World War I veterans and then the entire world was first, the scale of the death and devastation, and second, that no one could explain why or to what end these things had occurred. Indiscriminate machine-gun fire sprayed volleys of death upon the other side without regard to the bravery of the victims. Those who arose and crossed the no man's land were not courageous but foolish—because no amount of skill, internal fortitude, nor sense of duty would save you from the slaughter. Thus, both the brave and the cowardly met the same fate. How could a knight survive in these conditions with his honor intact? How could he rationalize the chemical gas warfare that was faceless, cruel, and completely unpredictable? World War I demoralized a generation of Westerners and ushered in a new kind of war that no one wanted. Progressives across the West found their vision of perfecting the world through technology, education, and reform hard to justify in the wake of such a war. For British historian Sandra Schwab, World War I both ended the Progressive Era and killed the Victorian sensibility. She wrote “even though knights, soldiers, and gallantry still abounded in literature and especially popular culture,

chivalry as a dominant code of conduct received its final deathblow on the battlefields of Europe.”¹

It is debatable the degree to which chivalry still has a place in American culture. The twentieth-century civil rights movement changed America in many profound ways, including the way we think of and portray the past. Many Americans now link southern chivalry to the backwardness and brutality of the patriarchal and racist Jim Crow South. Instead of romantic, some Americans began to interpret southern chivalry as an excuse to justify a stratified society where white men are on top of the ladder and all blacks occupied a permanent subclass. Chivalry has not gone away but nonetheless has a dark side that Americans discovered and commented on. Often it seems that honor and duty as ideas have been regulated to fantasy movies or stories told to children. Manly codes of behavior such as chivalry oftentimes appear as the stuff of fairy tales or as the subject of satires and derisive commentary. On the other hand, the Middle Ages served as the backdrop for several Hollywood releases in recent years that feature characters of the knightly mold. There has even been an updated version of King Arthur. What keeps chivalrous heroes vital to Westerners is that most fundamental to the power of Camelot: it likely never existed in real form. No one knows for sure if Arthur was one man, an amalgamation of many, or was simply dreamed up collectively from the romantic imagination. If Westerners have not yet rejected chivalry completely, if it is still usable as means to measure a man, then perhaps it will never die. Maybe the once and future king will return someday to reign, after all.²

The chivalrous man has proven to be resourceful and adaptable. Knights still occupy a special place in the hearts of Westerners, and Americans still recite tales about heroes in shining armor. It is noteworthy to mention that even as a hero archetype appears

no longer valid to the modern world, it becomes increasingly desired by the masses. After all, the appeal of chivalrous masculinity in most any period has usually been the idea that it is harder and harder to find. Therefore, perhaps the death of the knight made Americans yearn for his return. Those who pine for the chivalric man can find the remnants of the knight within the stories about the more distinctly American type of hero such as the cowboy. For the most part, cowboys still chose duty and honor over self, but they also exhibited an individuality and rough exterior more menacing than the Christian knight. It is not strange that Americans or those of any place and time would allow for a wide range of characteristics which define the ideal man while combining preexisting archetypes together into single heroes. Scholar Christine Berberich argued that the English gentleman as a symbol of civility and gentility was deeply rooted in nineteenth-century chivalry but survived well past the end of the Victorian era. For her, the overt, aggressive displays of manliness which characterized Progressive-era culture were not a departure from gentlemanly masculinity but emblematic of it. For Berberich, the gentleman, “based on the medieval cult of the knight,” could “be adapted and modified to fit contemporary needs.” The rise of competitive sports as a means to assert one’s manhood is not unlike medieval dueling or other rites of passage from around the world. In any case, it is quite hard to argue that chivalry and the knight have not persisted in American culture in one form or another.³

Somewhere, Stonewall Jackson is growing tired of all this talk about chivalry. It is probable that most Americans during the Civil War assumed that Jackson more than Lee deserved to be known as the Confederacy’s greatest soldier. It is most definitely wrong to think Jackson has been forgotten, but he has not been worshipped nearly to the degree of Lee. Still, Jackson should take heart that the power of the Puritan archetype has

bestowed to America a distinctive inheritance that is full of contradictions. There is the matter of Puritanism and the Protestant work ethic—the inquisitive and industrious spirit so necessary to the promotion of capitalism. On the other hand, “puritanical” is often a pejorative term used to denote someone of a closed-minded, repressive, humorless orientation. As we all have learned, Puritans alternated between working, praying, and having no fun. With the Jackson figure, there is a large degree of the stern Puritan, along with a little dash of the knight, and some characteristics consistent with the Old West hero. This helps clarify why Americans have talked about Jackson always as separate from other generals of either the Confederacy or Union. Whether one admired Jackson’s way or despised it, few denied that he was simply different from almost all other men of his day. That is, except perhaps for John Brown, a radical holy warrior that probably surpassed even Jackson in intensity. In the end, Americans esteemed Jackson’s generalship, but they have not been entirely comfortable with Jackson the man.

With the Lee figure it was the man more than the general that Americans loved. It must be said that Lee’s generalship has been studied, scrutinized, and praised probably more than any of his Civil War counterparts. His tactical offensive-defensive maneuvers were bold and most often effective. Unlike many of the Virginians, though, most found it unnecessary to make Lee the perfect general in order to cast him as the ideal Arthurian hero. Most did not doubt that Lee somehow shared the blame for the Confederacy’s catastrophic defeat at Gettysburg. Yet, this did not make that much difference. When compared to his military record Lee’s character shined brighter, because Americans tended to talk about him as if it he were without blemish of any kind. As the Lee story went, he did not need a war to reveal his greatness—it was evident to anyone who ever encountered him. Lee’s knighthood was not entirely based on performing his part in the

Civil War, because stories persuaded that he was born a southern gentleman and never deviated from this path. As a youth in Virginia, as a young West Point cadet, as understudy to Winfield Scott in Mexico, as a peacetime planter, as a Civil War general, and as a postwar educator, Lee responded to any given scenario with the same grace and humility.

The persona of the Lee figure provides a key to understanding masculinity and sectionalism in Victorian America. For southerners, Lee actualized the Bayard-type hero figure they had read and dreamed about. Antebellum southerners repeated over and over that their culture produced knightly men, and Lee, though not the only, was the best, most tangible proof of their claims. Having a successful general as their leading man was important, but even more critical was that Lee always *acted* like a romantic knight. For northerners, Lee was the ideal southern man. They congratulated Lee for his conduct through secession, war, and peace, because his way illustrated the proper course for every southerner. Lee despised secession but relented to it, displaying both his loyalty to the Union and his duty-bound oath to protect those under his care. In leading the rebel cause, most thought that Lee fought a skillful, valorous, but restrained kind of war, dueling with his opponent but never disrespecting him. After Lee did all he could do and the Confederate cause was clearly sunk, Lee the gentleman general laid down his sword at Appomattox Courthouse. From his exalted place in the hearts of southerners, Lee could have counseled resistance against Reconstruction. He did not, and in fact, Lee chose the quiet, dignified role of college president. In another sense northerners idealized Lee because he gave life to the romantic, graceful, genteel, Old South character that they found appealing. This was the side of southern life and myth that northerners judged amiable and charming. Even if they found that most southerners fell short of Lee's lofty

standard, his existence allowed northerners to believe in southern, and therefore American, chivalry and romance. Lee provided the living evidence of a quaint place and time, full of gentleman and proper ladies, ruled by time-honored codes of behavior, that Americans could call their own. They did not have to go back there physically to live, leaving behind modernity and progress, but they could travel to the Old South of their imaginations at any time.

Stories about Lee, the Old South, and everything associated with the Confederacy, however, have been revised in recent decades. The blockbuster success of *Gone With The Wind* in 1939 perhaps signified the zenith of the antebellum South's mainstream acceptance. In the film the Old South itself is the hero—and its destruction was something for all Americans to lament, the story went. Filmmakers since, along with scholars, and social commentators of all kinds have made it more difficult to represent the slaveholding South as a romantic place. Civil Rights activists are most responsible for this trend. Long denied a voice of their own, during the twentieth-century black Americans reminded everyone that slavery was a cruel institution. A society based on coercion, violence, and racism is nothing to envy or mourn, many have rightly said. Thus, one could conclude that, although he may have been handsome or pleasant most of the time, Lee owned slaves and fought for a cause seeking to perpetuate a terrible practice. Lee and every symbol of the Old South can at any time give rise to disagreement and even confrontation within the discourse of black civil rights. Here, the differences between the Lee, Jackson, and Davis figures are often lost. Supporters of civil rights conflated Confederate leaders together in a way resembling what northerners did immediately after the Civil War. They all were a part of the slave power, therefore they were all wrongheaded and unworthy as heroes. For many of the more intransigent white

opponents of racial progress, Lee, Jackson, and Davis became prominent symbols of segregation and inequality. The modern Ku Klux Klan, for instance, adopted Confederate iconography to help spread its message. It is not an accident that at one of the most sacred locations for the modern Klan, Stone Mountain, Georgia, an enormous mural of Lee, Jackson, and Davis is carved into the side of the monumental granite outgrowth. The work began in 1964, during the middle of some of the most racially divided years in American History.

Recent stories about the Civil War have done more than just highlight race problems, however. In his 2008 book, Gary Gallagher discussed how movies and art reflected the different ways in which contemporary Americans remember the Civil War. In short, Gallagher found that popular representations indicate four current modes of thinking about the Civil War, its results, and its lessons. Each encompasses a preference, a desire to see the Civil War as: a righteous southern crusade against the North, a war to preserve The Union, one to free the slaves, and an unfortunate but necessary conflict that resulted in reunion. Gallagher said the last two have in the last several decades been the most pervasive. Americans prefer to think about the Civil War in terms of reunion at least as much as its legacy of emancipation, Gallagher contended. The Lee story lives on—mostly because the Lee figure still conjures an idealized chivalry and stirs up (sometimes) feelings of sectional harmony. Even after the Civil Rights Movement, visual representations of Lee and Jackson drastically outpace those of Union heroes. It seems that at least some of the power of the Lee story still remains.⁴

The Lee figure helped usher in the reunion—or rebirth—of North and South following the Civil War. In Jungian thought, the rebirth or renewal of the hero is a motif only as old as the first stories humans ever told. For pagans, it was an understanding of

nature, birth, death, seasons, the time to reap, the time to sow; the cyclical rise and fall that is life. For Westerners it is prominent in the most famous story ever told: the death and resurrection of Christ. If a nation might be a religion, then northerners and many southerners, as well, assuredly hoped that the Civil War would engender an American renaissance. That is to say, many Americans told stories that indicated they wished that the Civil War wiped clean any imperfections and ignited the reign of a new, prosperous, if not more perfect Union. It is not unusual they would do so. Americans needed an explanation of why the Civil War cost so many thousands of lives and was so bitterly contested. They wanted the end result of all the destruction to ultimately mean something profound and permanent. It is not unlike the theologian who used stories to come to terms with human suffering or with the unknown origins of life itself. Lee gave to many Americans the following: a story of how one great, romantic civilization (the Old South) fought valiantly but fell to a greater more modern one that absorbed the best qualities of the defeated, but discarded the rest. The American rebirth had room for chivalry and the genteel remnants of Victorian culture. It was not the Lee alone who allowed for the work of reunion to begin, but he had a great deal to do with it.⁵

Jeff Davis attempted to destroy the American revival, and northerners hated him for it. Most Americans could not allow Davis and all he represented to appear as respectable and important. They felt it their duty and right to shame him into obsolescence, lest anyone take him and his ideas too seriously. To do otherwise, to let Davis have his say and write his books, was akin to admitting that the fire-eaters were right, that the slave South was superior to the free North, that secession was not wrong, and that states' rights radicalism was as American as George Washington or Paul Revere. That northerners insisted that Davis was antique, irrelevant, out of touch, etc.,

demonstrated both that many believed this was true and that many wanted to believe it true. Northerners did not want to acknowledge that any group of people calling themselves Americans would regard Davis as an important man. They distanced themselves from Davis, and said in time that southerners would, as well. When southerners did not, northerners felt the reunion process disrupted if not forever stunted. Davis was the pillar of the unreconstructed South, the one which preferred to call the Civil War the War of Northern Aggression. Northerners did not like this South and did not want to be associated with it. If Americans likened the Civil War to a great, cleansing baptism, then southerners were guilty of backsliding: they heard the gospel of reunion, came forward, but then went back to their old ways. The continued southern reverence of Davis indicated to most Americans that the sections could not truly become one again. Davis stood in the way of the American rebirth, and despite what southerners said, northerners refused to bow down to the tyrant king.

Beyond the details of the Davis story, or that of any other Civil War figure, is something more important in scope: the story of the Civil War, and of America itself. The manner in which Americans conceive of leading figures says something about the Civil War, Victorian culture, the Progressive Era, etc., which together reveal some interpretation of American History as a whole. The point being, as Lee or Davis have a story, so does America; but this master narrative is grander and more difficult to tell. One could argue, as some have, that the Civil War gave full expression to the notion of America as something approaching a religion. The religion began perhaps when the early Puritans made explicit their goal of building a city on the hill for the entire world to emulate. Thomas Paine said it better than most, when he linked the cause of America with that of all men of all times, but none ever articulated the vision of a holy America

better than Abraham Lincoln. For Lincoln America was the “last best hope” of the world, and he described the eventual Union victory in the Civil War as a “new birth of freedom.” No American since has better described American exceptionalism. Even if they did not like the emancipation aspect of Lincoln’s vision, most wanted to see the Civil War as a new birth of something.⁶

Whether one considers America a religion or not, knowing the stories is essential to knowing the place. George Washington chopped down a cheery tree and could not tell a lie, we have all heard, but this of course never happened. Most everyone has heard of Paul Revere, and how his Ride saved the American Revolution from disaster, yet his role was actually much less significant than Longfellow’s poem related. The lack of credibility of these and other stories did not mean Americans felt them any less. The stories’ conclusions about heroes, what they did, and who they were, resonated with Americans even if untrue. Stories serve the basic human need to give meaning to events which have occurred and to create characters infused with the qualities that people either covet or scorn: making heroes or villains. Origin stories may be the most important of all, in part because almost every community has invented them. In many cases the origin story is of the mythical or supernatural kind—as in Native American cultures, as with King Arthur and England, the Roman Empire, and many more. America presents a unique case in this regard. The American people cannot trace themselves to a mysterious Dark Ages epoch, and clearly its founders were men and not myths. Lacking the mysterious or otherworldly stuff of classic myths, American stories tend to discuss rebirth or renewal, instead. The Civil War as a “new birth,” a fresh start, or a new beginning is one of the most important stories about America ever told. Lee, Davis, and to a lesser degree, Jackson, played no small role in the drama. Their lives and legends composed a

chapter in the book about the Civil War, rebirth, and America itself. There are many more players in the larger drama, many more chapters in the unfolding American narrative. There is no reason to doubt, that as Americans continue to sort out and explain the past, they will do so by telling stories to themselves and the world.

¹Sandra Schwab, “What is a Man? The Refuting of The Chivalric Ideal At The Turn of The Century” in Jennifer Palmgreen and Lorretta Holloway, eds., *Beyond Arthurian Romances: The Reach of Victorian Medievalism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 229.

²Fitzhugh Brundage, *The Southern Past: A Clash of Race and Memory* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 2008); Here I reference the popular stories about Arthur written by T.H. White and published as a single volume in 1958 as *The Once and Future King*.

³Christine Berberich, *The Image of The English Gentleman in Twentieth Century Literature* (Burlington, VT: Ashcraft Publishing, 2007), 21.

⁴Gary Gallagher, *Causes Won, Lost, and Forgotten: How Hollywood & Popular Art Shape What We Know About The Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008).

⁵Carl Jung, *Man and His Symbols* (London, Aldus Books, 1964).

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