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Through Northern Eyes: Robert E. Lee and the Northern Press

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THROUGH NORTHERN EYES:
ROBERT E. LEE AND THE
THE NORTHERN PRESS

A Thesis

by

STEVEN D. SHELLER

Submitted to the Graduate College of
The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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May 2017

Major Subject: History

THROUGH NORTHERN EYES:
ROBERT E. LEE AND THE
THE NORTHERN PRESS

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by
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May 2017

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ABSTRACT

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Most historians would agree that it is an anomaly in history how Robert E. Lee became an American icon. General Lee was the commander of a rebel army that was trying to split the country he had once loyally served into two. Even after being defeated at the Battle of Appomattox, instead of Lee suffering the normal fate of all failed revolutionaries, he was pardoned and allowed to continue to live in his native Virginia. Over a short amount of time after General Lee's death he was elevated from rebel to hero. The origins of this can be traced back to the Civil War when General Lee was given accolades in the country's newspapers he was fighting against. Due to the way the Northern Press regarded Lee this must be considered the base for understanding how the people of the North came to view General Lee not as a traitor, but as an American icon.

DEDICATION

To complete this thesis many months of hard work, research, writing, and multiple gallons of coffee were considerably required. None of this would have happened without my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ who gave me inspiration in times of writer's block and showed me where to find information; the love and support of my beautiful wife, Elizabeth "Tot" Sheller who helped me along the way; and my parents, who pushed me to get into the Master's Program in the first place. Finally I dedicate this thesis to my daughter Joy Rylee Sheller whom I love and can't wait to be a father to; we await your arrival dear. Thank you all for the endless love and patience that you give me.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I will always be grateful to Dr. Michael Faubion who chaired my thesis committee. He gave proficient direction and advice for writing this thesis in editing and correcting oversights that I made along the way. Also, thank you Dr. Charles Waite, who initially birthed this journey by providing the idea and facilitating research avenues to explore. Finally, I would also like to thank Dr. Thomas Knight for consenting to be on the thesis committee and the time and effort it takes to see this through. All of the help these men provided kept me on the right track.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

We can scarcely take up a newspaper that is not filled with nauseating flatteries of Lee from which it would seem that the soldier who kills the most men in battle, even in a bad cause, is the greatest Christian, and entitled to the highest place in heaven.¹

- Fredrick Douglass on Robert E. Lee

In my estimation, one of the supremely gifted men produced by our Nation. . . . selfless almost to a fault . . . noble as a leader and as a man, and unsullied as I read the pages of our history. From deep conviction I simply say this: a nation of men of Lee's caliber would be unconquerable in spirit and soul. Indeed, to the degree that present-day American youth will strive to emulate his rare qualities . . . we, in our own time of danger in a divided world, will be strengthened and our love of freedom sustained.²

- President Dwight D. Eisenhower in a letter to Dr. Leon Scott

When Americans look at wars in history we tend to see them as wars of Good vs. Evil. During any war, society will look for villains that they can throw their hatred and disdain at. In

¹ "PBS," *Introduction: Robert E. Lee* accessed June 3, 2016.

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/introduction/lee-introduction/>

² Jarvis, Gail "*Robert E. Lee at 200*," LewRockwell.com, 2013,

<https://www.lewrockwell.com/2007/01/gail-jarvis/robert-e-lee-at-200/> accessed June 3, 2016

World War II it was Hitler and the Nazi Party, in the Revolutionary War it was the tyrannical King George III, and during the Cold War it was Communists and Joseph Stalin. These men were criticized and scorned by American Newspapers henceforward American History has held them as examples of what we as a Democracy stand against.

In the bloodiest war in American history, brother fought brother over the issue of State's Rights and Slavery for four years in The Civil War. The ten years of Reconstruction that followed left deep wounds in the Nation that would take many decades to fully heal. The Civil War had its own share of villains, but despite the fact that the United States had defeated a section of its country that took up arms in defiance of the Federal Government's authority, none of the probable consequences that a victorious government would take upon those who were in power and rebelled against them ensued. More to the point, those very men began to be viewed not as rebels to be scorned, but men that all of the United States should look up to as an example to aspire to.

The chief man, who should have been considered the object of disdain, was instead held higher than even those generals who had been the cause of his defeat. When one types in Robert E. Lee's name on Amazon.com one will get 31,000 entries and out of those one has to get to the fourth page before one finds a book that has a negative spin on Robert E. Lee. With so many books about one single man one would think there would be an equal number of negative books to positive. Instead one finds hundreds of books praising the man who fought so long and hard to destroy the unity of the United States. Robert E. Lee has been hailed as a paragon of virtue and knightly chivalry, a man who held his personal honor above all things in his life except his love of God. He fought for the Confederate States of America as its greatest General for four years and handed defeat after bloody defeat to the Army of the Potomac that opposed him. Despite

this, very little to nothing negative is ever spoken about the man during the Civil War and even one-hundred and fifty years after his surrender to General Ulysses S. Grant at Appomattox Court House.

I find it odd that one finds little negative commentary is written about Lee by the North and by historians today. Every time one reads a book about the Civil War or see a Documentary or a film like Gettysburg Lee is painted in a positive light. The question I have is why? One never sees the North make Lee out to be a villain. It is possible that General Lee is so well respected by the population that nothing negative would stick, and because of a lack of Northern heroes who measured up to General Lee's abilities and virtues. Lee could have also been a means to an end for Lincoln's political opponents in the press to try and discredit Lincoln because the President's chosen generals consistently failed. Also the efforts of men like Jubal Early and the Lost Cause of the Confederacy helped elevate Lee to the status of national hero. Another reason we see so little negativity is because the majority of what one takes as fact about Robert E. Lee came from one historian, Douglas Southall Freeman and from Pulitzer Prize winning book *R. E. Lee: A Biography*. This book would form the bases for future works about Lee from future Civil War historians, who would base their works off of Freeman's research.

One sees political cartoons of Jeff Davis dancing with Benedict Arnold and Satan but why is Lee not with them? Lee after all was for all intents a more visible traitor to the United States. He was an officer with the United States Army who was offered the command of all Federal Armies and refused the offer so he could fight for his home state. Lee once supposedly said:

“Duty then is the sublimest word in our language. Do your duty in all things. You cannot do more; you should never wish to do less.”³

Lee swore an oath to serve the United States and then turned his back on that oath and took up arms against the very country his own father Henry “Light-horse Harry” Lee fought to free from the British Empire. Despite this oath and the fact that Lee dishonored it, the people of the United States hold him as an example of American greatness and an icon for the world.

The purpose of this thesis is to track the reputation and the perceptions of Robert E. Lee in the North. The thesis will use a variety of primary and secondary sources that range from before the Civil War to the present day. For primary sources, the thesis will draw upon newspaper articles from the major cities in the North during the time frame of the paper. With the invention of the telegraph and a better mechanical printing press, news correspondents in the field were able to send back almost up to the minute reports on the events of a battle thus making the primary sources from newspapers that much more reliable. These papers will have had the biggest influence on how the populous perceived the Civil War and the men who fought and lead the armies of both sides. As one sees today, the news media is able to use this influence to push the American public one direction or another. Each newspaper that will be selected will hold opinions about Robert E. Lee that would help shape the post bellum reputation of Robert E. Lee. The thesis will cover several issues that are linked to Robert E. Lee’s reputation in the United States that are debated by historians and link them to opinions of Northern newspapers. General

³ Billington, James H. “*Respectfully Quoted: A dictionary of Quotations,*” (Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, 2010) page 93 (Note this quote is debated as to Lee said it himself or it was merely attributed to him. However this quote does appear in an article from the *Daily Eastern Argus* in the form of a letter from Gen. Lee to his son Custis Lee. “Gen Robert E. Lee,” *Daily Eastern Argus* [Portland Maine] 15th April 1865. This article’s letter has been declared a forgery by experts, but there is still debate on its authenticity.)

Lee's personal letters will also be used to give his own insights into some of the decisions he made and his opinions on the key issues that defined the United States during this time.

Chapter Two will cover Lee's early life and his stance on slavery. Lee's early life and the experiences he gained at West Point and as a soldier on the staff of General Winfield Scott during the U.S.-Mexican War would shape how General Lee viewed war and be the basis for many of his opinions about slavery and secession.

Lee's stance on slavery is where we find a more varied opinion about him from various authors and historians. Bruce Catton, in his book *The Coming of the Fury*, points out that Lee did not believe in slavery. Catton uses a quote that Lee gave to General Winfield Scott in which he states that if he owned every slave in the South he (Lee) would free them all if that would bring peace.⁴ In a letter to his wife written in 1856 he stated that slavery as an institution is a moral and political evil in any country. However, this same letter has been used by his critics for another passage where General Lee goes on to say; "the painful discipline they are undergoing is necessary for their instruction as a race, & I hope will prepare & lead them to better things."⁵ Douglas Freeman in his biography of Lee felt that he was only acquainted with slavery at its best, and he judged it accordingly.⁶ The slavery issue was a conflicting issue for the nation and while Robert E. Lee did not side with the abolitionists, he was not committed to slavery. It would be General Lee's opinions on slavery and his seemingly anti-slavery views that would be held up to the people of the country both North and South to help in the reconciliation of the country. By showing that the greatest Southern hero was against Slavery it would be hoped that the South

⁴ Bruce Catton, "*The Coming Fury*," (New York: Fall River Press, 1961) pg. 335

⁵ Douglas Southall Freeman, "*Robert E. Lee: A Biography*," (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1934) volume 1 pg. 372

⁶ Ibid vol. I pg. 373

would be more accepting of free African-Americans and make the North more forgiving to the South. Because of this, the positive perception of General Lee would have been highlighted for everyone to see. The reason that this perception matters is that in order to make Lee an acceptable American hero his stance on slavery had to be made clear that he did not support the institution. By showing this, it influences our attitudes about General Lee by showing that he fought only to defend his native land of Virginia and not to defend slavery.

Chapter Three will look at the earliest mentions of General Lee in the Northern press by looking at Lee's role in the John Brown raid and then looking at how Lee dealt with the issue of secession and how the Northern Press viewed Lee's decision to leave the Union. This chapter will establish that General Lee was already well known at least by name if not actions in what would be the biggest news story prior to the Civil War. Author Michael Korda in his book *Clouds of Glory: The Life and Legend of Robert E. Lee* wrote of the two men saying;

In the short time the two men had spent together in the paymaster's office in the armory at Harpers Ferry, they may not have recognized how much they had in common. The Virginia gentleman and the hardscrabble farmer and cattle dealer from New England were both deeply religious, both courageous, both instinctive warriors, both gravely courteous, both family men, both guided by deep and unquestioning moral beliefs. John Brown may have been, as Robert E. Lee believed, a fanatic and a madman (the first was certainly true, the second not at all), but like him Lee, too, despite his firm opinion that "obedience to lawful authority is the foundation of manly character," would himself become, at last, a rebel—perhaps the greatest rebel of all.⁷

⁷ Korda, Michael "When Robert E. Lee Met John Brown and Saved the Union," The Daily Beast, May 2014 <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2014/05/15/when-robert-e-lee-met-john-brown-and-saved-the-union.html> accessed March 22nd 2017

Chapter Three will also cover what Douglas Southall Freeman called in a chapter of his biography of General Lee as “The Answer He Was Born to Make”, General Lee’s struggle with the idea of secession. The chapter will analyze what Lee personally thought about secession using his letters to get a sense of what Lee’s thoughts were. The chapter will show how the Northern press viewed Lee’s decision to leave the U.S. Army and join the Confederacy as well as their theories on why Lee chose Virginia over the United States. Historian’s opinions about Lee’s reasoning will be analyzed and compared.

Chapter Four will cover Robert E. Lee’s reputation in the North during and after the Civil War. Newspapers in the Northern cities will be examined to see how the overall reputation of Robert E. Lee changed from the antebellum years to the early 1900s, and how the opinions of historians and politicians of the North and with people outside of the United States had been influenced by these Newspaper articles. The chapter will look at how the Northern press reported on General Lee’s movements, the results of the battles that Lee fought, and the final outcome of the Civil War. Many historians support the idea of Lee being a great hero and the origins of that are found in the Northern press’s treatment of General Lee. The most famous of all authors who wrote perhaps the greatest biography on Robert E. Lee was Douglas Southall Freeman. His Pulitzer Prize winning four volume biography about Lee would prove to be one of if not the definitive works written about Lee. Historian Clifford Dowdey stated in his book *Lee* that “Lee was emphasized as the human aspects of a Christian gentleman.”⁸ Not all historians that believe in Lee’s greatness are American. British born Francis Lawley called him the “noblest son to whom the North American continent has hitherto given birth.”⁹ On the other side we see that as the

⁸ Dowdey, Clifford “*Lee*,” (New York: Bonanza Books, 1965) pg. iii

⁹ Lawley, Francis, “General Lee,” *Lee the Soldier*. Ed. Gary W. Gallagher (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996) page 75

years have passed the idea that Lee was a great American hero has slowly begun to be challenged. Historian Thomas Connelly states that, “no single war figure stands in greater need of re-evaluation than that of Lee.”¹⁰ Edward H. Bonekemper III concluded that, “Lee had escaped blame for his many failures during the war.”¹¹

The Civil War was a major part in the history of the United States and General Lee is perhaps the most well-known figure of the Civil War second only to President Abraham Lincoln. Lee’s actions, his decisions, and his opinions would help shape the manner in which the South carried out their plans to become an independent nation and how the Northern press viewed him. One cannot underestimate the power of the press at this time and one could make the argument that the press wielded more power then as compared to now. The views that they offered to their readers would often conflict from city to city and changed multiple times over the Civil War, but their views would help shape the post bellum opinion about General Lee and form the basis for many of the positive images that the United States would have of Lee.

¹⁰ Connelly, Thomas, “Robert E. Lee and the Western Confederacy,” *Lee the Soldier*. Ed. Gary W. Gallagher (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996) page 190

¹¹ Bonekemper III, Edward H. “*Ulysses S. Grant: A victor, not a Butcher*,” (Washington D.C.: Regnery Publishing, Inc, 2004) page ix

CHAPTER II

LEE'S EARLY LIFE AND HIS OPINION OF SLAVERY

Robert E. Lee was born on January 19, 1807, to Ann Carter Lee and General Henry “Light Horse Harry” Lee in Stratford, Virginia. The Lee’s were considered one of the “First Families” of Virginia and were members of the upper class. General Henry Lee was a Revolutionary War hero and one of George Washington’s favorite generals. Despite this, Robert E. Lee was not born into wealth as his father squandered the family fortune in various business ventures and land speculation. Robert E. Lee would rarely see his father as Henry Lee would spend two sentences in debtor’s prison before Robert was two years old. It would be the War of 1812 that ultimately cost young Robert his father. Henry Lee had made the mistake of being a member of the anti-war camp and was severely wounded when a mob attacked a jail house that Henry Lee was being kept for protection after he and others had been placed there for supporting the editor of the *Baltimore Federal Republican* who printed an anti-war editorial.¹² The mob nearly killed him and in the aftermath of the attack, Henry Lee left the United States and his family in self-exile never to see his wife and children ever again. Later Henry Lee would die on his way to return to his family in Georgia in 1818; Robert E. Lee was only 12 years old.

Raised in Alexandria, Virginia, Robert E. Lee grew up hearing stories about George Washington and the virtues and glory of the Father of the United States from people who were alive that personally knew the general. In their Alexandria home, God came first and George

¹² Freeman volume I pg. 15

Washington second.¹³ As Robert E. Lee grew, a desire to restore his family name grew with him, but due to the financial disaster left behind by Henry Lee, it was going to be a difficult task. According to Thomas Connelly, Robert E. Lee briefly considered a career in medicine,¹⁴ but instead of this peaceful profession, Robert E. Lee chose the path of a soldier. In 1824, Robert E. Lee accepted an appointment to the United States Military Academy and finished 2nd in his class of 1829 graduating with no demerits. In 1831 Robert E. Lee married his childhood playmate and distant cousin Mary Custis who was the granddaughter of Lee's hero George Washington. Lee's marriage to Mary Custis was a happy one that would last forty years. Although she was not often able to travel with Robert E. Lee, the two of them went on to have seven children in a fourteen year span.

In 1846 the U.S.-Mexican War started over a dispute on the Texas/Mexico border sending Robert E. Lee to the staff of General Winfield Scott. The war served as a training ground for many future Civil War generals on both sides. Men like George B. McClellan, Thomas J. Jackson, Ulysses S. Grant, James K. Longstreet, and George G. Meade all would battle in the conflict as U.S. soldiers giving them valuable combat experience that they would put to deadly use against their fellow countrymen just fifteen years later. Captain Robert E. Lee fought in many of the major battles on Winfield Scott's march to Mexico City. Lee's name is mentioned time and time again in reports and letters. With his personal reconnaissance before the Battle of Cerro Gordo, Lee helped assure the United States victory and winning the admiration of General Scott who called him "the very best soldier that I ever saw in the field".¹⁵ The historian John

¹³ Ibid volume 1 pg. 22

¹⁴ Connelly, Thomas, "*The Marble Man: Robert E. Lee and His Image in American Society*," (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978) pg. 6

¹⁵ Pryor, Elizabeth B. "*Robert E. Lee (ca. 1806-1870)*," Encyclopedia Virginia http://www.encyclopediavirginia.org/Robert_E._Lee accessed June 8, 2016

Esten Cooke gives a statement by the Hon. Reverdy Johnson, that he "had heard General Scott more than once say that his success in Mexico was largely due to the skill, valor, and undaunted energy of Robert E. Lee."¹⁶ For his actions at Cerro Gordo, Lee was promoted to brevet Major and ultimately later into the U.S.-Mexican War was promoted to brevet Colonel for actions at the battles of Contreras, Churubusco, and Chapultepec. Concerning the U.S.-Mexican War itself, Lee had this to say; "It is true we bullied her. For that I am ashamed, for she was the weaker party, but we have since, by way of set-off, drubbed her handsomely and in a manner no man might be ashamed of. They begin to be aware how entirely they are beaten, and are willing to acknowledge it."¹⁷

After the U.S.-Mexican War, Robert E. Lee moved from posting to posting. Most of Lee's assignments were engineering assignments creating coastal forts. These assignments would teach Robert E. Lee the virtue of earthen works being used in the defense of an area. The experience of creating fortifications would be used by Lee in the creation of the defenses around Richmond during the Civil War. While Lee would garner the nickname of the "King of Spades" as a result of his creation of entrenchments, these defenses would make their presence known during the Siege of Petersburg where Lee held off the Army of the Potomac for over nine months and would prove to be the precursor to trench warfare that would be used extensively during World War I.

On September 1, 1852, Robert E. Lee became the ninth superintendent of the United State Military Academy at West Point. From 1852 to 1855, Lee served as superintendent of West Point, and was therefore responsible for educating many of the men who would later serve under

¹⁶ Cooke, John Esten, "*A Life of Gen. Robert E. Lee*," Project Gutenberg E-book. January 12, 2004 <http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/10692/pg10692.html> accessed June 9, 2016

¹⁷ White, Henry Alexander, "Robert E. Lee," (New York: Fred DeFau & Company, 1897) pg. 46

him as Confederate leaders and those who would serve against him as Union leaders on the battlefields of the Civil War. The position of Superintendent of West Point was considered to be a prestigious posting in the Army. To be the superintendent was an honor that Robert E. Lee did not want. Despite the fact that the posting tended to last four to five years and he would be able to spend time with his oldest son Custis who was a cadet at West Point at this time, he felt that he did not have the proper experience to manage West Point. In a letter to General Joseph Gilbert Totten, Lee states “Although fully appreciating the honor of the station and extremely reluctant to oppose my wishes to the orders of the Department, yet if I be allowed any option in the matter, I would respectfully ask that some other successor than myself be appointed to the present able Superintendent.”¹⁸

While Lee did not think of himself as up to the task, others did not share that assessment. Jefferson Davis wrote that “Lee as superintendent was a position for which he was peculiarly fitted as well by his attainments as by his fondness for young people, his fine personal appearance, and impressive manners.”¹⁹

Despite not wanting to be the Superintendent, Lee took to the duty with the same amount of diligence that he had at his various other postings. The best aspect of this assignment was the fact that Lee would be able to spend time with his family that he would not normally be able to on the various postings he had been and would be on later in life. His oldest son, Custis, was a cadet and his youngest son Robert was at an age where Lee could begin to properly teach him. One of the first acts that Lee accomplished as superintendent was the improvement of the equestrian

¹⁸ Freeman vol. 1 pg. 317. *Freeman states that the original of this letter to Totten has disappeared from US archives. Freeman quotes the text from Henry White's Robert E. Lee and the Southern Confederacy pg. 47-48*

¹⁹ Davis, Jefferson “Robert E. Lee,” *The North America Review*, January 1st, 1890 pg. 57. Digital <https://archive.org/stream/jstor-25101921/25101921#page/n1/mode/2up> accessed June 14, 2016

situation that West Point was having. Elizabeth Brown Pryor states that one notable contribution was Lee's focus on equestrian instruction.²⁰ Many of the horses were unfit and the stables and riding area were unkempt and somewhat dangerous in their dilapidated state. Lee requested new horses and a riding pitch and because of this, many fine young Calvary officers that were at West Point while Lee was superintendent would reap the benefits of this change. During the Civil War, Lee would count on the likes of former students such as J.E.B. Stuart and Fitzhugh Lee to lead his cavalry in daring raids, and then watched as another former student, Philip Sheridan, destroyed them.

Lee's time at West Point is seen as having a minimal impact on the curriculum that West Point taught. Instituting discipline into the Corps of Cadets seems to be one of Lee's main areas of focus during his tenure. Henry White writes that Lee made discipline at the West Point more efficient.²¹ Multiple times Lee instituted discipline actions on cadets including two instances of the potential dismissal of his own nephew Fitzhugh Lee. Lee did not play favorites and began court martial proceedings against his nephew. Fitzhugh was only saved from dismissal after Lee was given pledges from all cadets that the whole class of cadets would not commit Fitzhugh's offence for the academic year.²² Physical improvements to the campus were also accomplished with the building or renovation of several buildings to acquisition of funds that would be used for future such projects.

There are some inconsistencies between historians about Robert E. Lee's reputation among the cadets during his tenure. Douglas Southall Freeman states that Lee would often find reasons

²⁰ Pryor, Elizabeth Brown. "*Robert E. Lee (ca. 1806–1870)*." Encyclopedia Virginia. Virginia Foundation for the Humanities, 9 Mar. 2014.

http://www.encyclopediavirginia.org/Robert_E._Lee#its2 Accessed June 14, 2016

²¹ White pg. 48

²² Freeman vol. 1 pg. 334

to forgive cadets who committed errors if they admitted their offences. For serious offenses, Lee would urge that cadets be court-martialed or dismissed and would fight readmission, but if possible he would try to allow a cadet to stay. cadets did not fail to appreciate the justice and mercy of Lee's administration.²³ Author Bradley Gilman writes that such leniency won the hearts of the young men and helped to make them respond more willingly when he tightened the screws of military discipline.²⁴ Frederick Trevor Hill states that Lee governed the cadets without seeming to command them and, as at his own home, he exerted a peculiarly happy influence upon all with whom he came into personal contact.²⁵

However Elizabeth Brown Pryor wrote that Lee's rigid belief in the virtue of "duty" was not appreciated by the cadets, among whom he was unpopular.²⁶ Pryor offers no evidence of this while endorsements from former students like Lieutenant-General John M. Schofield in his own memoirs state that "Lee was the personification of dignity, justice, and kindness, and was respected and admired as the ideal of a commanding officer."²⁷

Overall Lee's tenure of West Point was relatively unremarkable but he was considered an efficient superintendent. A British observer Captain C. C. Chesney stated that he was able to

²³ Ibid vol. 1 pg. 346

²⁴ Gilman, Bradley "*Robert E. Lee*," (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1915) pg. 68. The Internet Archive. <https://archive.org/stream/robetelee00gilmgoo#page/n8/mode/2up> Accessed June 14th 2016

Freeman vol. 1 pg. 351

²⁵ Frederick Trevor Hill. "*On the Trail of Grant and Lee*," (New York: Firework Press, 2015) Kindle edition Locations 444-445

²⁶ Pryor, Elizabeth Brown. "*Robert E. Lee (ca. 1806–1870)*." Encyclopedia Virginia. Virginia Foundation for the Humanities, 9 Mar. 2014.

http://www.encyclopediavirginia.org/Robert_E._Lee#its2 Accessed June 14, 2016

²⁷ Schofield, John M. "*Forty-Six Years in the Army*," (New York: The Century Co., 1897) The Internet Archive, <https://archive.org/stream/fortysixyearsina00scho#page/n5/mode/2up> accessed June 14th 2016

testify to its completeness and the efficiency of the course of studies and disciplines.²⁸ Freeman states that Lee worked no real revolution in West Point and the discipline that he instituted fell apart after he left.²⁹ It has been a popular belief that because of his tenure at West Point, that Lee gained inside knowledge of several future generals on both sides of the Civil War. It is not for certain that Lee did gain any special knowledge of the men who would graduate under his tenure as Superintendent that would help him in battle. Only a handful of the cadets who graduated and sided with the North directly confronted Lee as general officers. Of the men who worked with Lee as staff members, only two would face Lee directly. Fitz John Porter would experience mixed results in his encounters with Lee, with his V Corps by being beaten at the Battle of Gaines Mill and the Second Battle of Bull Run, gaining a great victory at the Battle of Malvern Hill, and being the reserve corps during the Battle of Antietam. The second staff member was Joseph Reynolds who fought and defeated Lee at the Battle of Cheat Mountain. Of those Cadets who sided with the Confederacy, Lee would use his knowledge of them from West Point when giving promotions, with J.E.B Stuart being the most important instance. It is certain that Lee would use the experience that he gained as a superintendent of West Point when he would later become President of Washington College.

Around the time that Robert E. Lee was at West Point, the United States was having problems with the Native American tribes. Since becoming the Secretary of War, Jefferson Davis had been pushing Congress to increase the size of the U.S. Army. The request was rebuffed until what became known as the Grattan Massacre, a short battle where a former student of Lee's named Lieutenant John L. Grattan and his thirty men were killed by a group of Sioux Indians. After the

²⁸ Chesney, Charles Cornwallis "A Military View of Recent Campaigns in Virginia and Maryland," (London: Smith, Elder and co., 1863) pg. 50

²⁹ Freeman vol. 1 pg. 351

massacre, Congress authorized the creation of four new regiments, two of infantry and two of cavalry. Robert E. Lee was promoted to Lieutenant Colonel and made second in command of the 2nd Cavalry stationed in Texas under the overall command of Albert Sidney Johnston who would later fall at the Battle of Shiloh. Lee's time in Texas can be summed up in two words, court-martial. Lee did not engage in a single fight with Indians in Texas and did not engage in a battle with the bandit Juan Nepomuceno Cortina during what would become known as the Cortina Wars who had occupied Brownsville, Texas. Before Lee could arrive with troops from San Antonio, Major Samuel Heintzelman and his 117 troops attacked and routed Cortina's band and forced them across the Rio Grande into Mexico. Lee had been given orders to pursue Cortina into Mexico if needed, but Lee felt that his horse were not up to the effort and instead sent letters to the Mexican governor of Tamaulipas protesting their inaction against Cortina. After securing the border, Lee returned to San Antonio and spent most of his time at his base performing the role of a peacetime officer, or being sent from place to place to preside over court martial proceedings. It was during his time in Texas that Lee would get bad news from home. His father-in-law George Washington Parke Custis had passed away. All of Lee's sons were gone leaving no adult male to direct affairs. The two oldest sons, Cutis and Rooney, were on duty at their respective army posts leaving Lee's wife and children alone. Lee asked for two month's leave and proceeded back to his home in Arlington. It was there that Lee learned that he was the executor of Cutis's will and what followed would be the issue for Lee and his opinion about Slavery in the forefront of his history.

Southerners had possessed slaves since the first Africans were brought over to Jamestown, Virginia in the early days of English colonization. The growth of the plantation system and the high price cash crops like tobacco, indigo, and especially "King" cotton led to the increase

demand for labor. With this demand, the Trans-Atlantic slave trade would bring hundreds of thousands if not millions of enslaved Africans to the New World. The major justification for the enslavement of Africans that the Southern slaver holders used was the Bible. The core idea behind the justification of Biblical African slavery was the story behind the Curse of Ham. Ham had been a son of Noah and was cursed for insulting his father by being forced to be servants to his brethren.³⁰ Professor Robert L. Dabney who was a professor of Ecclesiastical History, General Jackson's chief of staff and a Presbyterian pastor wrote in his book "the words of Noah are not a mere prophecy; they are a verdict, a moral sentence pronounced upon conduct, by competent authority' that verdict sanctioned by God. Now if the verdict is righteous and the execution blessed by God, it can hardly be, that the executioners of it are guilty for putting it in effect."³¹ Many religions including Muslims, Jews, and Christians believed that this curse had marked Ham with black skin thus justifying slavery of Africans.³² Other Scriptures that were used by Southern plantation owners to justify holding slaves were Ephesians 6:5³³ and Titus 2:9.³⁴ Many pro-slavery supporters used the Bible to show that God had not only marked who should be slaves, but showed that slaves should accept their status. Dabney's book, *A Defense of Virginia*, written in 1867 was dedicated to showing in both the Old and New Testaments the various religious justifications of slavery and how God had allowed it.

The issue of Robert E. Lee's opinion about the institution of slavery has been a matter debated by historians and political activists since Lee's death. On one side there are those who

³⁰ Genesis 9:23

³¹ Dabney, Robert L. "*A Defence of Virginia [And Through Her, of the South]*," (New York: E.J. Hale & Son, 1867) pg. 106

³² Goldenberg, David M. "*The Curse of Ham: Race and Slavery in Early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*," (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005) pg. 6

³³ "Slaves obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling" Ephesians 6:5

³⁴ "Tell slaves to be submissive to their masters and to give satisfaction in every respect" Titus 2:9

say that Lee had very little interaction with slavery and those slaves that Lee did own he treated kindly due to accounts from former slaves that belonged to Lee that state that he was a kind master. Lee is said to have had a personal dislike for the institution of slavery itself and would not be upset if slavery ended. Lee also did not fight for the Confederacy to defend slavery, but to fight for State's Rights, and to defend his native Virginia.

On the other side are those that say that Lee was a harsh master. That upon the death of his father-in-law George Washington Parke Custis, Lee kept all two hundred slaves enslaved for five years when Custis had ordered in his will to emancipate all his slaves upon his death. Stories from former slaves and newspapers articles tell of Lee personally whipping slaves and splitting families by selling some of the slaves in order to pay down debts.

Douglass Freeman states that this letter was the prevailing view among most religious people of Lee's class and says that Lee did not spend much time among slavery and only was acquainted with slavery at its best and judged it accordingly.³⁵ Elizabeth Brown Pryor on the other hand states in an interview with *USA News* that Lee was a hard taskmaster and treated his slaves poorly.³⁶ These two historians stake out the extremes of both ends of the debate with Freeman taking the traditional view of Lee's involvement with slavery while Pryor is taking a more modern look at the issue.

Lee's main experience with slavery came about through his marriage to Mary Custis Lee. Lee had inherited a slave from his mother, but little is known about her other than the fact she was

³⁵ Freeman vol. pg. 373

³⁶ Pryor, Elizabeth Brown. "The Private Thoughts of Robert E. Lee." Interview by Diane Cole. Private Thoughts of Robert E. Lee. *USA News*, 24 June 2007. <http://www.usnews.com/news/articles/2007/06/24/the-private-thoughts-of-robert-e-lee> Accessed 20 June 2016

mentioned in Lee's 1846 will as property. The slaves that were owned by his father, Harry "Lighthouse" Lee were lost due to bankruptcy and sold off before young Robert E. Lee was born, but Harry Lee himself found slavery a "dreadful evil and was pleased that the Constitution outlawed the slave trade."³⁷ While in command of the 2nd, George Custis died leaving Lee as the only man capable of being the will's executor. Lee, through the position of executor of Custis' will, inherited the slaves that belonged to the Custis estate. The number of slaves varies from source to source but most estimates put those around two hundred individuals, with sixty-three at Arlington where Lee would spend his time trying to exercise the will. The terms of the will gave different parts of Custis' holdings to Lee's three sons, Custis, Rooney, and Robert. Each of Lee's daughters was to receive ten-thousand dollars to be paid by selling parts of the land that Custis owned. The slaves that Custis owned were to be emancipated within five years of Custis' death.³⁸

It is the issue of the emancipation of the Custis slaves that give us the debate on Robert E. Lee's stance on slavery. The first and most widely cited letter in the debate of Robert E. Lee and slavery was written on December 27, 1858, to his wife Mary Lee.³⁹ If one knew nothing about Robert E. Lee, then this letter would seem to be full of contradictions. It reads like someone who is sitting on the fence about the issue of slavery by saying it is wrong, but necessary. A breakdown of this letter can be used to attack Lee's stance on slavery and to defend him. The various relevant passages from the letter have been divided.

³⁷ Lee, Henry "Memoirs of the war in the Southern department of the United States vol:1," (Philadelphia: Bradford and Inskeep, 1812) Kindle Edition loc 2915

³⁸ Decker, Karl and McSween, Angus, "*Historic Arlington*," (Washington D.C.: Decker and McSween Publishing Company, 1892) page 80-81

³⁹ Letter to Mary Lee from Robert E. Lee December 26, 1857

In defense of Robert E. Lee being against slavery we have the following passages to draw upon:

- 1) That slavery as an institution, is a moral & political evil in any Country. It is useless to expatiate on its disadvantages
- 2) While we see the Course of the final abolition of human Slavery is onward, & we give it the aid of our prayers & all justifiable means in our power

While the whole of the letter is considered by some to be anti-slavery, these are the only passages that in reality Lee does actually condemn it. Lee states that slavery as an institution is evil in any country and he prays that it will end. These two lines do suggest that Lee was against slavery as claimed by many Lee biographers, but when we read the rest of the letter we see sections that put the idea that Lee was against slavery into question.

In accusing Robert E. Lee as pro-slavery we have the following passages:

- 1) The painful discipline they are undergoing is necessary for their instruction as a race, & I hope will prepare & lead them to better things.
- 2) How long their subjugation may be necessary is known & ordered by a wise Merciful Providence.
- 3) The blacks are immeasurably better off here than in Africa, morally, socially & physically.

The previous two lines show that Lee felt that slavery was needed for the African slaves to get prepared for their future. He further states that Providence (God) had ordained that Africans be enslaved. This view that was held by many including Lee also felt that God would set them free

in His own time. The last selection is saying that blacks are better off here than in Africa. That line is open to your own interpretation in the condition that statement would be true or not. I feel that it would be up to the former slaves themselves to make that determination on how better off they are compared to their African comrades.

The lines mentioned above are Lee's views on slavery with this letter. However if one reads about Lee's view of abolitionist it shows that he did not agree with them in their methods. The evidence for his opposition to abolitionist can be read here.

- 1) the Systematic & progressive efforts of certain people of the North, to interfere with & change the domestic institutions of the South,
- 2) The Consequences of their plans & purposes are also clearly set forth, & they must also be aware, that their object is both unlawful & entirely foreign to them & their duty; for which they are irresponsible & unaccountable; & can only be accomplished by them through the agency of a Civil & Servile war.
- 3) the Abolitionist must know this, & must See that he has neither the right or power of operating except by moral means & suasion, & if he means well to the slave, he must not Create angry feelings in the Master
- 4) that the reasons he gives for interference in what he has no Concern, holds good for every kind of interference with our neighbors when we disapprove their Conduct;
- 5) Still I fear he [the abolitionist] will persevere in his evil Course.

- 6) Is it not strange that the descendants of those Pilgrim Fathers who crossed the Atlantic to preserve their own freedom of opinion, have always proved themselves intolerant of the Spiritual liberty of others?

Instead of seeing this letter as mainly a pro/anti-slavery letter as many historians are apt to do, we see that it is an extensive attack on the Abolitionist movement. Lee uses religious, historical, moral, and Constitutional arguments on why the Abolitionist movement should leave the domestic institution of the South alone. In lines 1 and 4, we see that Lee dislikes the attempt at interference from Northerners in slavery and states that the South does not complain about what the North does with its own people. Many times Southerners would point out that their slaves were better treated than the poor immigrant workers in the factories of the North. Lines 2, 3, and 5, Lee states that the Abolitionist have no legal right to interfere and that if they continue trying to, it would lead to Civil War and that they know that they have no right or power to interfere with slavery. In line 6 we see Lee using irony when describing how the Abolitionist of New England forgot how their Pilgrim ancestors left England for freedom and now try to impose their will and ideas on others.

The Lee to Mary letter of 1857 has been held up as the primary letter of Lee's slavery beliefs and is perhaps one of the most often quoted letters. When broken down, we see that the Lee letter of 1857 does little to settle the question of the stance that Lee takes on slavery but other lesser known letters do exist that give other examples of Lee's belief on the issue of slavery. The next letter was written to his son William Henry Fitzhugh (Rooney) Lee discussing the state of Rooney's family and what Robert E. Lee was doing at his post in San Antonio. One section of this letter says the following:

I fear I shall have to purchase a servant. I find it almost impossible to hire one, and nearly all the officers in the department have been obliged to resort to purchase....At present I have a boy belonging to Major Marlin for whom I pay \$20 per month. I have thought someone about Richmond might have a good family servant for whom they are obliged to part, and for whom they would like to procure a master. Do you know of any?⁴⁰

This letter clearly shows that despite Lee thinking that slavery was evil; he was quite willing to purchase a slave for himself-or rent one. The terms boy and master give a racist image of Lee that is contrast with the view that Lee did not care for slavery. There seems to be no evidence that Lee did purchase a slave while in Texas but despite this, the letter still shows willingness on Lee's part to put at least one man in bondage to him and rent one out. This letter of Lee is never mentioned in the various biographies written about him. Thomas Connelly states that this was "deliberately done in order to make Lee more acceptable to the nation as a whole."⁴¹ Unlike the letter to his wife, this letter is clear that Lee believes in buying and selling slaves and seems more bothered by the inconvenience of paying \$20 for the use of another officer's servant than buying his own. It is no surprise that this letter is not seen in most of Lee's biographies. Also not mentioned in the biographies of Lee, one finds that at least during the early part of Lee's career in the Confederate Army, he had two slaves with him acting as personal servants. During the West Virginia Campaign when Lee was assigned to coordinate the Confederate efforts to gain control of western Virginia, Lee mentions in a letter that he had received some socks from his wife and had gifted some to Perry who was a slave from Arlington. Lee goes on to say that he

⁴⁰ Lee to W.H.F. Lee, July 9, 1860, in Bolling Lee Papers, VHS

⁴¹ Connelly pg. 118

had other pairs of socks that were in the care of Merideth, a slave from White House.⁴² This letter and the letter from Texas show that Lee had slaves or wanted slaves with him wherever he was posted in both the United States Army and Confederate States Army.

The next letter written by Lee is seen as a response to Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation. In a letter written to James Seddon, the Confederate Secretary of War, Lee writes:

In view of the vast increase of the forces of the enemy, of the savage and brutal policy he has proclaimed, which leaves us no alternative but success or degradation worse than death, if we would save the honor of our families from pollution, our social system from destruction, let every effort be made, every means be employed, to fill and maintain the ranks of our armies, until God, in his mercy, shall bless us with the establishment of our independence. I have the honor to be, very respectfully, your obedient servant, R. E. Lee, General.⁴³

Lincoln's Proclamation gave freedom to all slaves in areas of the rebelling states of the Confederacy that were not under Federal control. It also allowed for African-Americans to join the Union Army. By the time the Civil War was over, 179,000 Africans-Americans would fight in the Union army with 40,000 dying for the cause. What this letter suggests is that Lee is upset with the emancipation of the slaves in the Confederacy. He feels that unless the South wins the Civil War, that the social system that the South has, whites in charge of blacks, will be destroyed. The sentence where he says would save the honor of our families from pollution seems to suggest that Lee is worried about blacks marrying whites, a common fear at that time in

⁴² Robert E. Lee to Mary Lee October 7th 1861. Lee, Fitzhugh "General Lee," (Fawcett Publications INC: Greenwich, Conn, 1961) page 124-125

⁴³ Robert E. Lee to James Seddon Secretary of War January 10, 1863. War of the Rebellion: OPERATIONS IN N.VA., W.VA., MD., AND PA. Serial 031 Chapter XXXIII Page 1086

both North and South that even Lincoln was against⁴⁴. Lee's reaction to the Emancipation Proclamation was also printed in the Northern Press. In an article by the *New York World* that was picked up in other papers across the United States such as the *San Francisco Bulletin*, *Boston Evening Transcript*, and the *Milwaukee Sentinel*, General Lee sent a formal communication with his arguments against the Emancipation Proclamation to Gen. Halleck.

In what the *New York World* called "exceedingly elaborate", Lee states firstly that the proclamation is unwarrantable and that in no work on military law is the instigation of a servile war recommended indorsed, or even mentioned. Lee says that the Southern people are justified in regarding it as coming under brutal and savage expedients of a barbarous people.

Secondly Lee states that Confederate Military authorities would be compelled to retaliate in the sternest manner upon all the Union prisoners in the form of executed Union prisoners for every woman or child murdered by rebelling Negroes.⁴⁵

No other Confederate General's opinion was printed in such a manner and in so many papers from across the United States. Lee's arguments were basic antebellum ones that did not reflect the changing times of war. The type of servile insurrection would become quite common just thirty-three years later when the United States government would support Cuban Rebels against the Spanish government. Lee's second argument about the execution of prisoners had been carried out if not officially sanctioned by the Confederate Government by Confederate troops such as the massacre of black troops at Fort Pillow and reports of black troops being killed after surrendering at the Battle of Fort Wagner and the Battle of the Crater. If these executions were

⁴⁴ Fourth Lincoln-Douglas Debate Charleston, Illinois September 18, 1858

⁴⁵ "General Lee's Arguments Stated," *New York World* [New York] 22nd November 1862

officially sanctioned, then Lee could expect Confederate POWs to be executed as well in retaliation. Lee's letter did state that the Confederate Government is in earnest about this and will do even more than it threatens. I could not see Lee executing Union prisoners on his own volition, but it is very likely the Confederate Government would have carried out its threat. Fortunately none of what General Lee and the Confederates stated occurred. Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation did not cause a slave revolt and prisoners were not executed by either side in significant numbers. No reports of Negro soldiers killing women and children were ever recorded. Because of the lack of a massive slave revolt we will never know if General Lee was bluffing with his eye for an eye statement.

The final letter was written in 1865 near the end of the Civil War when the South was considering arming slaves for the purpose of creating more soldiers to fight for in the Southern Armies. This idea was a violation of the core beliefs of the Southern politicians who knew that their fight to keep slavery would be lost even if they won the Civil War by arming slaves. The former slave and perhaps the most powerful African-American of his day Fredrick Douglas, described what would happen if blacks were allowed to be soldiers for the Union by stating that "Once let the black man get upon his person the brass letter, U.S., let him get an eagle on his button, and a musket on his shoulder and bullets in his pocket, there is no power on earth that can deny that he has earned the right to citizenship."⁴⁶ This very true idea expressed by Douglas, was the stopping block in the way of those who wanted to arm slaves to fight for Southern independence. The irony of the situation was that George Washington himself, the man that the South considered to be the pinnacle of Southern aristocracy and a national hero, offered the

⁴⁶ Freeman, Elsie, Wynell Burroughs Schamel, and Jean West. "The Fight for Equal Rights: A Recruiting Poster for Black Soldiers in the Civil War." *Social Education* 56, 2 (February 1992): 118-120.

exchange of freedom for military service from slaves. In a letter to Robert E. Lee's father, Henry Lee, Washington said "We must use the Negroes or run the risk of losing the war...success will depend on which side can arm the Negroes faster."⁴⁷ As during in the Revolutionary War, slave owners were afraid that if armed, the slaves would fight against them instead of for them and that if they won the Civil War, they would be forced to free those slaves.

The idea of arming slaves was not new in the Confederacy. Confederate Major General Patrick Cleburne had advocated arming slaves in 1863. His proposal was written and sent to President Davis who urged that the matter be kept secret at all costs. Davis was worried that the Confederate press would learn of the plan that the Cause would be harmed and the matter was dropped and the officers involved ordered not to discuss it. Lee may have been aware of Washington's letter to his father and General Cleburne's proposal, and now like his hero, Lee faced a similar problem. In the letter to Andrew Hunter, a Virginia lawyer and advisor to Lee, Lee, like Washington, acknowledges that if they are to arm slaves that they needed to move quickly. Lee states "Should the war continue under the existing circumstances, the enemy may in course of time penetrate our country and get access to a large part of our negro population. It is his avowed policy to convert the able-bodied men among them into soldiers, and to emancipate all."⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Malcolm, Joyce Lee, "*Peter's War: A New England Slave boy and the American Revolution*," (Yale University Press: New Haven, 2010) page 104

⁴⁸ Robert E. Lee to Andrew Hunter January 11th, 1865
<http://www.civilwar.org/education/history/primarysources/robert-e-lee-to-andrew.html>

Lee went on to write that “We should not expect slaves to fight for prospective freedom when they can secure it at once by going to the enemy, in whose service they will incur no greater risk than in ours.”⁴⁹

Like the first letter, the letter to Hunter is a mixed message. In it Lee states that he does not want to change the master/slave relationship, but Lee also advocates the Emancipation of Slaves if only to try to take away some of the motivation the North has for fighting the Civil War. Lee also feels that slaves would make good soldiers because of the long habits of obedience and subordination, coupled with the moral influence which the white man possesses over the black, gives a foundation for that discipline needed for soldiers. Lee felt that if they were going to arm any of the slaves that it should be done quickly so that there would be time to train and arm the former slaves. Lee’s opinion of arming slaves did not stay secret. In the North, it was printed widely in papers such as *The Albany Evening Journal* that stated that “General Lee was in favor of the proposition of arming slaves.”⁵⁰ *The Boston Daily Advertiser* stated that the “Rebel Congress passed a bill giving Gen. Lee authority to call for or order a detail of not less than 50,000 slaves for service in the army as soldiers.”⁵¹ *The Indiana Journal* story was picked up by the *Williams Port Warren Republican* that stated that “Robert E. Lee, their beau-ideal of chivalry and wisdom, has demanded that the residue of the slave men of the South shall be armed and used against us.”⁵² Another article in the *Adams Sentinel* of Gettysburg, PA writes; “John Brown was hung for attempting to arm the slaves of Virginia and use the for the prosecution of a

⁴⁹ Robert E. Lee to Andrew Hunter January 11th, 1865

<http://www.civilwar.org/education/history/primarysources/robert-e-lee-to-andrew.html>

⁵⁰ “Gen. Lee Favors the arming of Slaves,” *Albany Evening Journal* [Albany, New York] 19th December 1864

⁵¹ “Arming of Slaves by the Rebels,” *Boston Daily Advertiser* [Boston] 4th January 1865

⁵² “Arming Black Men for the Union and Vice Versa,” *Indiana Journal* [Indianapolis]; “Arming Black Men for the Union and Vice Versa,” *William’s Port Warren Republican* [William’s Port, Indiana] 30 March, 1865

reasonable warfare on the Government. Jefferson Davis and Robert E. Lee both openly and currently advocated the arming of the same class for the same purpose. What is to save their necks from the halter?⁵³ In the end, the arming of slaves did not happen in time. Some regiments had been formed in the waning days of the Civil War, but none of these troops ever saw combat and the idea to arm slaves to save the Souths right to own them died.

All four of these letters provides Robert E. Lee's views in his own words that clearly shows a man that supported slavery and was willing to buy slaves. Emancipation was only to be considered if it saved the Confederacy from conquest at the hands of the North. Lee would not have considered freeing all the slaves as he believed that a Master/Servant relationship between whites and blacks was the best one. These views should not come as a surprise due to the near canonization of Lee in the United States; we don't see the negative aspects of his life. Lee's early biographers did an excellent job of cherry picking the good things about Lee's opinion on slavery and leaving the more inflammatory information out.

The issue of Robert E. Lee and the slaves that were under his control was of national interest before the start of the Civil War. Several articles appeared in newspapers detailing several complaints about the way the Custis slave emancipation issue was being handled. The first article appeared in the *New York Times* in December of 1857:

“The emancipation of the slaves left by the late Geo. W.P. Custis of Arlington, will, it is feared, be much retarded, if not wholly prevented by the heirs, chief among whom stands John Washington, Esq., the man who cuts down the old ancestral oaks of Mount Vernon to sell for canes, and who charges visitors fifty cents a head for the privilege of visiting the tomb of

⁵³ *Adams Sentinel* [Gettysburg, Pennsylvania] 13 June 1865

Washington, and who has turned the home of the Father of his Country into a slaveholding pen. All attempts to see the will of Mr. Custis have proved abortive. After much inquiry, it had been admitted by the heirs that the slaves are to be set free in five years. The poor darkies tell a different story. They of the Arlington House say that they were called into the room and stood by the deathbed of their master, and that after having taken leave of each of them personally, he told them that he had left them and all his servants, their freedom. At Arlington there were about one hundred negroes. Mr. Custis owned two plantations about sixty miles below Richmond, on which were about 250 or more slaves. According to the statement of those who were about him at the time of his death, he died in the full possession of his senses. Besides, it is well known that the old gentleman always said that he intended to free his slaves at his death. I have frequently heard him say as much, though not in exact terms. Unfortunately when this declaration was made to the house servants of Arlington, no white man was in the room and the testimony of negroes will not be taken in Court. It is already whispered about town that foul play is in process in regard to those negroes on the Virginia plantations' that they are now being sold South' and that all fo them will be consigned to hopeless Slavery unless something is done. Unless the will is produced, nothing can be done. And that there is a will and that the will contains something in regard to the emancipation of the negroes, has been publicly admitted by the heirs. It would be awful if the last remaining member of the household of Washington would not be allowed, should be prevented by fraud, from carrying out those precepts which he had learned, standing by the knee and hearing form the lips of that immortal Sage!"⁵⁴

Even though Lee is not named as executor in the article, we know that it was him that was left to execute the Custis will. The fact that Lee was not letting the slaves go was something that was

⁵⁴ "The Slaves of Mr. Custis." *New York Times* [New York City] 30 Dec. 1857

against the law and to suggest that Lee was not doing as Custis had wanted rankled him enough that Lee wrote a response within a few days.

My attention has been called to an article from the *Boston Traveller*, dated Washington, 24th December, republished in the New York Times of the 30th, under the caption of “*The Slaves of Mr. Custis*.”

It is there charged that the emancipation of the slaves will be much retarded, if not wholly prevented by his heirs’ that all attempts to see the will of Mr. Custis have proved abortive’ that it is whispered about Washington that foul play is in progress in regard to the negroes on his plantations in Virginia’ that they are now being sold South’ that all of them will be consigned to hopeless Slavery unless something is done’ and that nothing can be done unless the will is produced & c.

As it is also stated that Mr. Washington, of Mount Vernon is the chief among the heirs who have conspired to suppress the will of Mr. Custis and to defraud the negroes of their rights, I think it proper to state that Mr. Washington is not one of the heirs, has no interest in Mr. Custis estate, and so far as my knowledge extends, is ignorant of the provisions of his will. Mr. Custis left his property to his daughter and only child, and her children. His will was submitted to the Alexandria County Court for probate on the first day of its session (7th December) after the arrival of the executor at Arlington and is there on record in his own handwriting, open to inspection.

There is no desire on the part of the heirs to prevent the execution of its provision in reference to the slaves, nor is there any truth or the least foundation for the assertion that they are being sold South.

What Mr. Custis is said to have stated to the Washington correspondent of the *Boston Traviler* or to his assembled slaves, on his death bed is not known to any member of his family. But it is well known that during the brief days of his last illness, he was constantly attended by his daughter, grand-daughter and niece, and faithfully visited by his physician and doctor. So rapid was the progress of his disease, after its symptoms became alarming, that there was no assembly of his servants, and he took leave of but one who was present when he bade farewell to his family.

E.E. Lee. Executor.⁵⁵

This will be the only time that Lee will answer a charge against him in print. Why Lee decided to answer the accusations of this letter and not the later ones, we don't know. The main thing about this is that even before the Civil War, Lee and his life were being judged by the public at large. In this case, Lee seeks to set the record straight. There is an issue about the selling of Slaves. Lee claims that he did not sell any slaves South, but one letter contradicts this fully and another showed that Lee did hire his slaves out to other plantation owners. We will look at these letters further.

Two articles from 1859 bring the issue of the Custis slaves back to national attention. These articles were written by people who claim to be acquainted with the situation at Arlington and claimed to have knowledge of when and how Custis freed his slaves. The two letters state:

Sir: I live one mile from the plantation of George Washington P. Custis, now Col. Lee's as Custis willed it to Lee. All the slaves on this estate, as I understand, were set free at the death of Custis, but are now held in bondage by Lee. I have inquired concerning the will but can get no

⁵⁵ "The Will of Mr. Custis." *New York Times* [New York City] 8 Jan. 1858

satisfaction. Custis had fifteen children by his slave women. I see his grandchildren every day' they are of a dark yellow. Last week three of the slaves ran away; an officer was sent after them. Overtook them nine miles this side of Pennsylvania, and brought them back. Col. Lee ordered them whipped. They were two men and one woman. The officer whipped the two men, and said he would not ship the woman, and Col. Lee stripped her and whipped her himself. These are facts as I learn from near relatives of the men whipped. After being whipped, he sent them to Richmond and hired them out as good farm hands.

Yours, a Citizen.⁵⁶

To the Editor of the *N.Y. Tribune*.

Sir: It is known that the venerable George Washington Parke Custis died some two years ago' and the same papers that announced his death announced also the fact that on his deathbed he liberated his slaves. The will, for some reason, was never allowed any publicity, and the slaves themselves were cajoled along with the idea that some slight necessary arrangements were to be made, when they would all have their free papers. Finally they were told five years must elapse before they could go. Meantime they have been deprived of all means of making a little now and then for themselves as they were allowed to do during Mr. Custis's life, have been kept harder at work than ever, and part of the time have been cut down to half a peck of unsifted meal a week for each person, without even their fish allowance. Three old women, who have seen nearly their century each, are kept sewing, making clothes for the field hands, from daylight till dark, with nothing but the half-peck of meal to eat' no tea or coffee- nothing that old people

⁵⁶ "To the Editor of the New York Tribune." *New York Tribune* [New York City] 19 June, 1859

crave- and no time given them to earn these little rarities, as formerly. One old man, eighty years old, bent with age, and whom Mr. Custis had long since told "had done enough," and might go home and "smoke his pipe in peace," is now turned out as a regular field hand. A year ago, for some trifling offense, three were sent to jail, and a few months later three more, for simply going down to the river to get themselves some fish, when they were literally starved.

Some three or four weeks ago, three, more courageous than the rest, thinking their five years would never come to an end, came to the conclusion to leave for the North. They were most valuable servants, but they were never advertised, and there was no effort made to regain them which looks exceedingly as though Mr. Lee, the present proprietor, knew he had no lawful claim to them. They had not proceeded far before their progress was intercepted by some brute in human form, who suspected them to be fugitives, and probably wished a reward. They were lodged in jail, and frightened into telling where they started from. Mr. Lee was forthwith acquainted with their whereabouts, when they were transported back, taken into a barn, stripped, and the men received thirty and nine lashes each, from the hands of the slave-whipper, when he refused to whip the girl and Mr. Lee himself administered the thirty and nine lashes to her. They were then sent to Richmond jail, where they are now lodged.

Next to Mount Vernon, we associate the Custis place with the "Father of this free country." Shall Washington's body guard" be thus tampered with, and never a voice raised for such utter helplessness?

- A.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ "Some facts that should come to light." *New York Tribune* [New York City] 21 June, 1859

Both of these letters claim the same thing as the letter written in 1858 claimed that Custis had freed his slaves on his deathbed. The truthfulness of these letters is subject to question and many Lee biographers have different opinions about the events occurred. According to Douglas Freeman, There is no evidence, direct or indirect, that Lee ever had them or any other Negroes flogged.⁵⁸ Michael Fellman found the claims that Lee had personally whipped Mary Norris "extremely unlikely," but admits that Lee may have had them whipped as it was the standard punishment for runaways.⁵⁹ Elizabeth Brown Pryor states in her book that "there was enough evidence to show that Lee had the slaves whipped but not enough to show that he had done it himself and that Lee never directly addressed the articles."⁶⁰ Unlike the article in 1858, Lee decided not to answer in the papers. He gives no reason to this as these acquisitions are much more severe and specific. Lee did however address the issue in a letter to his son, he wrote "The *N.Y. Tribune* has attacked me for my treatment of your grandfather's slaves, but I shall not reply. He has left me an unpleasant legacy."⁶¹

Despite not answering these allegations publicly, they would again appear in the *Baltimore American* and with an article from the *National Anti-Slave Standard* were Wesley Norris, the slave that was allegedly whipped, gave an interview about the incident that matched with the *New York Tribune* story almost word for word with the exception of one part of the story where the *Tribune* stated that Lee had personally whipped the slave girl. Norris states:

⁵⁸ Freeman vol. 1 pg. 390

⁵⁹ Fellman, Micheal "The Making of Robert E. Lee," (Johns Hopkins University Press: Baltimore, 2003) pg. 67

⁶⁰ Pryor, Elizabeth Brown "Reading the Man: A portrait of Robert E. Lee Through His Private Letters," (Penguin Books: New York, 2007) page 270-272

⁶¹ Robert E. Lee to Lt. G.W. Custis Lee 2nd July, 1859. Jones, J. William "Life and Letters of Robert Edward Lee, Soldier and Man," (Neale Publishing Company: New York, 1906) page 102

In his presence, we were tied firmly to posts by a Mr. Gwin, our overseer, who was ordered by Gen. Lee to strip us to the waist and give us fifty lashes each, excepting my sister, who received but twenty; we were accordingly stripped to the skin by the overseer, who, however, had sufficient humanity to decline whipping us; accordingly Dick Williams, a county constable, was called in, who gave us the number of lashes ordered; Gen. Lee, in the meantime, stood by, and frequently enjoined Williams to “lay it on well,” an injunction which he did not fail to heed; not satisfied with simply lacerating our naked flesh, Gen. Lee then ordered the overseer to thoroughly wash our backs with brine, which was done.⁶²

The Norris article matches almost exactly with the earlier articles with the difference being that Norris stated that Lee did not whip his sister personally. The same article appeared also in the Madison State Journal but it adds that Norris was sent to Alabama during the time Lee had hired him out to work on the railroads.⁶³ Lee had stated earlier that he had never hired out any of his slaves, but the Norris article contradicts that statement. It is most likely that Lee did not directly send Norris to Alabama, but that his agent did so on his own without Lee’s knowledge. Once again Lee found himself being attacked for the supposed mistreatment of slaves and again refused to answer the allegations publicly. Privately he denied the charges into two separate letters. The first was written to an unnamed person where Lee stated that the same statement has been published at the North for several years and it was not true.⁶⁴ The second was to Mr. E.J.

⁶² “Robert E. Lee: His brutality to his slaves,” *National Anti-Slavery Standard* [New York] 14 April, 1866

⁶³ “Lee as a Wailoper of his Slaves,” *Madison State Journal* [Madison] 3 April 1866

⁶⁴ Robert E. Lee to “My Dear Sir” April 13, 1866. *Lee, Robert E. Jr, “Recollections and Letters of General Robert E. Lee,”* (Doubleday, Page & Company: New York, 1904) pg. 224-225

Quirk where Lee said the articles “had not a word of truth in it and that no servant, soldier, or citizen that was ever employed by me can with truth charge me with bad treatment.”⁶⁵

The Norris account and the early articles of the treatment of the Custis Slaves were not the only times that the Northern Papers would take an interest in how General Lee treated his slaves. In May of 1863 several Northern Papers printed articles about how Lee treated other slaves that he owned. *The Boston Evening Transcript*, *Hartford Daily Courant*, and *New-York Daily Reformer* were just some of the Northern Papers that printed similar accounts of a gentleman attached to the Army of the Potomac. In the letter, the gentleman says that he called on one of General Lee’s old slaves to find out what he could of that highly praised man. The gentleman wrote that upon asking the slave about Lee, he found out that General Lee was more dreaded by his slaves than were any of his overseers. The old slave had many sons and daughters who had been sold off until he only had one son and two daughters left with him that were too young to be carried away. The gentleman goes on to describe how General Lee withheld food from his slaves and when two of the old slaves sons went fishing that night they were caught and Lee had all of his slaves assembled to see the two boys along with another two boys and a girl to be flogged. The four boys were whipped till their backs were raw and bleeding, but when it came time for the girl, the overseer refused. Lee took the whip and with his own hands flogged the girl. The gentleman then describes his feelings of hatred and that he wanted to avenge the wrongs this former slave had suffered. He goes on to say how he would feel if he was whipped for getting food for a half starved mother or if his sisters were sold to a brutal man. He then says he puts his faith in God that He will free the slaves in His time. The article ends with the man saying that

⁶⁵ Robert E. Lee to E. J. Quirk March 1st, 1866. Jones, J. William, “*Anecdotes, and Letters of Gen. Robert E. Lee*,” (D. Appleton and Company: New York, 1875) pg. 213

“after Lee whipped the girl he bathed the girl’s wounds in brine and now that hand is raised against his country.”⁶⁶

This story was refuted not by Robert E. Lee, but by a person named W. M. G. Webster, who claims some relation to General Lee. In a letter written to the *Boston Journal* and picked up in the *Liberator*, Webster claimed to have visited Arlington multiple times. Webster stated that “Gen. Lee was never cruel to his slaves and they were treated with the most considerate kindness and that he couldn’t believe that any Negro belonging to the estate would breathe one word against its master.” Webster says he has “suffered like others over Lee’s defection, but that he was a gentleman and a Christian and never could have so forgotten himself and his high position as to strike a Negro and that a Negro woman too.”⁶⁷

The letter by Webster was refuted by a man named Samuel P. Putnam. Putnam’s letter was written to the *Boston Journal* and it was picked up by the *Liberator* as well. In Putnam’s letter he states that “although publicly denied, the original letter was correct and Lee frequently whipped the slave children with his own hand. Putnam stated that it is hardly probable that a visitor at Arlington could know all that was transpiring between master and slave.”⁶⁸

Parts of this story are unique from the Norris Case with the one similarity being that the overseer refused to whip the girl and Lee did it on his own and then washed the wounds in brine. While this story may or may not be true, the fact is that it was printed all over the North at a time that the Emancipation Proclamation had only taken affect at the beginning of 1863. If this article is true it further destroys the image that was so carefully cultivated by pro-Lee historians of a

⁶⁶ “Gen. Lee and his Slaves,” *Boston Evening Transcript* [Boston] 14th May 1863

⁶⁷ “Gen. Lee and his Slaves,” *Liberator* [Boston] 29th May 1863

⁶⁸ *ibid*

man who was kind to what few slaves he had. It could be a true story or it could be propaganda to paint Lee and slave masters in a negative light. The fact that the author of the letter does not give the name of the slave prevents the confirmation of the story using the known list of slaves that the Lee-Custis estates owned as proof of this slaves attachment to Lee. Had a name been given then this story would be more credible than it is. As it stands the fact that the letter was commented on by two other men one defending Lee and the other attacking the man who defended Lee it may lead some credence to it being a truthful story.

Other information provided by the press also gives credit to this story. *The Lowell Daily Citizen and News* reported that the “slaves that had run away and were recaptured and whipped severely by the general had been released and returned to Arlington freed. The young woman who was so badly treated by Lee and whose case was the subject of some controversy in the papers is among them.”⁶⁹ No matter if these were separate events or the Norris Case repeated the fact is that General Lee and how he treated his slaves was part of the Northern press before and during the Civil War. General Lee only once answered the charges, but others were willing to do it in his stead. As these articles show, General Lee was not just acquainted with slavery, but participated in it in the worst way.

The final piece of how Robert E. Lee thought about slavery and free blacks is his testimony before the 39th Congress on Reconstruction in Virginia. Lee was asked several questions about the recently freed slaves and gave his opinions. When asked to give his opinions on the question of Southern States allowing black suffrage, Lee responded by saying “My own opinion is, that,

⁶⁹ “Arlington Slaves Returned,” *Lowell Daily Citizen and News* [Lowell, Massachusetts] 30th November 1864

at this time, they cannot vote intelligently, and that giving them the right of suffrage would open the door to a great deal of demagogism, and lead to embarrassments in various ways.”⁷⁰

From Lee’s answer we see someone who doubts that the “colored” have the ability to understand what it means to vote. Lee feels that the freed slaves would fall prey to charismatic speakers who would get them to vote in a way that was not good for them as a people. This statement may or may not be true from a standpoint of the general lack of education among slaves. Most of the free slaves did not have the education to make an informed decision while voting and many would most likely vote for a Republican candidate just because they were a Republican. Still it does show that Lee, like most Southerners and many Northerners, had a low opinion about African-American’s voting. That idea would dog the African-American community for over a century in the form of Jim Crow laws that would permeate the South until the Civil Rights movement.

During the interview, Lee was asked about his opinion on the former slaves living in Virginia. His answer would be proof of the blatant post-bellum racism of Lee that many writers like Douglas Southall Freeman tried to gloss over. The question that was asked was in Lee’s opinion would Virginia be better off if the colored people left. Lee’s response,

I think it would be better for Virginia if she could get rid of them. That is no new opinion with me. I have always thought so, and have always been in favor of emancipation—gradual emancipation.

⁷⁰ Robert E. Lee testimony to the Joint Committee on Reconstruction. “*Joint Committee on Reconstruction at the First Session of the Thirty-Ninth Congress,*” (Government Printing Office: Washington D.C., 1866) Part II pg. 134

Mr. Blow: Do you not think that the State of Virginia is absolutely injured and its future impaired by the presence of the black population there?

Robert E. Lee: I think it is.⁷¹

These questions and answers from Lee's own testimony show that Lee did not want black people living in Virginia. Lee saw them as a group of people that somehow harmed Virginia. Lee stated that he believed in gradual emancipation but only to get rid of the Africans, not out of any consistent moral outrage over slavery. As previously stated, Lee was willing to keep blacks slaves until gradual emancipation happened. How long this would take Lee did not know, but until that event, Lee was happy to keep them enslaved and working for their white masters and did not want to directly change this relationship. If they had been freed naturally without the Civil War forcing the issue, then Lee would have simply said that it was God's timing. Lee felt that Virginia would prosper more and faster if the Negro population went to other states in the South.

The idea that freed blacks should be removed from the United States was not new. Lee's own uncle Richard Bland Lee was part of the American Colonization Society that was established to support the migration of free African Americans to Africa and even helped found the colony of Liberia. Both Thomas Jefferson and Abraham Lincoln to varying degrees advocated this solution. Jefferson wrote that "I have seen no proposition so expedient as that of the emancipation of those slaves born after a given day and of their education and expatriation at a

⁷¹ Ibid pg. 136

proper age.”⁷² In the first Lincoln-Douglas debate, Lincoln stated; “If all earthly power were given to me my first impulse would be to free all the slaves, and send them to Liberia, to their own native land. But a moment's reflection would convince me that whatever of high hope (as I think there is) there may be in this, in the long run, its sudden execution is impossible.”⁷³ The resettlement of free Africans never really happened in great numbers. While some did go back to Africa, the truth of the matter is in 1808 the African Slave Trade had been ended by the United States and any free Africans from that point onward had been born in the United States and, aside from any stories the earlier generation of slaves had about Africa, had no real desire to go to a place they had never been to. The reality is that many would probably not survive as evidenced by the Île-à-Vache colony in Haiti that failed due to a lack of colonist and an outbreak of smallpox. President Lincoln had to send a ship to rescue the remaining colonist and bring them back to the United States. Liberia did succeed in becoming a nation, but its history is plagued by government corruption and civil war.

How Robert E. Lee dealt with slavery has been clouded by Pro-Lee historians since his death. We are taught that Lee hated slavery and felt that slavery was an evil that he did not agree with. The evidence provided in his letters, in his testimony before Congress and in new articles paints a different picture. They show a man that was comfortable with Slavery and felt that slavery was proper. Lee would never have lifted a finger to emancipate all slaves and if possible would have kept the Custis slaves in his employment. In an interview with C-SPAN, Elizabeth Brown Pryor states: Lee fundamentally believed the master-slave relationship was "the only relationship that

⁷² Letter from Thomas Jefferson to Edward Coles, August 25th, 1814 “A Solution? Jefferson Proposes Colonization” *Monticello.org* <https://www.monticello.org/slavery-at-monticello/liberty-slavery/solution-jefferson-proposes-colonization> accessed May 6th 2017

⁷³ First Lincoln-Douglas Debate Ottawa, Illinois August 21st, 1858

could exist between the races; he had no grander vision, no ability to see beyond that”⁷⁴ Master and slave was the only relationship and, unlike Mrs. Custis, he saw it very much as an economic relationship, that those slaves were there to work, and I think one of the reasons they thought he was mean is because he was very tough on them. He saw that he owned their labor.⁷⁵ She goes on to say that based on his letters that Lee did not like black people and it was very clear from those letters that he was an elitist who followed the pro-slavery line. Based on the evidence gathered, one has no choice but to lean towards this opinion. While some would argue that Lee was opposed to slavery, his own letters and possible if not probable actions shows a man that was a typical upper class Southerner who was not the exception but one of many who felt that slavery was the proper place for the African American people. We can no longer believe the narrative of Douglas Southall Freeman that Lee was only acquainted with slavery at its best. It must be shown that Robert E. Lee was a slave holding Southerner who believed in white supremacy, and felt that blacks were a detriment to Virginian society and for Robert E. Lee, anything that could potentially harm his native Virginia should be removed.

⁷⁴ Pryor, Elizabeth Brown. Interview. *Book Discussion on Reading the Man: A Portrait of Robert E. Lee*. C-SPAN, 19 May 2007. Web. 30 June 2016

⁷⁵ *ibid*

CHAPTER III

LEE IN THE PRESS BEFORE THE CIVIL WAR AND SECESSION

How the North viewed Robert E. Lee during the antebellum, the Civil War, and post-bellum years is critical in watching Lee rise from rebel commander of a defeated revolution to national icon. This next chapter will look at newspaper articles before the Civil War, during the Civil War, and after the Civil War. Each section will track how Lee was seen by the Northern papers and find when the North helped make Lee a hero of the country and the events in the nation as a whole that made Lee a national icon.

Before the Civil War, Lee was a highly regarded individual within the U.S. Army. He was a favorite of General Winfield Scott who lauded Lee as the man who helped win the war against Mexico. While Lee would not get any national notice for his exploits, the events of October 16-19 of 1859 would make Lee a household name.

During the antebellum period some members of the Abolitionist movement grew militant and felt that slavery should be ended by force of arms. This militant arm of the Abolitionist movement took root in Kansas where one of the biggest proponents of militant abolitionism was a man by the name of John Brown. John Brown and his followers, many of them his own sons, formed a militia and raided and killed pro-slavery citizens in the Kansas territory during the Bleeding Kansas movement of 1854. Upon arriving in Kansas John Brown attacked a small outpost and hacked five pro-slavery men to death with swords. The viciousness of these killings

and the reprisals by pro-slavery forces helped to create the term Bleeding Kansas. After peace came to Kansas, John Brown turned his attention to freeing the slaves of Virginia. Virginia was one of the biggest slave states and was seen by many to be the epitome of the southern slave aristocracy. John Brown hoped that by taking the arsenal at Harper's Ferry that many slaves would join his small army and help overthrow the slave holders of Virginia. The rabid abolitionist and a group of his supporters entered Harper's Ferry and took the arsenal, but the expected slave uprising never came. The local Militia was called out and soon John Brown was surrounded in the engine house with a handful of followers. Robert E. Lee was at his home in Arlington when his former student and future commander of Confederate Cavalry Lieutenant J.E.B. Stuart came with an order from the War Department. Lee was ordered to take command of the troops there and end the insurrection. Under his command, the Marines led by Lieutenant Green stormed the engine house and captured John Brown. After the capture of Brown, Lee would be present at Brown's interrogation only to note the names of those whom Brown mentioned as members of his party. Lee checked the names against the captured and dead members of Brown's men and forwarded his findings to Washington. Lee would then spend a small amount of time guarding Harpers Ferry from a possible attack that never happened.⁷⁶ Brown would later be hanged by the Government of Virginia and turned into a martyr.

The John Brown Raid was the biggest thing in the news at the time with every newspaper printing a story. Robert E. Lee received notice for his part in the John Brown raid in the North in the form of his taking command of troops and his actions at Harper's Ferry. Lee was also mentioned as the man who took charge of John Brown as well as papers on Brown's person. *The Commercial Advertiser* stated that the troops were waiting for the arrival of Col. Lee who had

⁷⁶ Freeman vol. I page 401-402

been deputized by the War Department to take command.⁷⁷ The *Boston Traveler* wrote about Lee's dispatch to John Brown calling on Brown to surrender and promising protection until the wishes of the President could be ascertained. The *Boston Traveler* went on to say this was done in order to save the lives of the prisoners.⁷⁸ After the John Brown Raid was over, the *Albany Evening Journal* reported that Lee took charge of several important papers found in Browns possession.⁷⁹ Also Lee's report to the Secretary of War on the results of his attack on John Brown was printed in the *New York Herald*.⁸⁰ In the *Plain Dealer*, Lee is mentioned as receiving a telegraph from the Secretary of War who was going to take charge of the legal proceedings against the prisoners and bring them to trial.⁸¹ In the *Public Ledger*, Lee is mentioned multiple times with regards to a false alarm at Sandy Hook. The article starts with Lee and the Marines leaving for Washington and going to Sandy Hook to see if the rumors of an insurrection were true. It then states that Lee upon arriving at Sandy Hook determined that there was no insurrection going on and that all was well and returned to Washington with the marines.⁸² A story was printed in the *Commercial Advertiser* about an attack on a farm by the slaves, but they quoted Lee who said he doubted the whole story and put it down as one of the many hundred that had been floating through the town.⁸³ Lee still investigated and the Boston Courier reported that Lee found the family safe.⁸⁴ The *Boston Traveler* stated that the removal of Col. Lee and the Marines increased the general consternation of the citizens who formed companies for the

⁷⁷ "The Insurrection at Harper's Ferry," *Commercial Advertiser* [New York] 19th October 1859

⁷⁸ "The Riot at Harper's Ferry," *Boston Traveler* [Boston] 19th October 1859

⁷⁹ "Harper's Ferry Riot," *Albany Evening Journal* [Albany, New York] 19th October 1859

⁸⁰ "Harper's Ferry, Oct 18, 1859," *New York Herald* [New York] 27th October 1859

⁸¹ "Last Night's Report," *Plain Dealer* [Cleveland] 19th October 1859

⁸² "The Harper's Ferry Insurrection, Further Particulars," *Public Ledger* [Philadelphia] 20th October 1859

⁸³ "Rumored Attack on a Farm House," *Commercial Advertiser* [New York] 22nd October 1859

⁸⁴ "Harper's Ferry, Oct 20," Boston Courier [Boston] 24th October 1859

general defense, but wrote later that Col. Lee had returned.⁸⁵ On the day of John Brown's execution, it was reported by the *Albany Evening Journal*⁸⁶ and the *New York Tribune*⁸⁷ that Col. Lee would be in command of the troops there.

Multiple other newspapers such as *The Sandusky Daily Commercial Register*⁸⁸ and the *Boston Post*⁸⁹ ran the story of the Harper's Ferry Raid and Lee features in each of the articles as the man whom commanded the troops. In the *New York Times* coverage of the John Brown Raid, Lee's name is mentioned multiple times as the man who led the attack along with J.E.B Stuart.⁹⁰ The *New York Times* was one of the most widely circulated papers in the North and its articles would be picked up by other newspapers around the state of New York. This assured that when Lee became a Confederate General, that his name would be familiar to many people in the North.

While Lee might not have gotten much praise for his conduct during the John Brown Raid, his movements during and after the John Brown Raid were closely followed by the Northern Press. Every action that Lee took was reported to the people by the newspapers which made Lee known by the Northerners.

Although Lee was only mentioned by name with nothing else except his actions printed, there was a speech by Gov. Wise of Virginia that gave Lee a glowing review. The *Boston Post*⁹¹ and

⁸⁵ "Harper's Ferry, Oct. 20," *Boston Traveler* [Boston] 21st October 1859

⁸⁶ *Albany Evening Journal* [Albany, New York] 2nd December 1859

⁸⁷ "John Brown Items," *New York Tribune* [New York] 2nd December 1859

⁸⁸ "The Insurrection," *The Sandusky Daily Commercial Register* [Sandusky, Ohio] 20 Oct. 1859

⁸⁹ "The Insurrection," *The Boston Post* [Boston] 20 Oct. 1859

⁹⁰ "The Negro Insurrection," *The New York Times* [New York] 19 Oct. 1859

⁹¹ "Speech of Governor Wise: On His return from Richmond from Harper's Ferry" *Richmond Enquirer* [Richmond] 25th Oct. 1860; "Speech of Governor Wise: On his return from Richmond from Harper's Ferry" *Boston Post* [Boston] 28th Oct. 1860

the *New York Herald*⁹² published the speech in which Lee was called that “*gallant and noble Virginian*”. The speech from Gov. Wise was from a Southerner who owned slaves and was celebrating the suppression of an anti-slavery insurrection and praising the commander of the forces who defeated John Brown. This is remarkable because it appeared in a Northern newspaper and even more so because one of the papers that printed the story was in Boston, which was one of the biggest hotbeds for anti-slavery movements in the United States with William Lloyd Garrison’s anti-slavery *Liberator* being published there. With this speech, Robert E. Lee’s name would most assuredly be on the lips of many people with regards to his connection to John Brown.

During the Civil War, articles about the John Brown Raid and Robert E. Lee’s role in it started to be printed. One of the articles looking at Lee from a different perspective published a letter in the *Pittsburg Chronicle* that was picked up by the *Warren Mail* that gives a rather unique possible reason that Robert E. Lee left the Union Army and joined the Confederacy. In the letter written five years after the John Brown Raid, the author gives a brief history of the John Brown Raid as told to him by a witness, but the author of the letter goes on to give a theory of some interest. The article starts off with telling the readers that they may not have known that Robert E. Lee was a chief actor in the John Brown Raid. This could have been a surprise to many readers because of how little attention most Northern newspapers gave Robert E. Lee at the time. The author states “and such is the historical episode which I listened to last night from a citizen

⁹² “Speech of Governor Wise at Richmond,” *New York Herald* [New York] 26th October 1859

who was a witness to it. Who knows how much it may have influenced Robert E. Lee to forsake the flag of the United States and become a chieftain in the rebel cause?"⁹³

This article which appeared in 1864 after some of the fiercest battles of the Civil War may have caused some people to wonder what if John Brown had not led that raid. For all they knew, Robert E. Lee might have not joined the Confederate Army and would have led Union troops to victory sooner. The John Brown Raid and Lee's involvement would be brought up from time to time later in the Civil War. In April of 1864 the *Exeter New-Letter and Rockingham Advertiser* would mention the incident along with the endorsement of calling Lee the best General the rebels have,⁹⁴ with the *Hartford Daily Courant* mentioning the John Brown Raid while calling Lee the distinguished rebel General.⁹⁵ *The Indianapolis Daily Journal* wrote that Lee figured so conspicuously in the capture of John Brown and led the attack of the soldiers and U.S. Marines upon the engine house. *The Indianapolis Daily Journal* also however wrote a negative comment about Lee saying; when the secret history of this great insurrection comes to light, it will probably appear that soon after the execution of John Brown, Lee, with others, actively entered upon their efforts to realize their long cherished dreams of Southern independence.⁹⁶

With a look at the letters that Lee wrote in which he was critical of abolitionists coupled with a universal remembrance of slave revolts in Virginia the John Brown raid would not really have had an effect on Lee's decisions to leave the Union Army. Lee never mentioned any discontent at the lack of national coverage of his actions at Harpers Ferry during the John Brown Raid so it

⁹³ "The Rebel General Lee and Old John Brown," *The Pittsburg Chronicle*, [Pittsburg]; "The Rebel General Lee and Old John Brown," *The Warren Mail*, [Warren, Pennsylvania] 02, April 1864

⁹⁴ *Exeter New-Letter and Rockingham Advertiser* [Exeter, New Hampshire] 4th April 1864

⁹⁵ *Hartford Daily Courant* [Hartford] 9th April 1864

⁹⁶ "Confiscated Estates about Washington-Arlington house-The forfeited Estate of General Lee-Chivalry at Home," *Indianapolis Daily Journal* [Indianapolis] 23rd May 1864

is doubtful that John Brown had any effect on his decision to join the Confederacy. As previously stated Lee's reasoning had less to do with Abolitionist sentiment and more to do with his loyalty to the State of Virginia. What this article shows is that the people of the North recognized Lee's talents as a commander by this point of the Civil War and many probably would want to find a way or a person to place blame for the loss of this talented commander. The earlier articles about the John Brown Raid also show that Lee's name was known throughout the Northern States and not just in the South. While many might not have remembered Lee's name or perhaps not made the connection, many others would. What impact this would have had on their opinions about Lee would be difficult to find, but it is clear from Northern Papers, that some of them saw it as a noble man doing his duty while others saw it as a prelude to secession.

With the election of Lincoln in 1860, the South began state conventions to secede from the United States. The South justified the idea secession as being lawful based on the voluntary compact argument. Since the Constitution was silent on the issue, that meant (to the South anyway) that they had the right to leave the United States willfully since they had joined willingly, known as the Compact theory that argued power was derived by consent of the states. The Compact Theory states that the United States was formed through a compact agreed upon by all the original Thirteen Colonies, and that the federal government is thus a creation of the states. Each new state that applies for statehood willingly joins this compact on its own accord. Because of this, the states should be the final judge in deciding if the federal government had overstepped the limits of its authority as set forth in the compact. Historian Shelby Foote stated that Southerners would not have willingly entered into the federation [United States] if they did not believe that it would be possible to get out and when the time came for them to get out; they

thought that they had every right.⁹⁷ One of the leading proponents of the Compact Theory was Thomas Jefferson.⁹⁸ Jefferson made his views on this secretly, after the Federal Government passed the Alien and Sedition Acts by writing part of the Kentucky and Virginia Resolutions in opposition to the Alien and Sedition Acts stating that the Government created by this compact was not made the exclusive or final judge of the extent of the powers delegated to itself; since that would have made its discretion, and not the Constitution, the measure of its powers.⁹⁹

The idea of secession was not new in the United States. During the War of 1812, the states that made up New England had a faction that talked of secession due to the economic strains that had been put on their primarily overseas trade based economy by several embargos placed by the Democrat-Republican Party of Thomas Jefferson. What would be called the Hartford Convention would ultimately not secede thanks to General Andrew Jackson's victory at the Battle of New Orleans.

During the years 1832-1833 an incident dealing with secession occurred during the Nullification Crisis where a semi-secession movement was started in South Carolina. President Andrew Jackson himself felt that "the tariff was only a pretext, and disunion and southern confederacy the real object. The next pretext will be the negro, or slavery question."¹⁰⁰ Jackson, in this instance, seemed to have gained prophetic abilities and accurately predicted the cause of the Civil War decades before it happened.

⁹⁷ *The Civil War*. Ken Burns. PBS, 2004. Film.

⁹⁸ Thomas Jefferson to William B. Giles December 26, 1825

<https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/98-01-02-5771> accessed Jan. 2017

⁹⁹ Kentucky Resolutions of 1798 and 1799

¹⁰⁰ Meacham, John "American Lion: Andrew Jackson in the White House," (New York: Random House, 2009) page 247

Texas had successfully seceded from Mexico in 1836 with the Texas Revolution and then joined the United States in 1845 only to join the Confederacy 16 years later.¹⁰¹

With the rise of the secessionist feelings among the Southern States and the secession of several Southern States, Robert E. Lee found himself torn between loyalties. It has often been reported that Lee did not truly believe in secession and that the only reason that he sided with the South was that his home state of Virginia had seceded. Like slavery, Lee's stance on secession can be found in his letters to family and friends. Lee felt that the Union should stay together and that any dissolution would spell the end of the country. For himself, the idea of leaving the United States was a difficult thing to grapple with. Many letters from Lee to members of his family show how Lee dealt with this issue of secession and how he saw his struggle between loyalty to country and loyalty to home. In a letter to his son Custis Lee, Robert E. Lee said to Custis: "But I can anticipate no greater calamity for the country than a dissolution of the Union. It would be an accumulation of all the evils we complain of, and I am willing to sacrifice everything but honor for its preservation. Secession is nothing but revolution."¹⁰²

In a second letter to his sister Anne Kinloch Lee Marshall, Robert E. Lee gave similar insight to his feelings about secession but also added a line that would appear in multiple letters and quotes that would serve to show how Lee felt torn, "With all my devotion to the Union and the

¹⁰¹ Texas won its independence in 1836 from Mexico. In 1845 Texas was officially annexed as the 28th State in the Union. Texas became the 7th State to join the Confederate States in 1861.

¹⁰² Robert E. Lee to George Washington Custis Lee January 23, 1861 Jones, J William "Life and Letters of Robert Edward Lee: Soldier and Man," (The Neale Publishing Company: New York, 1906) page 120-121

feeling of loyalty and duty of an American citizen, I have not been able to make up my mind to raise my hand against my relatives, my children, my home.”¹⁰³

A third letter was also written to a sibling, this one being sent to his brother Smith Lee. It reads much like the one to his sister Anne, but it confirms all of Lee’s feelings, “To save me from such a position, and to prevent the necessity of resigning under orders, I had to act at once, and before I could see you again on the subject, as I had wished. I am now a private citizen, and have no other ambition than to remain at home. Save in defense of my native State, I have no desire ever again to draw my sword.”¹⁰⁴

A fourth letter, Robert E. Lee’s resignation letter to General Winfield Scott, contains much of the same information and again that famous line, “I shall carry with me to the grave the most grateful recollections of your kind consideration, & your name & fame will always be dear to me. Save in the defence of my native State, I never desire again to draw my sword”.¹⁰⁵ Upon receiving Lee’s resignation, the *Richmond Enquirer* quoted General Scott as saying that “he would rather have received the resignation of every general than that of Lee.”¹⁰⁶

By looking at all of these letters, we get a feel for how Lee felt about secession. Lee considered secession nothing more than revolution against the legitimate government of the United States. For Lee loyalty to United States was something ingrained in him from birth. Lee was a man whose family had fought for the independence of the United States and who was tied by family bonds to the father of the United States. Few people would have felt this confliction in loyalty to the United States more than Lee. Lee felt his loyalty torn between his country and his

¹⁰³ Robert E. Lee to Anne Kinloch Marshall, April 20, 1861 *ibid* 133-134

¹⁰⁴ Robert E. Lee to Sydney Smith Lee, April 20th, 1861 *ibid* 134

¹⁰⁵ Robert E. Lee to General Winfield Scott, April 20th, 1861 *ibid* 132-133

¹⁰⁶ *Richmond Enquirer* [Richmond] 27th April 1861

state and found himself having to question where he would place his loyalty to. Lee was a man who believed deeply in honor and duty and took any and all vows and oaths he made as an officer to the United States very seriously. Lee had served in the United States Army for well over thirty-seven years. When becoming an officer, Lee swore the following oath:

"I, _____, appointed a _____ in the Army of the United States, do solemnly swear, or affirm, that I will bear true allegiance to the United States of America, and that I will serve them honestly and faithfully against all their enemies or opposers whatsoever, and observe and obey the orders of the President of the United States, and the orders of the officers appointed over me, according to the rules and articles for the government of the Armies of the United States."¹⁰⁷

The first letter is perhaps the most famous and often cited source of Lee's stance on the issue of secession. Lee clearly feels that the Founding Fathers had not wanted the Union to be dissolved and that the Union itself was "perpetual". Lee states that he willing to do almost anything to save the Union. Unlike the general idea that the South had about the Constitution not expressly forbidding secession, Lee definitely states that the Founding Fathers never "*exhausted so much labor, wisdom, and forbearance in its formation, and surrounded it with so many guards and securities, if it was intended to be broken by every member of the Confederacy at will.*"¹⁰⁸ Lee also felt that if the Union had to be maintained by force, he would sit on the sidelines and not fight unless to defend Virginia.

The next issue that Lee would have would be his statement of not wanting to raise his hand against his family. The excuse of not wanting to fight his family is one that Lee would have been

¹⁰⁷ "Oaths of Enlistment and Oaths of Office," U.S.
<http://www.history.army.mil/html/faq/oaths.html>

¹⁰⁸ Robert E. Lee to George Washington Custis Lee January 23, 1861 Jones 120-121

better off not saying. Lee had multiple cousins and a nephew fight for the Union. His nephew Henry Marshall (his sister Anne's son) served in U.S. Army and was on the staff of U.S. General John Pope. Samuel Phillips Lee was another cousin who would fight for the Union Navy and who was to have said when asked about his loyalty famously replied "When I find the word Virginia in my commission I will join the Confederacy."¹⁰⁹ Lee's own sons and other relatives fought for the Confederacy. No matter what side Lee decided to fight for or even if he did not fight at all, and then his family would be like many of the other families that lived during this time period and had family vs family. We don't know how Lee felt about his family fighting for the Union. While I'm sure he would regret the death of each cousin and nephew the fact is that Lee never experienced the loss of an immediate family member. His brother Smith severed in the outnumbered Confederate Navy and never left port on a ship, and his other brother Charles Carter Lee did not fight in the Civil War. Still for a man to say that he did not want to raise his hand against family, Lee did not do anything to prevent from finding himself in that situation. One has to wonder what would have happened if one of his three sons had chosen to stay loyal to the Union cause and Lee found himself in the position of fighting against his children.

It is Lee's desire not to do anything that might bring harm to Virginia that is made very clear in all four letters. Lee as he stated multiple times, did not want to raise his sword against his country unless it was to defend his home state of Virginia and felt that he was obligated to protect Virginia from harm. Lee had a deep love of Virginia and that love was deeper than his love for the Union. In all of these letters and the letter of resignation to Winfield Scott, we see that Lee does not want to fight against the United States. Lee clearly saw that the Civil War was going to destroy the Union and he had no desire to participate unless to defend Virginia from

¹⁰⁹ Hoehling, Adolph A "*Thunder at Hampton Roads*," (Da Capo Press: Boston, 1993) page 6

going down with the rest of the country. For the reader, it is obvious that Lee held only nominal loyalty to the United States. One could say that Lee only paid lip service and he was really only ever truly loyal to Virginia. While Lee may have disliked the idea of secession and had no wish to see his country break apart, it is clear from his letters and comments that Lee never had any intention of joining the United States to fight against the rebelling South.

For Lee, Virginia was the United States. Perhaps he felt this because Virginia had birthed the heroes and leaders of the American Revolution. It had been one of the strongest proponents for Independence with calls of Liberty or Death. It had produced the men who would write the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. It was where freedom from England had been won. It had made the four out of the first five presidents. Five of the first sixteen Presidents had been Virginians, and perhaps most important of all, it was the birthplace of the father of the nation. For Lee, it may have been that Virginia was the United States and as long as Virginia existed, no matter where it went so too went the founding promises and ideals of the country that men like Washington, Jefferson, Madison, Henry, and yes even his own father established four score and seven years ago.

Many southerners, and possibly Lee himself, felt that because of the close connection between most of the Founding Fathers being from the South that this was a second or third war for independence.¹¹⁰ Thomas J. Jackson in a speech to his First Brigade stated twice that this was a second war for independence.¹¹¹ A poem written in 1860 titled South Carolina in its prologue gave a brief timeline of events in South Carolina's history and the last event were the years

¹¹⁰ Some considered the War of 1812 to be the Second War of Independence.

¹¹¹ Jackson, Mary Anna, *Life and Letters of General Thomas J. Jackson*, (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1892) page 202

1860-1861, the Third War for Independence.¹¹² The *Charleston Mercury* on November 8, 1860 linked the events of Fort Sumter to the Boston Tea party by stating, "Yesterday, November the 7th, will long be a memorable day in Charleston. The tea has been thrown overboard—the revolution of 1860 has been initiated."¹¹³ Multiple Northern newspapers printed a story that labeled Lee as "The Hero of the Revolution". Today some historians also give the Civil War this title. In his book *Civil War Fredericksburg to Meridian*, author Shelby Foote also referred to the Civil War as a second war for independence.¹¹⁴

Lee's decision to leave the Union was also printed in Northern newspapers. Two of the personal letters that he wrote, his resignation letter to General Scott and his letter to his sister Anne, were printed in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* for all the North to read.¹¹⁵ A letter that Lee wrote talking about how he saw the Civil War to a Northerner female admirer who wanted his photograph appeared in the *New York Express* and was picked up by the *Goshen Democrat*. In it, Lee stated again one of the main reasons that tore at him with the secession questions saying; "that he must either side with or against my birth place, my children."¹¹⁶

The Iowa State Register in 1864 was writing about the capture of former Vice-President and Confederate General John C. Breckenridge and the possibility that Breckenridge was a traitor before the Civil War began. They compare Breckenridge's apparent antebellum treachery to Lee by saying "Robert E. Lee and Alexander Stephens – both personally opposed to secession- have

¹¹² Wharton, H.M "War Songs and Poems of the Southern Confederacy," (Edison, New Jersey: Castle Books, 2000) page 69

¹¹³ *Charleston Mercury*, [Charleston] November 8, 1860

¹¹⁴ Foote, Shelby "Civil War Fredericksburg to Meridian," (Vintage Books: New York, 1986) page 20

¹¹⁵ "Robert E. Lee, His views in 1861 No Necessity for Secession," *Philadelphia Inquirer* [Philadelphia] 29th December 1864

¹¹⁶ "Letter from Gen. Lee," *New York Express* [New York] 5 May, 1861; "Letter from Gen. Lee," *Goshen Democrat* [Goshen, New York] 28 Aug. 1861

answer their own conscience: that their first allegiance was to their own states and that they must follow the fortunes of their own people.”¹¹⁷ In this article they are saying even though Lee and Breckenridge were both traitors, Lee at least did it for the sake of his state and not for personal gain like Breckenridge.

The *Boston Post* putting their theory on Lee’s reason for leaving was that *he fancied the authority of Virginia paramount to that of the Republic*.¹¹⁸ While the *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper* said that General Lee has allowed an insane devotion to that most pestilent doctrine, State Rights, to lead him astray.¹¹⁹

Still the inner struggle that Lee wrote about in his letters and quoted by others did not convince everyone of his reluctance to join the Confederate Army. The *New York Tribune* wrote an article that was picked up by the *Janesville Weekly Gazette* that stated that “*Lee is one of the men who deliberately determined to betray his country. While meditating treason he retained his commission and his close relation to the Commanding General [Scott]. When he made the plunge he made it with his eyes open. Such a man is more guilty than any other.*”¹²⁰ The *Indianapolis Daily Journal* wrote a scathing article about Lee’s secession decision and stated that Lee’s friends were trying to give the impression that he manifested sincere reluctance to enter into the scheme of the traitors for this dissolution of the Union by force of arms but that

¹¹⁷ “The Victory,” *Iowa State Register*, [Des Moines] 18 Sept. 1864

¹¹⁸ “Result,” *The Boston Post* [Boston] 6 July 1865

¹¹⁹ “Gen. Robert E. Lee, The Rebel Commander-in-Chief,” *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper* [New York] 4th October 1862

¹²⁰ “General Robert E. Lee,” *New York Tribune* [New York]; “General Robert E. Lee,” *Janesville Weekly Gazette* [Janesville, Wisconsin] 11 May 1865

there was no evidence of this except that Lee did not take up arms as quickly as the other traitors did.¹²¹

Lee was not the only West Point graduate to leave the United States army. Other men such as Joseph E. Johnston, James K. Longstreet, Thomas J. Jackson, Braxton Bragg, and many others had to make the same decision, however these men did not hesitate as much as Lee had. Unlike Johnston who resigned as soon as Virginia seceded, Lee waited three days afterward before making his decision. Many West Pointers joined as soon as their states seceded from the Union. The reasoning that many had was the same as Lee's and that was a desire not to fight against their home state. Despite this, not all West Pointers from the South felt the same way. George H. Thomas who was from Virginia and part of a slave holding family faced the same decision as Lee. Unlike his fellow Virginians, he stayed loyal to his country and would become one of the best generals of the Union Army but would be seen as a traitor to the South.

Harper's Weekly published a brief bio of Robert E. Lee and said of Lee; "After filling this honorable and agreeable post in the military service of his country for several years, he crowned his career by deserting his flag at the moment of his country's sorest need. When the Richmond politicians passed what they called an Ordinance of Secession, Robert E. Lee threw up his commission and accepted the rank of General in the rebel army."¹²²

There was also another story, probably fiction, printed about Robert E. Lee and his decision to leave the Union and join the Confederacy. The *Washington Reporter* reprinted an article from the *Cincinnati Gazette* tells of a United States officer from Kentucky that went to Lee for advise

¹²¹ "Confiscated Estates about Washington-Arlington house-The forfeited Estate of General Lee-Chivalry at Home," *Indianapolis Daily Journal* [Indianapolis] 23rd May 1864

¹²² "The Rebel General Lee," *Harper's Weekly* [New York] August 24th, 1861

on if he should join the Confederacy. The article quoted Lee writing; Col. Lee advised him by all means to abandon the idea and assured him that if he did resign he would live to see the day when he would bitterly regret the step. The officer decides to remain with the United States Army because of Lee's advice only to hear that three days later Col. Lee resigned and was now a Major General in the Confederate Army.¹²³ This story, if true, would show that Lee was still oscillating between Loyalty and Secession and goes well with the narrative that Lee was conflicted in his decision to leave the Army.

These early Northern papers are critical of Lee for deserting his flag at the moment of his country's sorest need. The tone of the papers makes it sound as if Lee was just waiting for Virginia to pass the ordinance of secession to join the Confederacy. During and after the Civil War, many Northern newspapers wrote about Lee's decision to leave the United States Army. For them they could not really and fully understand the reasoning behind Lee's decision to betray his country and fight for the South. Lee had been regarded as the greatest soldier in the United States. Historians can argue that Lee was torn between his loyalties, but for a man to be torn there has to be equal amounts of commitment between the decisions. Lee would have had to have given equal weight to each side and weigh the pros and cons of his decisions. But I feel that Lee never really did that. For Robert E. Lee, it was never a decision to side with the South or North, he was always going to stand with the Old Dominion no matter what came and nothing could force him to change his mind.

¹²³ "Strange Story of Loyalty and Treachery," *Cincinnati Gazette* [Cincinnati] 1861; "Strange Story of Loyalty and Treachery," *Washington Reporter* [Washington D.C.] 21st November 1861

CHAPTER IV

LEE AND THE CIVIL WAR

The Civil War was one of the first modern wars where news could be transmitted almost instantly back to the main offices of the newspapers around the North. Because of the proximity of many of the battles to Northern cities, the Virginia Theater was given the majority of the press. Hundreds of correspondents followed the armies of both the United States and the Confederates States sending back stories to their editors. The reprinting of Southern articles in Northern newspapers about Lee's victories would be considered strange in modern standards. The Union Army and the Northern people had experienced more defeats than victories in the early days of the Civil War and as a result of this, morale amongst the population would always a touchy subject. Anyone with any basic knowledge of propaganda would know that when trying to keep up the morale of the population of your nation and your army, you would not be printing the victory speeches or the glowing articles of your enemy's generalship. Despite this basic premise Northern papers would print the Southern articles giving rise to Lee's reputation in the eyes of Northern people.

During the Civil War, Lee as commander of the Army of Northern Virginia was the focus of multiple newspapers. Robert E. Lee's reputation in the Northern press was always high and it was rare that he was given a negative comment about his abilities as a commander during the beginning of the Civil War. During any type of war it is rare that an enemy general is given a respectable accolade in the paper of the country they are fighting against. The modern parallel

would be Field Marshall Erwin Rommel during World War II. Even though Rommel fought for Hitler and the Nazi regime, he was praised in the Allied Press as a chivalrous leader who had honor. The main negativity we see against Lee is the fact that he was a traitor to his country and later after Gettysburg when it seemed that the tide had turned and Lee was going to be beaten, then we see the Northern papers began to call for Lee to be treated as all traitors should be treated, with arrest and hanging.

The reason for this is difficult to understand. It may be that in the beginning of the Civil War when many in the country felt that the war would be short and that it would not do good to insult their countrymen. Another reason for the newspapers to treat Lee so well is that the Northern Generals in the Eastern Theater like McClellan, Burnside, Pope, and Hooker did not compare to Lee very well as each failed to defeat him. The North looking to justify those defeats would elevate Lee as being a better General and the reason why they could not defeat him. Another reason could be the rumor that Lee had even been offered command of the Northern Army by President Lincoln had been printed showing the people of the North how highly Lincoln himself thought of Lee. Many different newspapers held high opinions of Lee during the opening days of the Civil War. Many newspapers reported lists of United States Army officers that had left the service to join the Confederate Army and even took note that many of these officers served in the same regiments.

During the Secession Crisis, the men of the United States military who were from those states made the decision to either stay with the Union or join their state. Despite the fact that as of 1861 Robert E. Lee had not yet been given a major command within the Confederate Army, his name was still being seen in Northern newspapers. Many newspapers are just short sentences saying that Lee has resigned and joined the Confederate Army while others give short

biographical information about Robert E. Lee. Lee's family history was perhaps the most interesting to the population as many of the biographies discussed his Revolutionary hero father Henry "Light Horse" Lee, and his connection to George Washington through his marriage to Mary Custis. The Biographies would mention Lee's time in Mexico and note his gallantry during the U.S.-Mexican War, as well as his time as Colonel of the 2nd Cavalry Regiment in Texas.

When Robert E. Lee gave his resignation and officially joined the Confederacy, multiple newspapers picked up the story and printed bios about him and in some cases minor comments on his treachery. Some like the *New Albany Daily Ledger* listed his name with other officers that had joined the Confederacy citing the year and class size of the West Point graduation. The *Daily Ledger* printed *Robert E. Lee of Virginia, in 1829, second in a class of 46.*¹²⁴

The New York Times wrote a story that was picked up by the *Boston Post* wrote what would be a common article;

*"Among the resignations yesterday was that of Col. Robert E. Lee, of the Second Cavalry, a Virginian. It is said that the President sent for him, and that when he called he found Mr. Lincoln engaged in Cabinet Council. The President requested him to wait a little, and told him he had sent for him to tell him that he desired him to take command of an army in the field. Lee responded with the declaration that he could not, for any consideration, fight against his native State, and so tendered his resignation, which is understood to have been accepted."*¹²⁵

This article about Lee being offered command of the Union Army is a good example of an event that did happen, but not the way the newspapers said it happened. The offer of the

¹²⁴ "A correspondent of the Advertiser" *New Albany Daily Ledger* [New Albany, Indiana] July 2nd, 1861

¹²⁵ "Correspondence 20th of the *New York Times*," *Boston Post* [Boston] April 25th, 1861

command of the Union Army was true enough, but we have no evidence that Lincoln ever met with Lee personally and made the offer. Lincoln's advisor Francis P. Blair was the one who made the offer to Lee who refused to be put in a position to possibly fight his native Virginia.¹²⁶

Two days later Lee sent his resignation to General Scott. Once Lee left the United States Army and joined his native Virginia, he was made the Commander-in-Chief of Virginia's Army. This event was noted in the Richmond newspapers, and subsequently picked up by the Northern newspapers who reported the praises of General Lee.

The *New York Times* also published an article from the *Richmond Sentinel* that stated that Robert E. Lee has long been the pride of the service.¹²⁷ The *Richmond Enquirer* wrote the short article and it was picked up in the North by the *Indianapolis Indiana State Sentinel*; The appointment of Colonel Robert E. Lee to the post of Commander-in-Chief of the Virginia forces gives great satisfaction and confidence to our people. He was one of the most accomplished and able of the officers of the late United States Army.¹²⁸ This was confirmed along with the appointment of other officers when newspapers like the *Burlington Daily Hawk Eye* posted a list of Generals appointed in the provisional and regular armies of the Confederacy saying Lee was listed as the rank of General in the regular Confederate Army.¹²⁹ This was before he became the commander of the Army of Northern Virginia. Lee was appointed to command all of Virginia's military forces, but upon the formation of the Confederate States Army, he was named one of its first five full generals. Multiple newspapers wrote lists of officers who joined the Confederate

¹²⁶ Goodwin, Doris Kearns, *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln.* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2005) p. 350

¹²⁷ *Richmond Sentinel* [Richmond], 1861; "Highly Interesting from the Federal Capital," *New York Times* [New York] 1st May 1861

¹²⁸ *Richmond Enquirer* [Richmond], 1861; *Indianapolis Indiana State Sentinel* [Indianapolis] 8 May 1861

¹²⁹ "Generals in the Rebel Army," *Burlington Daily Hawk Eye* [Burlington, Iowa] 26 July 1861

Army. Most papers just reported the names of the officers, but some like the *Boston Daily Advertiser* wanted readers to remember their names with scorn.¹³⁰

With this article that originated in the South but was picked up by the Northern paper we see that the North was following to some extent what was happening to Lee. Also to note is the opinion that Lee was one of the most accomplished and able officers of the United States Army. This was an opinion shared by many people in the North including Lincoln as evidenced by his offer mentioned in the previous article. Other Northern newspapers would later say similar things about Lee such as the *Indianapolis State Guard* which stated that *Lee exhibited talents and character of the highest order.*¹³¹

As the Civil War continued on its bloody course, multiple articles would appear saying much of the same things. When Lee finally did see combat as a commander, it was with much praise that that the *New York Times* gave to describing the beginning of Lee's first military command for the Confederate States at the Battle of Cheat Mountain. Gen. Lee then, the first in reputation, and probably in ability, of the four Major-Generals in the Confederate Army, has been sent to take command of the division moving against Western Virginia. It has not been without a purpose that Davis has detached the ablest of his Generals from Richmond, and from his Army of the Potomac. What that purpose may be will form a fitting subject for the speculators at home.¹³²

Writing later in November, the *Washington Reporter* printing an article from the *Cincinnati Gazette* gave the form of Lee's purpose mention in the *New York Times* article for fighting in

¹³⁰ "Military Matters," *Boston Daily Advertiser* [Boston] 4th May 1861

¹³¹ "Major General Lee," *Indianapolis Indiana State Guard* [Indianapolis] 8th June 1861

¹³² "Fighting Expected in Western Virginia," *New York Times* [New York] August 19th, 1861

Western Virginia writing that Lee is in service attempting to subdue the western half of his native State to the same tyranny that has already eaten the vitals out of the remainder.¹³³

Robert E. Lee was sent to western Virginia by Confederate President Jefferson Davis to coordinate the Confederate forces in the region. Lee found himself having to deal with generals who had little to no experience leading troops with two of them being political appointees. General W. W. Loring had fought in the U.S.-Mexican War but resented Lee being in command of him. General Henry A. Wise was a former governor of Virginia who was the brother-in-law of General George Gordon Meade and had been governor during the John Brown raid. The other political general was John B. Floyd, the Secretary of War during the Buchanan administration and whom the Federal Government thought that he had purposefully stored arms and ammunition in Federal arms depots in the South in preparation of the secession of the Confederate States.

It was up to Lee to get these men to work together in order to push the Union Army out of western Virginia. This was difficult to do as Loring chaffed under Lee and Wise and Floyd openly hated each other and seemed to be more interested in attacking each other than the enemy. This was a sentiment that was discussed in a letter between two Southerners that was printed in the *Cincinnati Commercial Tribune*¹³⁴ and the *Daily Missouri Democrat*¹³⁵ sometime much later when the author stated that it was only the timely supervision of General Lee that saved Wise and Floyd from counteracting each other into mutual destruction.

¹³³ “Strange Story of Loyalty and Treachery,” *Cincinnati Gazette* [Cincinnati] 1861; “Strange Story of Loyalty and Treachery,” *Washington Reporter* [Washington D.C.] 21st November 1861

¹³⁴ “A Very Important Document,” *Cincinnati Commercial Tribune* [Cincinnati] 22nd October 1862

¹³⁵ “A Very Important Document,” *Daily Missouri Democrat* [St. Louis] 24th October 1862

Lee arrived at the camp of General Loring, near the end of July of 1861 and found conditions at the camp to be dirty from a lack of organization on Loring's part. Lee personally scouted the area around the Union Army's positions and found that it was being led by General Joseph J. Reynolds who had been part of the faculty at West Point during Lee's time as commandant whom Lee mentioned in a letter to his wife as "our old friend". Scouts discovered a way to attack the flank of Reynold's army and brought the information back to Lee. Lee devised a strategy that included a two-pronged simultaneous attack against Union position on the summit of Cheat Mountain that he hoped would catch Reynolds by surprise.

The plan was too complex for untrained troops and inexperienced officers. Lee's plan called for five separate but converging columns. The Confederate brigades were uncoordinated and the unexpected rain and fog made marching on the mountainous terrain and a dense forest difficult. Lee gave the mission to start the attack to Colonel Albert Rust. Rust was to lead his men on a diversionary attack that was to draw the Federals out of the Fort. As Rust led his columns, they captured Union troops who lied and told Colonel Rust that 5000 troops were at the fort. Rust was fooled by this information from captured Federal soldiers and by two Federal probing attacks from Cheat Summit Fort that were so aggressive that Rust was convinced that an overwhelming force confronted them. Rust withdrew his 3000 men although they actually faced only about 300 determined Federals outside the Union fortifications. With the failure of Rust's attack, the battle ended in defeat for Lee. Both sides lost less than 100 troops and both returned to their original positions before the battle.

For Lee, the Battle of Cheat Mountain came with a personal loss. One of his aids, Colonel John A. Washington who was President George Washington's great grandnephew was killed during a scouting trip of the area with Lee's son Fitzhugh Lee. They had tried to capture a Union

Soldier, but were ambushed and Washington was shot three times and died. After the failure of the attack and a lack of supplies coming to his troops, Lee called off the attack and, after maneuvering in the vicinity, withdrew to Valley Mountain on September 17.

With the Battle of Cheat Mountain over, Lee looked to continue efforts to drive the Union out of western Virginia. Despite his efforts, he could never get the Confederate Army to properly coordinate due mostly to the infighting of Generals Wise and Floyd. Interestingly, credit for who actually defeated Lee during his time in the West Virginia Campaign has been argued about. The credit for handing Lee his first defeat is given to three men General Joseph J. Reynolds, General William S. Rosecrans and General George B. McClellan.

*“The Indianapolis Daily Journal writes; we are glad to learn that this meritorious officer [Reynolds] is at last given a command. The people of the Northwest have not forgotten the skill with which he met and foiled the famous rebel General, Robert E. Lee, in his Cheat Mountain campaign, and there are few officers who enjoy in a higher degree the confidence of our citizens.”*¹³⁶

In the *Chicago Tribune* and the *Concord Enterprise* written in 1898 credit is given to General William S. Rosecrans. In Rosecrans obituary written 37 years after the battle in the *Chicago Tribune*, it states that Rosecrans won the battle of Rich Mountain in West Virginia and in September Rosecrans defeated General Floyd. This thwarted Lee’s attempt to get a foothold in West Virginia.¹³⁷ The *Concord Enterprise* wrote a complete biography of Rosecrans and when telling about the western campaigns it said, “General Lee then took command of the Confederate forces and planned to annihilate Rosecrans’ command, but failed. Floyd, who was to co-operate

¹³⁶ “Important Military Changes,” Indianapolis Daily Journal [Indianapolis] 6th December 1864

¹³⁷ “General William Stark Rosecrans,” *Chicago Tribune* [Chicago] 26th August 1898

with Lee, was badly repulsed, and western Virginia was practically cleared of Confederate troops.”¹³⁸

Later in 1936 a full page in the Chicago Tribune was dedicated to General McClellan defeating Lee at Cheat Mountain. In it they described the whole campaign for West Virginia and give multiple complements to McClellan’s abilities. The article states that “McClellan’s Generalship had proved superior to that of Lee and that this leader who had saved a state for the Union and outwitted the best military brains of the South.”¹³⁹

The fact that there was a question on who got the final credit for defeating Lee shows that many people were eager to prove that Lee was not this invincible general. That he was beaten by Northern generals before Grant came along and put an end to Lee and the whole Confederacy seemed to be important to some people during and after the Civil War. For Reynolds, it can be seen as a newspapers attempt to show that Lee was not unbeatable. For the Rosecrans and McClellan articles written after the Civil War, it can be seen as an attempt to help rehabilitate the reputations of two Generals that had failed miserably during the Civil War and by showing that they had defeated Robert E. Lee in battle. Historians give credit for the defeat not to anything that any of the Union Generals did, but to the fact that Lee came up with an overly complicated plan led by inexperienced officers, infighting among the general officers, and untrained troops that were low on supplies, low on moral, and fighting in bad weather.

With Lee’s defeat, the major fighting for western Virginia was finished and that section of the state lost. Lee was recalled back to Richmond and was sent to South Carolina to help with the

¹³⁸ “The Life of a Soldier,” *Concord Enterprise* [Concord] 17th March 1898

¹³⁹ “How McClellan Outwitted Lee and Won West Virginia,” *Chicago Tribune* [Chicago] 23rd August 1936

coastal defenses. This event was noticed and written about in Northern newspapers such as the *South* who reported that Lee's command of the West Virginia devolved to General Floyd and that Lee left Richmond on the 7th for Beaufort, S.C. and will have command of that section.¹⁴⁰ The *New York Times* article however commented on Lee's physical condition stating that; "Gen. Robert E. Lee reached Richmond on Friday last, from Greenbrier River, much broken down by his arduous labors in command of the forest in the Northwest and has been transferred to the command of the land operations in the defense of the South Carolina coast."¹⁴¹

However the *Cincinnati Commercial Tribune* writes the same article, but takes some jabs at Lee on some of his previous statements by pointing out that Lee had said on multiple occasions (as evidenced earlier) that he [Lee] would never draw his sword save in defense of Virginia. "Lee was now sent from his inglorious operations among the Cheat and Gauley Mountains to defend South Carolina where he is deeply distrusted and will be unable to make head against the forces of the Union."¹⁴²

With that transfer, Lee's time as an army commander was put on hold. He did not distinguish himself as was expected in the North and the South at a time when Lee was widely regarded as the best Soldier in either army. During his time in Western Virginia, Lee stopped shaving and grew a grey beard. This new look would be commented on in 1863 when the *Janesville Daily Gazette* wrote that; *his [Lee] hair and beard are white as snow and the lines of his face indicate rapidly advancing, or rather premature age.*¹⁴³ His time in South Carolina however did not go unnoticed completely in the North and despite the fact that Lee did not appear to be the great

¹⁴⁰ "Appointment of Gen. Lee and Western Virginia," *South* [Baltimore] 16th November 1861

¹⁴¹ "Gossip at Richmond," *New York Times* [New York] 23rd November 1861

¹⁴² "Gen. Robert E Lee," *Cincinnati Commercial Tribune* [Cincinnati] 22nd November 1861

¹⁴³ "In This War Men Grow Old Very Fast," *Janesville Daily Gazette* [Janesville, Wisconsin] 1st September 1863

military leader that was anticipated, Lee was still given complementary praise by Northern papers who printed their own opinions or reprinted those of the Southern Press.

The *Springfield Republican* reported that “Lee was an accomplished officer and was busily engaged in locating and building batteries at various points so as to protect the railroad communications between Charleston and Savannah.”¹⁴⁴ The *San Francisco Bulletin* in giving a list of Confederate Generals wrote unfairly of Lee that “Robert E. Lee of Virginia commands the South Atlantic coasts and must carry the odium of the losses at Roanoke, Hatteras, Port Royal, and Biloxi and the like.”¹⁴⁵ This description of Lee was unfair because Lee was not in personal command of those areas in time to prevent what happened. After the Battle of Port Royal, Lee was successful in creating coastal defenses at Charleston and Savannah that did not fall until nearly the end of the Civil War. The *Boston Evening Transcript* reprinted an article from the *Charleston Courier* stated that “Our Brave wise-headed and wise hearted General, Robert E. Lee, we are authorized to say, feels every assurance of his ability to defend Charleston against any force now at the disposal of the enemy.”¹⁴⁶

Lee did not remain in South Carolina for long. Lee was recalled by Jefferson Davis to Richmond on March 2nd, 1862 and made the military advisor to Davis. This was reported in the North as an act of the Confederate Congress. *The Fort Wayne Weekly Sentinel*¹⁴⁷ and the

¹⁴⁴ “From Port Royal,” *Springfield Republican* [Springfield, Massachusetts] 20th November 1861

¹⁴⁵ “The Rebel Generals,” *San Francisco Bulletin* [San Francisco] 20th May 1862

¹⁴⁶ “The Defences of Charleston and Savannah,” *Charleston Courier* [Charleston] 23rd February 1862; “The Defences of Charleston and Savannah,” *Boston Evening Transcript* [Boston] 10th March 1862

¹⁴⁷ “The News,” *Chicago Times* [Chicago]; “The News,” *Fort Wayne Weekly Sentinel* [Fort Wayne, Indiana] 15th March 1862

*Dawson's Daily Times and Union*¹⁴⁸ both quote the *Chicago Times* when they announced that General Robert E. Lee had been made General-in-Chief. All three papers call Lee the most valuable catch the Rebels got from the Federal Army. While in Richmond, Lee began to dig the trenches around the Confederate capitol. All of this digging earned Lee the nickname The King of Spades from the troops.

Lee might have had the title of General-in-Chief, but the position held little real power. Jefferson Davis believed that as Commander-in-Chief of the Confederate Army, he had the final say in all military strategy and saw the Confederate Congress's placement of Lee as General-in-Chief as a threat to his Presidential authority. Lee's placement of General-in-Chief was mocked by the Southern press. In an article that was printed in the *Charleston Mercury* and reprinted in the *National Intelligencer*, state that Lee was reduced from a commanding general to an orderly sergeant.¹⁴⁹ To make matters worse, General Joseph E. Johnston who commanded the Confederate Army in the field did not communicate with Davis or Lee. Lee was frustrated by this lack of ability to make command decisions but despite this he did give advice to Johnston during the early parts of McClellan's Peninsula Campaign when it came to the defense of Yorktown. Multiple Northern newspapers reported an article from the an Army Correspondent of the *Associated Press* that General Lee as General-in-Chief had gone to Yorktown and declared the town untenable and recommended that Yorktown be abandoned. Each newspaper also printed another article that gave the opinion of the Confederate commander at Yorktown, General John B. Magruder who called General Lee a coward. The articles read as; *Magruder swore he was not afraid of McClellan if Lee was and if he could not successfully fight him here,*

¹⁴⁸ "The News," *Chicago Times* [Chicago]; "The News," *Dawson's Daily Times and Union* [Dawson, Indiana] 13th March 1862

¹⁴⁹ *Charleston Mercury* [Charleston] 24th March 1862; *The National Intelligencer* [Washington D.C.] 14th April 1862

he could nowhere.¹⁵⁰ Few if any men in the Confederate Army would have said that Lee was afraid of anything. It would seem that Lee did not hold this against Magruder as he allowed him to continue to command troops during the Seven Days Battles and never rebuked or called out Magruder for anything that he did, but after the Seven Days Battles were over, Magruder would be transferred by Lee to the Western Theater.

On June 1st however things changed with the injury of General Joseph E. Johnston at the Battle of Seven Pines. While trying to organize his forces towards the end of the battle, General Johnston was injured by a bullet and a shell fragment and carried from the field. Command of the Army went to Johnston's second in command, General Smith, but Smith was ill and Davis turned command of the Confederate Army to General Robert E. Lee. This event was reported in the Northern Press such as the *New York Times* printing that Major General Robert E. Lee was assigned to the command of the army in front of Richmond in consequence of a slight wound to Gen. Johnston. *The New York Times* then reported that Lee addressed his troops saying that they had made their last retreat and every man's watchword must be "Victory or death!"¹⁵¹ The *Gettysburg Compiler* simply wrote that Gen. Johnston was wounded in a Confederate claimed victory and that Gen. Robert E. Lee is now in command.¹⁵²

History knows that with Lee taking over command of the Confederate Army, later renamed the Army of Northern Virginia, that a new more aggressive style would be given to the army by General Lee. We don't know if Lee would have taken command because of Johnston's poor

¹⁵⁰ "Yorktown Evacuated. Our Troops in Full Possession of the Rebel Works. Capture of a Large Quantity of War Materials. Gloucester Also Captured" *New York Tribune* [New York] 5th May 1862

¹⁵¹ "GEN. JOHNSTON WOUNDED. GEN. LEE IN COMMAND." *New York Times* [New York] 11th June 1862

¹⁵² *Gettysburg Compiler* [Gettysburg, Pennsylvania] 16th June 1862

performance if Johnston had not been injured. A letter written sometime after the battle and printed in the *Cincinnati Commercial Tribune*¹⁵³ and the *Daily Missouri Democrat*¹⁵⁴ quotes Southern officers that attribute the injury of Johnston and the elevation of Lee to commanding general to the subsequent consolidation of the Confederate Army that led to the successful defense of Richmond. It is not arguable however that the change in command was a turning point in the Civil War. Lee would be successful in defending Richmond for over almost four years from advancing Union Armies, but Lee's aggressive style would lead the Confederates to invade the North in two failed major campaigns that would lead to some of the bloodiest fighting of the Civil War.

During the Civil War at this time, Lee's wife and daughters made national news. McClellan's Peninsula Campaign had come to the White House Plantation owned by Robert E. Lee's son Rooney who was a Colonel in the Confederate Army. Staying at the White House was Lee's wife Mary Custis and two of his daughters were captured by advancing Union Troops. The capture was reported by the Northern Press in articles like this one from *the Democratic Expounder* which stated that "Mrs. Lee and her two daughters had been captured near Hanover Court House. A contraband [freed slave] was the one who told the Union soldiers where she was staying." The paper goes on to say that Mrs. Lee was indignant and the soldiers were given a lecture about the duties of chivalry by the daughters.¹⁵⁵

Lee's wife was placed under what was basically house arrest. Lee knew that she would not be harmed and Lee and McClellan both exchanged letters and later she was escorted through the

¹⁵³ "A Very Important Document," *Cincinnati Commercial Tribune* [Cincinnati] 22nd October 1862

¹⁵⁴ "A Very Important Document," *Daily Missouri Democrat* [St. Louis] 24th October 1862

¹⁵⁵ "Capture of Mrs. General Lee and her two Daughters," *Democratic Expounder* [Marshall, Michigan] 12th June 1862

Union lines to Richmond. This event was noted as well by multiple newspapers. The *Rockford Republican* wrote that; “Mrs. Lee was placed in charge of a guard of cavalry and crossed the line to the rebel Capital.”¹⁵⁶ *The New York Times*¹⁵⁷ and the *New Albany Daily Ledger*¹⁵⁸ write the same article as the *Rockford Republican*, but end their articles with an added line that has a hopeful tone saying; “we may soon follow her”. The *New Port Daily News* printed a theory as to the reason Mrs. Lee was released saying that; “the wife of the rebel General Robert E. Lee has been released and returned to Richmond—to reform her husband, so it is said.”¹⁵⁹

It is humorous to assume that Mrs. Lee would try to reform her husband, but this still shows that Lee’s reputation was still such that a minor hope was still out there that Lee would turn back to the flag of the United States and leave the Confederacy.

After Lee took command the Seven Days Battles began from June 25th- July 1st 1862. In a series of eight battles, Robert E. Lee pushed the Army of the Potomac away from Richmond and back to its original starting point. Despite the fact that Lee had won the Campaign, Lee in fact lost most of the battles of the Seven Days. Of the eight battles, Gaines Mills was the only clear Confederate victory. It would be from this battle that a dispatch that Lee sent to Davis after the Battle of Gaines Mills that would be printed in the Northern Press. The dispatch dated June 28th read; Lee stated he was “grieved by the loss of life in the victory.”¹⁶⁰ The other seven battles were either ambiguous outcomes or outright losses. Time and time again it would look as if Lee would be able to cut off parts of the Army of the Potomac and each time the Union Army would

¹⁵⁶ “Release of Mrs. Lee,” *Rockford Republican* [Rockford, Illinois] 26th June 1862

¹⁵⁷ “The Wife of Gen. Lee Released A few more Rebel Compliments Letters.; MRS. LEE. THE TRIBUNE’S AID AND COMFORT,” *New York Times* [New York] 16th June 1862

¹⁵⁸ “Mrs. Lee Released,” *New Albany Daily Ledger* [New Albany, Indiana] 18th June 1862

¹⁵⁹ “General Summary,” *New Port Daily News* [New Port, Rhode Island] 19th June 1862

¹⁶⁰ “From New York,” *Boston Traveler* [Boston] 11th July 1862

slip away. Lee's desperation to strike at the Union Army would lead him to make reckless attacks against fortified positions such as Malvern Hill that would cost Lee thousands of troops for little or no gain. Lee's aggressive tactics would incur more casualties than McClellan did during Seven Days because of McClellan's natural defensible mindset. The high loss of men would be a common theme in Lee's generalship of aggressive movements against well defended positions. Most of the problems that Lee had were again blamed more on the errors of subordinates than on Lee himself. This is a fair assumption considering that Lee took over an army that had officers that Lee had not yet fully acquainted himself with and knew little to nothing on how his Generals would carry out his orders. Most of the blame is given to General Jackson's poor showing than anything else.

In the South the victory was celebrated and Lee was made a hero of the South and in the North the loss devastated Northern morale. With McClellan's retreat Richmond would never be that close to being taken until General Grant took the city in 1865. What we find when we read the initial articles is mass confusion among the press on both sides. Reports came in stating that Richmond had fallen while other stated that Lee had been reinforced by troops from Corinth, Mississippi and because of this McClellan was forced to retreat¹⁶¹ and even a report in Houston, Texas that proudly proclaimed that McClellan had been captured.¹⁶² It took some time for the news to be sorted and the real story of McClellan's defeat and the emergence of Lee's new found reputation to begin to be circulated in the North.

After the Seven Days Battles multiple articles would be printed in the North trying to explain how McClellan had lost while victory articles would be reprinted from Southern newspapers in

¹⁶¹ "Gen. McClellan's Army. Our Loss 25,000 Men. Interesting Details--The Change of Base--Our Present" *Boston Post* [Boston] 10th July 1862

¹⁶² "McClellan Captured," *Houston Tri-Weekly Telegraph* [Houston] 18th July 1862

Northern papers. The most numerous of the Southern articles to appear in the Northern press were multiple pieces praising Lee in what seemed to be ever increasing attempts to give Lee the highest possible compliments and accolades. The *New York Times*¹⁶³, the *Cleveland Leader*¹⁶⁴ and other Northern Newspapers all reprinted an article from the *Richmond Dispatch*. Most of the papers state that Lee is being extravagantly praised and quote the *Dispatch* which states that Lee is a “master” in the art of war and how Lee being at his post makes the city of Richmond and the country feel safe. The *Milwaukee Sentinel* also quotes from a later *Dispatch* article that states that “besides being a great General in the field, Lee is acknowledged by universal consent to be the best organizer of the day and will prepare the means of resistance and use them once prepared.”¹⁶⁵ Pulling from the *Dispatch* again, the *Philadelphia Inquirer*¹⁶⁶ and the *Boston Evening Transcript*¹⁶⁷ reprints a large article about how General Lee had displaced General Beauregard as the Confederacy’s hero and described how Lee had gone from damaged fame because of the West Virginia Campaign to military genius. Another article from the *New York Tribune* gives the praises of Lee from multiple Richmond based newspapers such as the *Richmond Enquirer*, the *Richmond Dispatch*, and the *Richmond Whig* where Lee’s victory during the Seven Days Battles were compared to other famous battles such as the Battle of Austerlitz and Lee himself is compared to Napoleon, Hannibal, and Fredrick the Great.¹⁶⁸ Lee’s victory address to his soldiers was printed in the North where Lee thanked God for the victory and extolled the valor of his troops.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶³ “The Bombast of the Richmond Press,” *The New York Times* [New York] 14th July 1862

¹⁶⁴ “From Washington,” *Cleveland Leader* [Cleveland] 14th July 1862

¹⁶⁵ “Later from the South from Rebel Sources,” *Milwaukee Sentinel* [Milwaukee] 17th July 1862

¹⁶⁶ “General Lee the Southern Champion,” *Philadelphia Inquirer* [Philadelphia] 23rd July 1862

¹⁶⁷ “Lee the Southern Champion,” *Boston Evening Transcript* [Boston] 24th July 1862

¹⁶⁸ “Gen. Lee Exulted above all other men,” *New York Tribune* [New York] 26th July 1862

¹⁶⁹ “Tall Bragging by Davis,” *Springfield Republican* [Springfield, Massachusetts] 19th July 1862

Even with all the accolades from the South being printed in Northern newspapers across the country, Lee did not escape from criticism though that criticism itself could be seen by some as the act of a merciful man. Reprinting an article from the *Richmond Examiner*, the *Daily Missouri Democrat* writes that Lee is blamed for the shameful and alarming frequency of desertions because Lee does not execute deserters as is the military custom of that time.¹⁷⁰ While the execution of deserters was practiced in both armies, Lee's forgiveness could be seen by many as the act of a civilized man.

The Seven Days Battles was the beginning of the rise of Robert E. Lee's reputation as the greatest general of the Civil War. Despite the past criticisms and the apparent lack of marshal skill, Lee did indeed live up to the promise of being the most able and greatest soldier on either side. After Seven Days Lee now has to confront a new threat just weeks after McClellan fled from the gates of Richmond. General John Pope was put in command of an army of 77,000 men that he dubbed the Army of Virginia during the Peninsula Campaign. To oppose him, Lee had an army of about 55,000 men. Knowing that McClellan was no threat at the moment, Lee hoped that he could get his army between Pope and McClellan and destroy Pope before McClellan could move and lend aid. With General Jackson acting as bait, Lee lured Pope into focusing only on Jackson and ignoring everything else. When Pope thought that he had Jackson cornered, Lee sprung his trap and General James Longstreet's troops slammed into Pope's army and routed them. Lee's plan almost worked and Pope's army was defeated at the 2nd Battle of Bull run but not destroyed as it was hoped that it would be. Newspapers reported the results of the battle quickly and at first proclaiming victory for the North, but soon after the truth of the results came in and the Northern people were treated with more articles of defeat. One of the first stories

¹⁷⁰ "The Frequency of Desertion from the Rebel Ranks," *Daily Missouri Democrat* [St. Louis] 31st July 1862

printed came from the *Springfield Republican* that the rebels regard the whole affair as a “decided success and as a great triumph of General Lee over Pope and that after beating McClellan; Lee has now done the same to General Pope.”¹⁷¹ The North printed stories about the strategy that Lee used. In the *Daily National Intelligencer*, Lee was given credit for carefully concealing his main Army and drawing Pope into a trap.¹⁷² The *Philadelphia Inquirer* gives the account on how Lee captured all of the official papers of General Pope and knew of Popes plans.¹⁷³ Then in a latter issue, the *Philadelphia Inquirer* reported a quote from Lee printed in the *Lynchburg Republican* giving Lee’s opinion of the 2nd Battle of Bull Run as the most decisive of the War.¹⁷⁴

After the battle, two incidents printed in the Northern press painted General Lee in a favorable light. The first printed by the *Albany Evening Journal* was that under a flag of truce Lee sent the body of Union General Philip Kearny showing that Lee respected the fallen general and did not allow his body to lie on the field.¹⁷⁵ This was not an uncommon occurrence during the Civil War for bodies of general officers to be sent over the lines, but rarely was the name of the general who ordered it printed. By printing Lee’s name, it could show how highly respected Kearny was and how Lee acknowledged Kearny’s ability. The second article from the *Cincinnati Commercial Tribune* writes that many of the dead were stripped of their clothing and this was a violation of General Lee’s orders. The paper quotes Lee who said that those who did it “should

¹⁷¹ “The War. The Army of Virginia. Fighting at Manassas,” *Springfield Republican* [Springfield, Massachusetts] 30th August 1862

¹⁷² “How Jackson Got into Pope’s Rear,” *Daily National Intelligencer* [Washington D.C.] 2nd September 1862

¹⁷³ “From the National Capital,” *Philadelphia Inquirer* [Philadelphia] 1st September 1862

¹⁷⁴ “General Lee’s Opinion,” *Lynchburg Republican* [Lynchburg, Virginia] 8th September 1862; “General Lee’s Opinion,” *Philadelphia Inquirer* [Philadelphia] 13th September 1862

¹⁷⁵ Army Items,” *Albany Evening Journal* [Albany, New York] 3rd September 1862

be shot".¹⁷⁶ Lee's own personal health was also mentioned as reported in the *Massachusetts Ploughman and New England Journal of Agriculture* that Lee had been injured by an accidental discharge of his pistol.¹⁷⁷

With his victory over General Pope, Lee was able to begin his first invasion of the North through Maryland. Lee had four objectives for his invasion of Maryland. The first was to get the Civil War out of Virginia and plunder the Northern farm land that had not yet been foraged. The second objective was to cut off Washington D.C. from the rest of the Union by destroying the B and O railroad. The third objective was to convince Maryland to leave the Union and to raise troops from Maryland to help Lee replenish his ranks after his losses at Seven Days and 2nd Bull Run. The fourth objective was to defeat the Union Army on Northern soil and hopefully convince the European nations of England and France to recognize the Confederate States of America and force President Lincoln to negotiate an end to the Civil War.

Upon arriving in Maryland, Northern newspapers printed various articles about General Lee. Some of them seemed uncharacteristic of General Lee such as articles printed by the *Manchester Daily Mirror*¹⁷⁸, the *New York Tribune*¹⁷⁹ and the *Massachusetts Spy*¹⁸⁰ who all wrote articles saying Gen. Lee offered to bet \$100 to \$1 that he would be in Washington in a week. These articles are hard to believe. It is highly doubtful that Robert E. Lee would make this type of bet. The *Manchester Daily Mirror* and the *Massachusetts Spy* both in the article before this one

¹⁷⁶ "From Washington," *Cincinnati Commercial Tribune* [Cincinnati] 4th September 1862

¹⁷⁷ "Washington," *Massachusetts Ploughman and New England Journal of Agriculture* [Boston] 6th September 1862

¹⁷⁸ "Lee bets \$100 to \$1 that he will be in Washington in a Week," *Manchester Daily Mirror* [Manchester, New Hampshire] 9th September 1862

¹⁷⁹ "Gen Lee Going to Dine in Washington Soon," *New York Tribune* [New York] 9th September 1862

¹⁸⁰ "The Invasion of Maryland," *Massachusetts Spy* [Worcester, Massachusetts] 10th September 1862

mentions General Fitzhugh Lee and the bet may have come from him, but the *Tribune* does not mention General Fitzhugh Lee at all so it possible that General Robert E. Lee made the bet.

Lee was also put in a positive light with the issue of free slaves. *The New York Tribune* wrote an article which described how an English gentleman present as a volunteer saw a scoundrel in citizen's clothing with a major's star on the collar grab a negro and remarked that he did not care whether the negro was a slave or not. He took the Negro by the collar and said "I'll make a slave of you and a slave you are from this moment." The scoundrel then struck the Negro and asked the Englishman what he thought of that. The Englishmen replied that there was a flag of truce that was being violated and other officers immediately disclaimed what the scoundrel did and reported that Gen. Lee would doubtless return the free Negroes who were taken if he could find them.¹⁸¹ While Lee is not directly quoted, it does show the people of the North that Lee would care about whether a Negro was a slave or not and make sure if possible to keep Freedmen from being put into slavery. Of course the opposite may also be true that Lee would have encouraged the return of escaped slaves.

To help achieve the objective of drawing Maryland into the Confederacy and also to recruit troops, Lee issued a proclamation to the people of Maryland whom many in the South felt were being oppressed by the Yankees and would jump at the chance to throw off the yoke off that oppression by joining Lee's army and fighting for the Confederacy. Lee's proclamation was

¹⁸¹ "The Invasion of Maryland," *New York Tribune* [New York] 10th September 1862

printed in the Northern newspapers in its entirety such as the *Daily Zanesville Courier*¹⁸² and the *New York Tribune*.¹⁸³ In Lee's proclamation he wrote;

"with the deepest sympathy for the wrongs that have been inflicted upon the citizens of the commonwealth allied to the States of the South by the strongest social, political, and commercial ties and reduced to the condition of a conquered provinces and the pretensions of supporting the constitution... to aid you in throwing off this foreign yoke, to enable you again to enjoy the inalienable rights of freemen and restore the independence and sovereignty of your state."

Lee's proclamation was printed in the North and in some cases the Northern papers printed commentary about it and the results that it had. *The Newark Daily Advertiser* wrote that "if Lee really respected the choice of Maryland which he professes to be his intention, the people would pronounce with remarkable unanimity in favor of the retirement of his invading army without any delay and that all the pledges and fair-seeming promises of Gen. Lee are the usual baits thrown out by invading Generals to entrap or influence those whose soil they dishonor and whose liberty that would overthrow."¹⁸⁴ *The Boston Evening Transcript* gave a scathing review of not only Lee's proclamation, but on Lee himself. Lee was called an associate of men who stole the property of the United States, a leader of troops raised to overthrow the nationality of the United States, a violated his oath and every principle of honor that characterizes a loyal soldier and a truthful gentleman. *The Boston Evening Transcript* goes on to say that Lee came as the deliverer and protector of that State [Maryland] oppressed by the violations of the

¹⁸² "Proclamation from Gen. Lee to the People of Maryland," *Daily Zanesville Courier* [Zanesville, Ohio] 12th September 1862

¹⁸³ "Proclamation from Gen. Lee to the People of Maryland," *New York Tribune* [New York] 12th September 1862

¹⁸⁴ "Gen. Lee's Proclamation," *Newark Daily Advertiser* [Newark, New Jersey] 12th September 1862

Constitution of the United States which Constitution he and his confederate rebels are in arms to overthrow and ends with calling Lee's proclamation a hypocritical, lying and impudent manifesto of the commander of the rebel marauders.¹⁸⁵ *The World* called Lee's proclamation "artfully phrased but said that to see the results of being in the Confederacy; Maryland just had to look across the Potomac at the desolation of Virginia."¹⁸⁶ *The New York Times* reported that "Lee's proclamation did convince several villages in Frederick County to send a few companies and one town sent an entire regiment, but even though Gen. Lee wooed the Marylanders very affectionately, they doubt whether Lee obtained twenty-five hundred recruits from the State."¹⁸⁷ Later the *New York Times* then said that the "cautious traitors have declined to join Lee and that Lee had expected 50,000 recruits from Maryland."¹⁸⁸ Writing after the Battle of Antietam, the *Independent Democrat* wrote that "Lee had not had an opportunity to see the effect of his proclamation as he and his army is skedaddling."¹⁸⁹ *The Examiner* wrote that Gen. Lee soon discovered that his proclamation was an "egregious blunder and he was unwelcomed everywhere."¹⁹⁰ *The Elkhart Weekly Review* noted that "instead of large reinforcements to his army as expected by Gen. Lee on the issuing of his proclamation, Lee was forced to recross the Potomac with fewer men than he went into Maryland with."¹⁹¹

The results of Lee's proclamation were not the ones that Lee expected. The troops that he had hoped would join the Army of Northern Virginia's banner never came in great numbers. Most of those Marylanders that wanted to join the Confederate Army had already done so prior to the

¹⁸⁵ "The Sublimity of Impudence," *Boston Evening Transcript* [Boston] 12th September 1862

¹⁸⁶ *The World* [New York] 12th September 1862

¹⁸⁷ "Rebel Recruiting in Maryland and Kentucky," *New York Times* [New York] 14th September 1862

¹⁸⁸ "The Rebel Campaign a Raid and Failure," *New York Times* [New York] 16th September 1862

¹⁸⁹ "Proclamation of Gen. Lee," *Independent Democrat* [Concord] 18th September 1862

¹⁹⁰ "The Rebel Proclamation," *The Examiner* [Frederick, Maryland] 24th September 1862

¹⁹¹ "Reason for Hopefulness," *Elkhart Weekly Review* [Elkhart, Indiana] 1st November 1862

Maryland Campaign leaving few men willing to join the Confederate Army at this stage of the Civil War. Maryland itself did not rise up against the United States Government. Lee ran into a lack of enthusiasm on the part of the citizens of Maryland. While it was a slaveholding state, most of the people did not own slaves and supported the Union in greater numbers than the slave holding planter class. The proximity of the Federal capital of Washington D.C. also put a damper on any resistance to the United States. Even if Maryland had elected to join the Confederacy when Lee invaded, it is doubtful that Lee could have stayed in the state. Lee would have extended supply lines and would have to deal with a wide open border that lacked the river protection that Virginia had in the Potomac and Rappahannock.

Lee's invasion was also hit with what could have been the biggest military blunder of the Civil War. Special Order 191 also known as the Lost Dispatch. Special Order 191 contained all of Lee's troop numbers, the positions of his forces, and their lines of advance. The order was found wrapping three cigars lying in the grass by a Corporal on September 13th. The order was passed on to General McClellan reportedly exclaimed, "*Here is a paper with which, if I cannot whip Bobby Lee, I will be willing to go home.*" Despite knowing where Lee was, McClellan failed to move quickly and Lee was tipped off to McClellan's movement and was able to concentrate his forces at Antietam. Historians will always blame McClellan for not taking full advantage of the Lost Order and destroying the Army of Northern Virginia in detail. A copy of the Lost Order was printed in the Northern press. *The Daily National Intelligencer* stated that it was a common idea that the entire object of the Maryland invasion was simply to a raid to collect recruits and supplies... it is now past doubt that Lee's intention was to invade Pennsylvania, carry the war to the gates of Harrisburg and operate afterward on Philadelphia or Baltimore. The *Daily National Intelligencer* then praised McClellan for defeating Lee and driving Lee out of

Maryland.¹⁹² By printing the Lost Order, the Northern Press was able to counter claims of the Southern Press that General Lee's invasion of Maryland was just a raid.

Lee's personal health again became the subject of the Northern Press who reported in the *Evening Star*¹⁹³ and the *Boston Evening Transcript*¹⁹⁴ an article by the *Richmond Dispatch* that Lee had hurt his hands falling off his horse after the animal had been spooked. This would be the second time that an injury to Lee made the news in the North.

After pursuing the Army of Northern Virginia, the Union Army launched a series of attacks against Lee's army that was in a defensive position behind Antietam Creek. In the morning of September 17th McClellan started his attack by attacking Lee's left flank. Multiple counter-attacks swept across the cornfield and Dunker Church and eventually pierced the Confederate center at the Sunken Road. In the late afternoon, McClellan sent in General Ambrose Burnside's corps and almost broke the Confederate line before reinforcements under Confederate General A.P. Hill arrived and counter-attacked Burnside driving the Union troops back and ending the Battle of Antietam. The end result of the battle was that Lee's first invasion of the North ended in failure. It was only by the extreme caution of General McClellan in attacking Lee upon getting the Lost Dispatch that Lee's army was not destroyed in detail perhaps ending the Civil War.

In the Northern Press, the victory at Antietam was celebrated. It was the first major victory for the United States in the Eastern Theater over the Confederate Army. It proved that the Union Army could defeat the Confederate Army in a battle. For Lincoln it was the victory he needed to

¹⁹² "The Results of Antietam," *Daily National Intelligencer* [Washington D.C.] 1st January 1863

¹⁹³ *Richmond Dispatch* [Richmond] 8th September 1862; "Generals Lee and Ewell," *Evening Star* [Washington D.C.] 13th September 1862

¹⁹⁴ *Richmond Dispatch* [Richmond] 8th September 1862; "Generals Lee Disabled-General Ewell Doing Well," *Boston Evening Transcript* [Boston] 16th September 1862

submit his Emancipation Proclamation and free the slaves of the rebelling South. *The New York Tribune* gave a detailed account of the battle showing how the Union Army won the fight.¹⁹⁵ *The Boston Post* congratulated General McClellan on the “fruits of the victories won and the greatest battle since Waterloo.”¹⁹⁶ The *Cincinnati Commercial Tribune* praised McClellan for sharing the dangers of his men.¹⁹⁷ *The Examiner* gleefully proclaimed that “Maryland is the grave of Treason.”¹⁹⁸ While the *Manchester Daily Mirror* stated that the Rebels have no hope that Maryland will join the Confederacy.¹⁹⁹

The Northern Press also printed complements about Lee independently as well as Southern newspaper articles about the Battle of Antietam that also praised him. *The Boston Post*, without quoting from a Southern newspaper, wrote about Lee’s skillful generalship during the battle,²⁰⁰ and three days later calling the rebel retreat an “ably managed affair and reflects great credit upon Gen. Lee.”²⁰¹ The Northern papers printed the rebel accounts of the Battle of Antietam. The Southerners universally declared Antietam a victory for the Confederacy despite the fact that Maryland remained in the hands of the North. The *Providence Evening Press* printed an article from the *Richmond Inquirer* that declared Antietam a great victory.²⁰² *The Manchester Daily Mirror* printed a story from the *Richmond Examiner* that also claimed Antietam a rebel

¹⁹⁵ “The War for the Union,” *New York Tribune* [New York] 19th September 1862

¹⁹⁶ “The Fruits of the Victory,” *The Boston Post* [Boston] 22nd September 1862

¹⁹⁷ “McClellan’s Headquarters,” *Cincinnati Commercial Tribune* [Cincinnati] September 23rd 1862

¹⁹⁸ “The Rebel Invasion,” *The Examiner* [Frederick, Maryland] 24th September 1862

¹⁹⁹ “By Telegraph,” *Manchester Daily Mirror* [Manchester, New Hampshire] 27th September 1862

²⁰⁰ “The Fruits of the Victory,” *The Boston Post* [Boston] 22nd September 1862

²⁰¹ “Miscellaneous,” *The Boston Post* [Boston] 25th September 1862

²⁰² “From the South,” *Providence Evening Press* [Providence] 26th September 1862

victory.²⁰³ The *Philadelphia Inquirer* printed an article from the *Richmond Enquirer* that said the Battle of Antietam was the most complete victory of the Confederate Army.²⁰⁴ The *Philadelphia Inquirer* in the same issue also printed an article from the *Petersburg Express* where they said that General Lee wisely withdrew his army from Maryland.²⁰⁵ The *San Francisco Bulletin* wrote that all the Richmond Journals write that Gen. Lee accomplished everything that proposed in his late raid into Maryland. And his proclamation was just a ruse.²⁰⁶

Even while reporting the Southern accounts of the Battle of Antietam, the North in some cases made sure to set the record straight. The *Daily National Republican* summed up all of the Richmond Newspapers accounts mentioned above and then stated that it was Lee who ran away using the time that was given to bury the dead to leave the battlefield. It goes on to say that the Confederate Army's generals were dispirited and discouraged and all of this does not look like the success which the Richmond journals claim for Lee.²⁰⁷ The *San Francisco Bulletin* also stated that Lee ran from the battle despite what the Richmond journals stated.²⁰⁸ But these were few in number. Most papers did not refute what the Southern press said about the Battle of Antietam which many have helped contribute to the later estimations of Antietam being a draw instead of a great Northern victory.

Antietam was the end of Lee's first invasion of the North. Even though the North claimed victory, the Northern press still did not universally condemn or make any major effort to degrade

²⁰³ "The Rebels Claim the Battle as a Great Victory," *Manchester Daily Mirror* [Manchester, New Hampshire] 27th September 1862

²⁰⁴ "The Terrific Fight at Sharpsburg, Md.," *Philadelphia Inquirer* [Philadelphia] 27th September 1862

²⁰⁵ "The March into Maryland," *Philadelphia Inquirer* [Philadelphia] 27th September 1862

²⁰⁶ "The Late Battles," *San Francisco Bulletin* [San Francisco] 24th October 1862

²⁰⁷ "About the Battle of Antietam," *Daily National Republican* [Washington D.C.] 30th September 1862

²⁰⁸ "The Late Battles," *San Francisco Bulletin* [San Francisco] 24th October 1862

Lee's abilities as a General. By printing complements and the views of the Southern papers on Antietam's outcome, they were helping keep the image of Lee in a positive light when they could have used the opportunity to rip into Lee as a general and help increase the morale of the Northern people by pointing out that General Lee was not this invincible reincarnation of Napoleon. The Northern Press also printed Lee's address to the Army of Northern Virginia. *The New York Tribune*²⁰⁹ and the *Plain Dealer*²¹⁰ printed the laudatory address that made it seem as if every battle that Lee's army had fought in had been a victory for the Confederacy. In it Lee talks about winning against overwhelming numbers and pushing the invading North out of their country. His address contradicted McClellan's address and with the removal of a victorious McClellan as commanding General of the Army of the Potomac, doubt about the validity of McClellan's victory may have been planted in minds of the people.

During the time between the Battle of Antietam and the Battle of Fredericksburg, several Northern papers began to print biographies and human interest stories about Lee and one of Lee's ancestors. The biographies ranged from short articles that just covered basic information that did not contain opinions, to some that questioned his military skill, to massive single page articles describing Lee in complementary words. While the stories were split between one making Lee look good and others making Lee look bad and others speaking of Lee's health again.

Many newspapers printed the same biographies of Lee. *The Evening Post*²¹¹, *The Cincinnati Commercial Tribune*²¹², and other Northern newspapers printed a short bio that gave just the

²⁰⁹ "Late from Richmond," *New York Tribune* [New York] 13th October 1862

²¹⁰ "Gen. Lee's Address to his Troops," *Plain Dealer* [Cleveland] 13th October 1862

²¹¹ "Who is General Robert E. Lee?," *Evening Post* [New York] 1st October 1862

basic information covering from birth to his resignation to join the Confederate Army. These were the same type of articles that appeared at the start of the Civil War. The reprinting of these articles may have been due to many people of the North not knowing who Lee was at the start of the Civil War having not paying attention to the initial articles. The biographies that were printed in the *San Francisco Bulletin*²¹³ and the *Farmer's Cabinet*²¹⁴ that were pulled from the *New York Herald* were longer than others and more detailed. This biography gave complements, but it also questioned Lee's skill as a commanding general. This bio felt there was a great deal of doubt about his abilities due to him being beaten at Cheat Mountain, failing to bag McClellan and Pope's armies, and finally the loss at Antietam. There was one massive biography printed in *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*. This particular biography was filled with complements and denunciations. The complement called him "distinguished, gallant, and described Lee's physical appearance as very striking and as Superintendent of West Point was very popular. The denunciations were that his serious dignity was an assumption to hide a mediocrity irritated by a vain ambition and as a rebel general he had not distinguished himself despite multiple opportunities."²¹⁵

Human interest stories are made to discuss a person in an emotional way that presents problems, concerns or achievements that can help grow interest or generate sympathy for that person with the reader. Multiple human interest stories about Lee were printed that either complemented him or painted him in a negative way. One such story deals with the personal

²¹² "Who is General Robert E. Lee?," *The Cincinnati Commercial Tribune* [Cincinnati] 4th October 1862

²¹³ "The Rebel General-in-Chief, Robert E. Lee," *San Francisco Bulletin* [San Francisco] 9th October 1862

²¹⁴ "Miscellaneous Readings. The Rebel General-in-Chief," *Farmer's Cabinet* [Amherst, New Hampshire] 30th October 1862

²¹⁵ "Gen. Robert E. Lee, The Rebel Commander-in-Chief," *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* [New York] 4th October 1862

effects of General Philip Kearny. General Kearny was killed at the 2nd Battle of Bull Run and his body was returned under flag of truce. The personal effects of General Kearny for an unreported reason were sent later during the month of October of 1862. Many of the Northern papers such as the *Public Ledger*²¹⁶ and the *Portland Daily Advertiser*²¹⁷ printed a story that said that General Lee sent the objects to General Kearny's widow. However the *Providence Evening Press*²¹⁸ printed the same story but made the article's title "*A Gallant Rebel General*". This title would give the readers a positive look at Lee actions unlike the other two examples that would show the return of General Kearny's effects as routine.

Another article from the *American Traveller* shows Lee's humanity in an inhumane war by showing that Lee refused to fight under the "Black Flag" or taking no prisoners. The article quotes Lee as saying he condemns the thought of using it and in his opinion black is black enough without wasting time and labor in striving to make it blacker. The paper states that Lee speaks like a man of sense and apparently does not wish to accumulate horrors upon horror's head.²¹⁹

Lee's physical health and appearance also were placed in articles. In the *American Traveller*, a paroled prisoner gave a description of General Lee calling him a "fine built man with a heavy frame."²²⁰ Lee's physical health was widely reported in the Northern press. During the Battle of Antietam, Lee had fallen off his horse and severely sprained his wrists. At the time they thought that Lee had been shot in the wrist, but we now know that Lee had not been shot during at

²¹⁶ "Respect of the Rebels for a Gallant Officer," *Public Ledger* [Philadelphia] 7th October 1862

²¹⁷ "Various Matters," *Portland Daily Advertiser* [Portland, Maine] 7th October 1862

²¹⁸ "A Gallant Rebel General," *Providence Evening Press* [Providence] 7th October 1862

²¹⁹ "Review of the Week," *American Traveller* [Boston] 1st November 1862

²²⁰ "Incidents in the Rebel Camps," *American Traveller* [Boston] 4th October 1862

Antietam. Without being fully aware of this fact, the *New York Tribune*²²¹, the *Hartford Daily Courant*²²², and the *Boston Evening Transcript*²²³ reported that General Lee had been shot in one hand and had fallen off his horse and broke a bone in the other.

An article about Lee that made him out to be a horrible kidnapper was printed in the *Portland Advertiser*. A letter that claims that Lee is “conscripting in the country with remorseless energy, seizing all under the age of forty-five who fall within his reach, taking citizens walking in the streets accompanied by their wives and children.”²²⁴ There is no evidence that this event happened and it would be highly doubtful that it did. The Confederate Congress did pass a conscription act in March of 1862, but there were never any officially recorded events of men being pulled off the street and forced into the Confederate Army.

Like before, Lee’s family would be commented on by the Northern Press. Printed in the Northern Press was a story linking Lee’s secessionist tendencies to his ancestor Richard B. Lee. Richard Lee was a U.S. Representative from Virginia and in 1799 wrote a letter that seemingly called for the dissolution of the United States once the South’s population had gotten big enough to sustain a nation. *The Press*²²⁵ printed the letter with the comment that it “furnished clear insight into the origins of the rebellion,” while the *Daily Missouri Democrat*²²⁶ printed the letter with the article title “*Lee’s Grandfather a Traitor*”. This letter would tie General Lee to the idea of secession based on a familiar tie and would imprint on the minds of the Northern people that Lee’s family may have been planning for the secession of the Southern States for some time

²²¹ “Illness of Gen. Lee,” *New York Tribune* [New York] 8th October 1862

²²² “Gen. Lee,” *Hartford Daily Courant* [Hartford] 8th October 1862

²²³ “Illness of Gen. Lee,” *Boston Evening Transcript* [Boston] 8th October 1862

²²⁴ “Pen and Scissors,” *Portland Advertiser* [Portland, Maine] 11th October 1862

²²⁵ “A Curious Revelation of the War,” *The Press* [Philadelphia] 1st November 1862

²²⁶ “Lee’s Grandfather a Traitor,” *Daily Missouri Democrat* [St. Louis] 8th November 1862

now. Later as the Civil War continues, we will see members of Lee's family and their actions to be used as a way to draw a picture of a family that had tried to break this country apart in the past.

The way the press treated Lee could be classified as mild. The lack of any serious anti-Lee stories that could have been printed never came about. Like Lincoln using the victory at Antietam to present his Emancipation Proclamation, the Northern press could have used the victory to present Lee as a man that was beatable and show that the abilities of Union generals could be an equal match to the abilities of Lee. The fact that this did not happen at a time when the people needed to have their faith in the ability of their Army and its leaders reinforced, the press failed. This lack of help given to the war effort would lead to new lows in public morale with the results of the next two battles.

After Antietam, General McClellan was replaced by General Ambrose E. Burnside. Burnside would be the fourth Union General he would face in battle. That battle would go down as one of the most one-sided battles of the war with Union casualties almost three times as heavy as those inflicted on the Confederate Army. This battle would be known as the Battle of Fredericksburg. The Battle of Fredericksburg began on December 11th as Union engineers laid five pontoon bridges across the Rappahannock. From December 11th to December 12th the Union Army pushed the Confederate Army out of the town with intense urban fighting. After the city had been cleared, the Union Army prepared to assault the Confederate Army in its defensive positions on a ridge known as Marye's Heights. On December 13th the attack started well for the Union who managed to pierce the defensive line in General Jackson's section of the line, but the Union was pushed back. After this, General Burnside ordered multiple frontal assaults against General James Longstreet's position on Marye's Heights. All of the attacks were repulse with

heavy losses. The next day on the 14th, General Burnside announced that he would personally lead his IX Corps in one final attack, but was talked out of it. Finally on the 15th, Burnside withdrew his army back across the Rappahannock ending another failed campaign and giving Lee another victory.

The Northern papers were dismayed by the loss. Many papers like the *Portland Daily Advertiser* printed stories saying of the battle that it was fought without other result than heavy losses in killed and wounded.²²⁷ *The Wisconsin Daily Patriot* wrote that the “slight resistance that Gen. Lee offered in the crossing of the Rappahannock was by designed so that the Union Army could be draw nearer to their formidable lines.”²²⁸ Multiple newspapers such as the *Boston Traveler*²²⁹ and the *New York World*²³⁰ printed articles about Lee calling for a truce so that the Union Army could bury their dead. *The Springfield Republican* blamed the loss on the delay of the pontoon bridges and the superior position of the Confederate Army.²³¹ *The Boston Post*²³² called the Battle of Fredericksburg the “Great Disaster”, and *the Portland Advertiser*²³³ called it the “Blunder of the War.”

Despite the loss, many papers tried to put a positive spin on the outcome of the Battle of Fredericksburg by celebrating the retreat of the Army of the Potomac. The *Plain Dealer* wrote that the “enemy seemed astonished to find us safe on this side of the river.”²³⁴ The *Public Ledger* bragged that the crossing not only “astounded the Rebel Army, but that the Army of the Potomac

²²⁷ “Saturday’s Battle at Fredericksburg,” *Portland Daily Advertiser* [Portland, Maine] 18th December 1862

²²⁸ “Estimate of Forces,” *Wisconsin Daily Patriot* [Madison] 20th December 1862

²²⁹ “Flag of Truce to Bury the Dead,” *Boston Traveler* [Boston] 17th December 1862

²³⁰ “Flag of Truce From Gen. Lee,” *New York World* [New York] 18th December 1862

²³¹ “How it Failed,” *Springfield Republican* [Springfield, Massachusetts] 19th December 1862

²³² “The Great Disaster,” *Boston Post* [Boston] 22nd December 1862

²³³ “The Blunder of the War,” *Portland Advertiser* [Portland, Maine] 27th December 1862

²³⁴ “Rebels astounded at our successful retreat,” *Plain Dealer* [Cleveland] 17th, December 1862

crossed the Rappahannock without losing a single man or cannon.”²³⁵ *The New York Tribune* stated that “Burnside outgeneraled Robert E. Lee by retreating so secretly that Lee didn’t realize that he could attack and capture the Union Army as it crossed the river.”²³⁶ *The Boston Post* reported that “Gen. Lee thought that whole army within his grasp and with the successful Union retreat when Lee woke up the next day his chagrin and mortification will take the place of exultation.”²³⁷ *The Boston Traveler* wrote that the “Battle of Fredericksburg was not a repulse; it was an attempt to try the strength of Gen. Lee.”²³⁸

It is somewhat surprising that the Northern newspapers tried to put such a positive spin on a retreat where they had not done so in the past. It might have been because the losses at Fredericksburg were so lopsided and horrific that the press felt it had to do something to keep the people’s morale up or because of the lack of any positive news to report in the wake of the ambiguous ending of the Battle of Antietam, the press wanted to print news of some sort of victory.

As before, the North again printed the papers of the Southern press as well as anecdotes that talked about General Lee. *The Public Ledger* printed the Confederate version of the Battle of Fredericksburg where the Confederates called it a complete victory and praised General Lee by saying that Lee selected the battlefield and studied it as Napoleon had done at Austerlitz. It goes on to say that Lee has no rival in the art of war.²³⁹ *The Portsmouth Journal of Literature and*

²³⁵ “The Crossing of the Rappahannock,” *Public Ledger* [Philadelphia] 18th December 1862

²³⁶ “How Lee was Outwitted,” *New York Tribune* [New York] 19th December 1862

²³⁷ “From the Left Wing,” *Boston Post* [Boston] 22nd December 1862

²³⁸ *Boston Traveler* [Boston] 29th December 1862

²³⁹ “Rebel Account of the Great Battle of Fredericksburg,” *Public Ledger* [Philadelphia] 24th December 1862

Politics quotes the Richmond papers who state that Fredericksburg was the greatest rebel victory yet.²⁴⁰

One such anecdote was printed in the *New London Weekly Chronicle* where they reprinted a story from the *Charleston Mercury*. The story goes that a captured Union captain saw General Lee and his staff ride by and upon learning that he was looking at General Lee, praised Lee's soldierly appearance in extravagant terms.²⁴¹ Another story from the *New York Tribune* with a negative look about Lee stated that the leading rebels along the "Valley were furious in their denunciation of Gen. Lee for not having destroyed the Army of the Potomac and says that if Lee can't protect them from the Yankees, they will take the oath to the Federal Government."²⁴² While the Valley population might not have been happy with Lee, the *Newark Daily Advertiser* stated that Virginia was in the hands of that able general, Robert E. Lee²⁴³ and the *Milwaukee Sentinel* stated that Lee was the cause of equal anxiety to the enemy and hope for his country and that Lee was at the head of one of the finest armies known to modern times.²⁴⁴

Once again Robert E. Lee is not completely torn down by the Northern papers. At this time when the Union had just suffered its most horrible defeat of the Civil War, the press was helping to print multiple praises of Lee's abilities with little criticisms or anti-Lee stories. In any situation it should have been the job of the press to give hope to the people at the end of what would be the second year of an almost five year long Civil War. It does not do anyone's faith in your

²⁴⁰ "Gen. Lee; Fredericksburg; Dispatch," *The Portsmouth Journal of Literature and Politics* [Portsmouth, New Hampshire] 27th December 1862

²⁴¹ "Stonewall Jackson," *New London Weekly Chronicle* [New London, Connecticut] 18th December 1862

²⁴² "From General Burnside's Army," *New York Tribune* [New York] 25th December 1862

²⁴³ "Jeff. Davis at Murfreesboro," *Newark Daily Advertiser* [Newark, New Jersey] 15th December 1862

²⁴⁴ "The Military Dead-Lock," *Milwaukee Sentinel* [Milwaukee] 31st December 1862

countries generals and army any good to constantly compare the enemy general to whom many saw as the greatest general of all time in Napoleon Bonaparte. Yet time and time again the North would allow these types of articles to be presented to their population. It seems that Robert E. Lee was still a person who the Northern press felt deserved more praise than hatred. Still this is not to say that Lee did not escape the end of the year completely. It would seem that in order for the North to begin criticizing Lee, they would need victories and a man to match Lee. Neither of which had appeared as of yet. Despite this, as 1862 came to an end, the *Cincinnati Commercial Tribune* wrote a defiant challenge to General Lee; “If the rebel army of Virginia is about to take the offensive-the Army of the Potomac will be delighted to hear it. If Gen. Lee wants to test the question as to the relative capacity of the armies facing each other on the Rappahannock, let him come out of his hole.”²⁴⁵

After the defeat of General Burnside at Fredericksburg and Burnside's subsequent disastrous “Mud March”, President Lincoln again replaced his commander of the Army of the Potomac. This time Lincoln selected General Joseph “Fighting Joe” Hooker as the new commander. General Hooker would spend much of the winter and spring of 1863 preparing his army for an attack on General Lee.

While General Hooker was training his men, General Lee never left the eyes of the newspapers. The majority of the articles printed were about Lee's possible movements, but a few were special interest stories about Lee. A widely reported and a heartbreaking story for Lee that was written was the death of his daughter Annie Carter Lee. Multiple newspapers reported the death but oddly some of the papers got information about her wrong. *The Daily National*

²⁴⁵ “The War News East and South,” *Cincinnati Commercial Tribune* [Cincinnati] 31st December 1862

*Intelligencer*²⁴⁶ and *Columbian Register*²⁴⁷ both briefly stated that Annie Carter Lee had died in North Carolina. The odd articles had to do with Annie Carter Lee's supposed allegiance to the Union. The *Portland Daily Advertiser* reported that "Annie Carter had died an outcast from her home because she adhered to the Union to the last."²⁴⁸

In what can only be considered poor taste and even poorer research, the *Cincinnati Commercial Tribune* not only reported Annie Lee's death, but use the opportunity to take a shot at General Lee. *The Cincinnati Commercial Tribune* reported that "Annie Carter Lee, the daughter and only child of General Lee, had been made an outcast from her home because she remained true to the flag under which her ancestors had won their laurels and true to the Government that had always treated her father as a parent treats a favorite child." The paper reported a short story about a gentleman who went to the Lee home at Arlington and found a book that had a message about being a gift to Anna Carter Lee and how the gentleman brought it away as a relic from a once happy home deserted and disgraced by the treason of General Lee. *The Cincinnati Commercial Tribune* ends the article with one more shot at Lee saying "that it is sorrowful to think that this Anna, the descendant of a once noble and patriotic house, and herself as noble and patriotic as the best of her line should have met death alone and deserted by all but one servant."²⁴⁹

The articles about Annie Carter Lee's death were printed in other papers, but some of these were poorly researched. Annie Carter was not General Lee's only child as other papers including the *Cincinnati Commercial Tribune* reported the exploits of some of Lee's sons. Also there was

²⁴⁶ "Miscellaneous," *Daily National Intelligencer* [Washington D.C.] 24th January 1863

²⁴⁷ "Connecticut; Baltimore; Improvements; Convert; Irrepressible," *Columbian Register* [New Haven, Connecticut] 7th February 1863

²⁴⁸ "Annie Carter Lee," *Portland Daily Advertiser* [Portland, Maine] 4th February 1863

²⁴⁹ "Death of a Heroine," *Cincinnati Commercial Tribune* [Cincinnati] 11th February 1863

no evidence that Annie Carter Lee was loyal to the Union. The only explanation is that the papers got General Lee's sister Anne Kinloch Marshall (Lee) who was loyal to the Union because of the marriage to her husband who was a pro-Union judge and whose son fought for the Union mixed up with Annie Carter Lee. While the research was bad, the description of Annie dying alone and as an outcast must have gotten back to Lee and that could only have made the death of his daughter more painful.

Once again as seems to have happened before every battle, the health of General Lee was again reported but it seems that this time their articles come with wishful thinking. The *Massachusetts Ploughman and New England Journal of Agriculture*²⁵⁰ and the *Weekly Wisconsin Patriot*²⁵¹ both report that "General Lee is sick and Jackson is in command. If he will only stay sick, they will be fifty thousand [men] weaker than they were at Fredericksburg." These articles show how much respect they had for General Lee by suggesting that General Lee is worth fifty thousand men and also implying that General Jackson is not equal to General Lee.

The battle that General Hooker looked forward to would take place on May 1st at Chancellorsville, Virginia and it would become known as General Lee's greatest masterpiece in the Art of War. On May 1st General Hooker advanced from Chancellorsville with 106,000 men towards General Lee who had only 60, 298 men. In the face of overwhelming numbers and against all normal military sense, General Lee attacked General Hooker's superior force. Hooker withdrew his army to a defensive line around Chancellorsville and on May 2nd Lee sent General Stonewall Jackson's entire corps on a flanking march that left Lee with less than half his army to face off against the bulk of Hooker's army. Jackson's corps found the open flank of the Union

²⁵⁰ "From the Potomac Army," *Massachusetts Ploughman and New England Journal of Agriculture* [Boston] 2nd May 1863

²⁵¹ "From the Army of the Potomac," *Weekly Wisconsin Patriot* [Madison] 2nd May 1863

Army and routed them but tragically at the end of the attack, Jackson was shot by his own men and he led a reconnaissance of the Union lines. The next day on May 3rd, Lee launched multiple attacks against Hooker's position that resulted in heavy losses for both sides and paralyzed Hooker from making any attack of his own. During the fight, General Hooker was injured when a Confederate cannonball hit a wooden pillar Hooker was leaning on knocking him out of the fight. Finally on May 5th and May 6th against the advice of his other generals, Hooker withdrew his army across the river and ended the Battle of Chancellorsville.

As shown before in previous reports of a battle, the initial news reported by the correspondents from the various newspapers reported incorrect results of the battles. The *Hartford Daily Courant* reported that "Hooker completely deceived General Lee with his movements."²⁵² *The Sun* gave the report that "Lee kept his men ignorant of the fact that they were surrounded and would have to surrender if they could not cut their way out."²⁵³ *The Boston Daily Advertiser* reported that "Jackson's attack had been checkmated."²⁵⁴ Soon however the real reports came in and the tone of the articles changed. *The Providence Evening Press* reported that "General Hooker was driven back across the Rappahannock and that Hooker was much depressed."²⁵⁵ *The New Hampshire Patriot and State Gazette* called it a "most disastrous and humiliating defeat, more disastrous and humiliating than any other which the Union cause has met since the fatal day of Bull Run."²⁵⁶ While Hooker was called a failure in many papers, Lee's opinion of Hooker was published in the *Press* who quoted Lee as saying that "Hooker was a

²⁵² "Gen Hooker's Advance," *Hartford Daily Courant* [Hartford, Connecticut] 5th May 1863

²⁵³ "Gen. Lee Outflanked and Attacked in his Rear and Front," *Sun* [Baltimore] 5th May 1863

²⁵⁴ "Stonewall Jackson Checkmated," *Boston Daily Advertiser* [Boston] 6th May 1863

²⁵⁵ "Bad News from the Army," *Providence Evening Press* [Providence] 7th May 1863

²⁵⁶ "Gen. Hooker's "Failure"," *The New Hampshire Patriot and State Gazette* [Concord] 13th May 1863

much abler man than he (Lee) supposed. Lee didn't hesitate to tell his officers that Hooker is a man to be feared and watched closely."²⁵⁷

The Northern papers also started printing the Southern papers reaction to the Battle of Chancellorsville. The *Daily Missouri Democrat*²⁵⁸ and the *Press*²⁵⁹ reported that the Richmond papers claimed another great victory for Lee and that General Lee drove Hooker out of the Wilderness and back to Chancellorsville. *The Daily National Intelligencer* quoted from the *Richmond Whig*; "in the language of the noble and invincible Lee, we have again to thank Almighty God for a great victory."²⁶⁰ *The Daily National Republican* printed a copy of Lee's official dispatch to President Davis claiming victory but also reporting the wounding of General Jackson.²⁶¹ *The Boston Post* printed an article from the *Richmond Whig* that stated that "the injury to Hooker's army and to Yankee hopes and prospects will be repaired never."²⁶²

The Northern Papers again praised General Lee's abilities during the Battle of Chancellorsville. *The Press* reported that "General Lee took a good lesson from the actions of Napoleon and that General Lee has certainly gained for himself the name of one of the ablest generals of the present age."²⁶³ *The Plain Dealer* stated that the "ease that General Hooker crossed the Rappahannock was part of the program of General Lee to entrap General Hooker and capture the whole Federal Army and that Hooker's escape was a great victory."²⁶⁴ *The Boston*

²⁵⁷ "Army of the Potomac," *Press* [Philadelphia] 25th May 1863

²⁵⁸ "They Claim a Great Victory for Lee," *Daily Missouri Democrat* [St. Louis] 7th May 1863

²⁵⁹ "Newspaper Details," *Press* [Philadelphia] May 7th 1863

²⁶⁰ "From the Richmond Whig," *Daily National Intelligencer* [Washington D.C.] 8th May 1863

²⁶¹ "Important and Interesting Reports from Rebel Papers," *Daily National Republican* [Washington D.C.] 8th May 1863

²⁶² "From the Whig of Tuesday," *Boston Post* [Boston] 11th May 1863

²⁶³ "Mr. Emil Schalk on the Last Operation on the Rappahannock, and the Cause of its Failure," *Press* [Philadelphia] 9th May 1863

²⁶⁴ "The News at Washington," *Plain Dealer* [Cleveland] 9th May 1863

Post printed that “General Hooker had been outgeneraled, outflanked and outfought by Lee.”²⁶⁵

The newspapers then printed General Lee’s congratulations address to the Army of Northern Virginia where he praised his men’s bravery and gave glory to God for the victory.²⁶⁶ *The World* printed an article about Lee and Hooker’s congratulatory orders saying; “by a most unhappy coincidence the congratulatory orders of Generals Hooker and Lee appeared together. The publication of these two documents simultaneously will do the North almost as much discredit and the South as much credit in Europe as the result of the battles on the Rappahannock.”²⁶⁷

The Battle of Chancellorsville and the whole campaign was over. Every aspect of it was a failure and according to the *World*, “it was as if General Lee himself planned it.”²⁶⁸ Hooker would go on to lead the Army of the Potomac for about two months before he too was replaced as commander. Once again after a loss, the Northern papers choose not to vilify General Lee after the battle. In the months between Chancellorsville and Gettysburg not much was said of General Lee personally. The death of General Jackson and the reactions ate up most of the headlines along with the movements and victories of General Grant during his highly successful Vicksburg Campaign. What did get printed were stories of Lee receiving gifts, complements from General McClellan and stories of Lee humanity towards wounded Yankee troops; however there was a harsh article that was reprinted in multiple papers that portrayed Lee in a severely negative light.

During the month of May multiple newspapers from New York, Connecticut, Massachusetts, and New Hampshire printed similar articles about General Lee’s harsh treatment of some slaves

²⁶⁵ “The Recent Fight,” *Boston Post* [Boston] 11th May 1863

²⁶⁶ “Gen. Lee’s Address to his Army,” *Albany Evening Journal* [Albany, New York] 13th May 1863

²⁶⁷ *World* [New York] 14th May 1863

²⁶⁸ *World* [New York] 14th May 1863

that he owned. The details of this incident were provided earlier in this paper, but the printing of this story was the truly first time that Northern papers attacked General Lee's character. This story contrasted with every other story of General Lee's kindness and chivalry that had been printed previously. On the heels of Chancellorsville and the somewhat mixed acceptance of Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation that took effect on the 1st of January, this article served a dual purpose of putting a negative light on General Lee that would make people question his integrity and help create support for the abolition of slavery by showing even supposedly good men like General Lee were able to be cruel to the slaves they owned.

Aside from the slave articles, General Lee was given more positive press during the two months before Gettysburg. The *Newark Daily Advertiser*²⁶⁹ and the *Wooster Republican*²⁷⁰ reported that the "rebel Democratic Ladies of New York have got a sword worth \$1,200 to present to General Lee." This story was disputed in the *Louisville Daily Democrat* saying that "it was pronounced a weak-invention of the enemy."²⁷¹ Another article from the *Wisconsin Daily Patriot*²⁷² and the *New York Tribune*²⁷³ wrote that "General Lee ordered that so long as one of our [Union] wounded remained, some physician attached to the corps should stay to attend him."

The *Boston Traveler*²⁷⁴ and the *Daily National Intelligencer*²⁷⁵ both printed articles from the South that were calling for General Lee not to expose himself to danger in light of the death of General Jackson. "They said that one hundred thousand men slain in battle might be replaced,

²⁶⁹ "A Northern Present for Gen. Lee," *Newark Daily Advertiser* [Newark, New Jersey] 20th May 1863

²⁷⁰ "Gen. Lee," *Wooster Republican* [Wooster, Ohio] 21st May 1863

²⁷¹ "All Sorts of Paragraphs," *Louisville Daily Democrat* [Louisville, Kentucky] 28th May 1863

²⁷² "From the Army of the Potomac," *Wisconsin Daily Patriot* [Madison] 25th May 1863

²⁷³ "From the Army of the Potomac," *New York Tribune* [New York] 25th May 1863

²⁷⁴ "Lee Exposing Himself," *Boston Traveler* [Boston] 19th May 1863

²⁷⁵ "A Rebel Tribute to Gen. Lee," *Daily National Intelligencer* [Washington D.C.] 26th May 1863

but if General Lee should fall who could take his place?" In an interview that was printed by the *Sun*, General McClellan said that Lee is perhaps the best commander they have.²⁷⁶

As with previous lulls in the Civil War articles concerning General Lee and his actions were printed. Like before, most were printed with a favorable impression of him in the minds of the people while few were negative. While the negative comments were few and far between, the difference this time were the articles about Lee's supposed abuse of his slaves. It is at this point that one will begin to see an increase in anti-Lee articles. The Civil War has gone on longer than many people expected and as the losses pile up, the conciliatory articles about Lee will begin to dry up and be replaced with articles calling for Lee to be punished for the troubles he has caused.

The Battle of Gettysburg started by accident on July 1st, 1863 as troops under General George Meade, who had replaced General Hooker, collided with General Lee's army at Gettysburg. Initially the area northwest of Gettysburg was defended by Union cavalry and then later two corps of Union infantry. However two large Confederate crops assaulted the flank of the Union troops causing them to retreat through Gettysburg and onto the hills south of the town. It was at this point perhaps the battle was lost as General Lee understood the defensibility of the hills and ordered General Ewell of the Confederate 2nd Corps to take drive the Federals off the hills in the south if practicable. Ewell decided that he was not able to carry the assault and thus one of the great what ifs of history had been created. Many historians will cite this as the reason that General Lee would go on to lose the Battle of Gettysburg and with it the Civil War.

On the second day of battle General Lee launched a heavy attack on the Union left that lead to some of the most famous battlefield names of the Civil War such as the Peach Orchard, the

²⁷⁶ "McClellan's Opinions of Lee and Jackson," *Sun* [Pittsfield, Massachusetts] 21st May 1863

Wheatfield, Devil's Den, and the most famous of all Little Round Top. On the Union right, Lee's army attack the heavily defended areas of Culp's Hill and Cemetery Hill. All over the battlefield the Union defenders held on against furious Confederate attacks and in some cases just barely beat the Confederates attackers off.

On the third day the battle resumed at Culp's Hill, but the main thrust of Lee's attack was to take place at the Union center that would become known as Pickett's Charge. Over the protest of Lee's senior corps commander General James Longstreet, at 3 p.m., 12,500 Southerners stepped out of their lines and began the nearly one mile march over open ground in the face of Union cannons and entrenched troops who yelled "Fredericksburg" at the oncoming Confederates. Despite piercing the Union lines, the Confederate troops did not have enough men to exploit it. Union reinforcements rushed in and plugged the breach in the line. With the death of many officers and the Union line now impregnable, the Confederates began to slip away in retreat. As the troops returned from the fight, General Lee met them and told them it was all his fault. The results of Pickett's Charge would be considered the High Watermark of the Confederacy.

With the defeat of General Lee, the Northern Press rejoiced. *The Albany Evening Journal* reported the Rebels Routed and that Lee will strain every nerve to escape into Virginia and that the rout of Gen. Lee was thorough and complete.²⁷⁷ *The Boston Daily Advertiser* reported a Glorious Victory and that "General Lee had the impudence to send in a flag of truce asking for a suspension of hostilities to bury his dead and exchange prisoners. General Meade replied that he intended to recapture all prisoners and bury their dead for him. Failing in this attempt to gain

²⁷⁷ "Various Reports about Friday's Battle," *Albany Evening Journal* [Albany, New York] 6th July 1863

time, the enemy retreated leaving their guards and sentinels.”²⁷⁸ Perhaps to make sure that people did not think that the cries of victory were not premature as they had been in the past, the *Daily Eastern Argus* reported; “it is really true that Lee has been totally routed and is trying to escape.”²⁷⁹ *The New York Tribune* wrote that “Lee had been attacked on his chosen ground and our center had driven the Rebel lines more than one mile.”²⁸⁰ The *North American* printed a dispatch from General Meade to General Halleck saying that “Lee was sneaking away in the night and that Meade’s cavalry was in pursuit.”²⁸¹ *The Philadelphia Inquirer’s* headline read Waterloo Eclipsed.²⁸²

General Meade began to pursue General Lee’s army and the newspapers reported on it. The *Boston Herald* reported that “they expected the capture of most of Lee’s army and that only a very small portion will be able to reach Virginia.”²⁸³ The *Cleveland Leader* predicted that “General Couch formed a junction with Meade and that not one-tenth of Lee’s army can get back to Dixie.”²⁸⁴ *The Wisconsin Daily Patriot* wrote that “Lee will push rapidly on to Richmond if possible to try to gain for his army on the soil of Virginia the confidence and prestige they have lost on this side of the lines.”²⁸⁵ Soon the optimism would turn to disappointment as Meade failed to force an engagement against Lee and force the capture of Lee’s army. *The World* stated that “Lee is more than likely to slip through General Meade’s fingers at last.”²⁸⁶ *The Boston*

²⁷⁸ “A Glorious Victory,” *Boston Daily Advertiser* [Boston] 6th July 1863

²⁷⁹ “The Battle of Gettysburg,” *Daily Eastern Argus* [Portland, Maine] 6th July 1863

²⁸⁰ “The Battle of Gettysburg,” *New York Tribune* [New York] 6th July 1863

²⁸¹ “The Latest Dispatch From Gen. Meade,” *North American* [Philadelphia] 6th July 1863

²⁸² “Waterloo Eclipsed,” *Philadelphia Inquirer* [Philadelphia] 6th July 1863

²⁸³ “Expected Capture of Most of Lee’s Army,” *Boston Herald* [Boston] 7th July 1863

²⁸⁴ “The War in Pennsylvania,” *Cleveland Leader* [Cleveland] 7th July 1863

²⁸⁵ “Lee’s Whereabouts,” *Wisconsin Daily Patriot* [Madison] 8th July 1863

²⁸⁶ “The War,” *World* [New York] 14th July 1863

Herald reported that Lee has succeeded in crossing the river with his army.²⁸⁷ *The Daily National Intelligencer* reported that the falling back of Lee's army took place on Sunday from Hagerstown.²⁸⁸ *The New York Tribune* wrote that "Gen. Lee has succeeded in placing everything beyond the Potomac."²⁸⁹

Strangely enough not every Northern newspaper believed that General Lee had lost at Gettysburg. *The New York Freeman's Journal and Catholic Register* wrote an article telling its readers not to believe those "flop-eared asses" of the daily papers- *Herald, Times, Tribune, World, and Express* that feel assured that Lee and the Confederates have been defeated. They state that General Lee is the ablest General produced by this war and will defeat Hooker. They state that the New York papers will have to own up to the lies that they said about Lee's defeat and that Lee will take Washington.²⁹⁰ This was refuted by the *New York Evangelist* that reprinted the story calling it "snaky" and then informed the readers that the Government was boarding the Editor who wrote the article at Fort Lafayette.²⁹¹

The North again printed the opinions that the South had about what happened. *The Weekly Wisconsin Patriot* printed Confederate Vice-President Stephen's speech where he said that left Pennsylvania with vast supplies and no matter Lee's movements, Stephen's was confident in Lee's abilities.²⁹² *The Weekly Miner's Journal* printed an article from the *Richmond Dispatch* that said that "when the secret history of this war shall have been published the conduct of the General will be amply justified by circumstances of which we are now and must for a generation

²⁸⁷ "From Maryland," *Boston Herald* [Boston] 15th July 1863

²⁸⁸ "Escape of the Rebel Army," *Daily National Intelligencer* [Washington D.C.] 15th July 1863

²⁸⁹ "Lee's Escape," *New York Tribune* [New York] 15th July 1863

²⁹⁰ "The Aspects of the War," *Freeman's Journal and Catholic Register* [New York] 11th July 1863

²⁹¹ "The Freeman's Journal," *New York Evangelist* [New York] 16th July 1863

²⁹² "Southern View of the Situation," *Weekly Wisconsin Patriot* [Madison] 1st August 1863

remain completely ignorant.”²⁹³ *The Boston Post* printed a story from *the Richmond Examiner* that placed the blame on the substitution policy of the Confederate Draft saying that the “60,000 substitutes plus the 60,000 men that hired them combined in the army could have been at Gettysburg and helped get a victory that would have brought a treaty of peace.”²⁹⁴ *The San Francisco Bulletin* reprinted a story from the *Richmond Examiner* that placed the blame on the fact that General Lee did not have the cavalry under his hand to reconnoiter and bring information.²⁹⁵

The Battle of Gettysburg was not only the turning point of the Civil War; it was a turning point in Lee’s treatment in Newspaper articles. The articles and stories about Lee from Gettysburg to the end of the Civil War had changed. Where there was once a majority of positive articles written about Lee, now there were more negative than positive articles written. Some were jokes and satire while others questioned his abilities as a general. Before Gettysburg the papers wrote of General Lee respecting the property of the civilians of the North, now the papers printed stories from the South that said that Lee to should act like Attila the Hun. With General Lee’s defeat at Gettysburg, the stories about him switch from the type that showed him to be a brilliant general and compassionate man to a braggart with no true military skill who allowed atrocities to occur or planned to destroy property.

Multiple papers printed stories about General Lee being outgeneraled and that he lost prestige and his reputation. *The Press* printed a scathing article about General Lee’s abilities saying that “Lee is not the omnipotent man his friends would have us believe. They say he is the

²⁹³ “The Great Conspiracy Against the Country,” *Weekly Miner’s Journal* [Pottsville, Pennsylvania] 1st August 1863

²⁹⁴ “News from Richmond,” *Boston Post* [Boston] 10th August 1863

²⁹⁵ “The Motive of Lee’s Pennsylvania Raid,” *San Francisco Bulletin* [San Francisco] 12th November 1863

greatest general in the world, but the author states that Lee owed all his success to General Jackson. Many times Lee was saved from dishonor by Jackson.” The article ends saying “the glory has departed from Robert E. Lee and his invincibility and prestige are both gone.”²⁹⁶ *The Manchester Daily Mirror* made a joke at Lee’s expense saying that “the reason General Lee did not take Washington is that being a temperance man, he couldn’t take anything strong.”²⁹⁷ *The National Aegis* wrote that Lee lost all his prestige of success.²⁹⁸ *The Indianapolis Indiana State Sentinel* printed an article from the *Mobile Evening News* that called on General Lee and his army to begin to imitate Attila the Hun and lay waste to the North.²⁹⁹ *The New York Tribune* stated that Gen. Lee wanted to lay waste to Pennsylvania.³⁰⁰ *The Hartford Daily Courant* talked of making General Lee the commanding general of Sing Sing Prison with various Copperhead Democrats as other government officials.³⁰¹ *The Madison Wisconsin State Journal* stated that Lee is very weak.³⁰² *The Chicago Tribune* printed an advertisement that read like a missing person’s report that said that Robert E. Lee claimed to be a Major General that had a penchant for going northward.³⁰³ *The Semi Weekly Wisconsin* printed an article about a Confederate civilian that had been falsely imprisoned by General Stuart. The paper claimed that while General Lee may not commit these outrages, he permits his subordinates to do as they like.³⁰⁴

²⁹⁶ “The Campaign in Maryland,” *Press* [Philadelphia] July 18th 1863

²⁹⁷ “Vermont Items,” *Manchester Daily Mirror* [Manchester, New Hampshire] 4th August 1863

²⁹⁸ “The Operations of Last Month,” *National Aegis* [Worcester, Massachusetts] 8th August 1863

²⁹⁹ “Gen. Lee and Annihilation in in Pennsylvania,” *Indianapolis Indiana State Sentinel* [Indianapolis] 10th August 1863

³⁰⁰ “Guide to Voters,” *New York Tribune* [New York] 2nd November 1863

³⁰¹ “Sing Sing Conservatives,” *Hartford Daily Courant* [Hartford, Connecticut] 28th August 1863

³⁰² “By Telegraph,” *Madison Wisconsin State Journal* [Madison] 19th October 1863

³⁰³ “Lost,” *Chicago Tribune* [Chicago] 19th October 1863

³⁰⁴ “Persecution of John Minor Botts,” *Semi Weekly Wisconsin* [Milwaukie] 1st December 1863

The New Haven Palladium wrote that the rebel armies were in favor of making General Lee a dictator.³⁰⁵

While we see an increase in the negative articles, there still were some positive ones that were printed. These were few in number compared to previous times, but they were still printed. *The Plain Dealer* printed a story from *the Raleigh Progress* about a visitor to General Lee. The visitor stated that General Lee was in blooming health and was confident in the South's final victory for independence.³⁰⁶ *The National Aegis* printed an article from a British visitor that said that Lee was "the handsomest man I have ever saw and a gentleman in every respect."³⁰⁷ *The Portland Advertiser* printed the same story, but added that *the Boston Post* thinks that the last phrase is "equivocal."³⁰⁸ *The West Jersey Press* printed a story about President Lincoln asking his generals whose fault it was for the loss of Harpers Ferry. After each general denied that it was their fault, Lincoln walked around the room then stopped and said with a twinkle in his eye that it was the fault of General Lee.³⁰⁹

As before Lee's family again became the center of attention. This time it was his son General Fitzhugh Lee that was the subject of the papers. General Fitzhugh Lee was captured in a minor skirmish and was held as a hostage for two Union Captains who were under threat of being executed. While this was going on, the Northern press printed another story about a child of General Lee who was actually for the Union. *The Milwaukee Sentinel* ran a story that stated that before hostilities commenced, a friend of Fitzhugh received a letter from him that said that he was disheartened and discouraged and hardly knew what course to take. Fitzhugh said to his

³⁰⁵ "Gen. Lee Dictator," *New Haven Palladium* [New Haven, Connecticut] 31st December 1863

³⁰⁶ "A Visit to Gen. Lee's Headquarters," *Plain Dealer* [Cleveland] 17th November 1863

³⁰⁷ "The Rebel Officers," *National Aegis* [Worcester, Massachusetts] 14th November 1863

³⁰⁸ "All Sorts of Paragraphs," *Portland Advertiser* [Portland, Maine] 26th December 1863

³⁰⁹ "The Man that Did It," *West Jersey Press* [Camden, New Jersey] 9th December 1863

friend that he wanted to stand by his country but he believed the South had been wronged. Fitzhugh's friend advised him to stay in the United States and that was the last time they talked to each other.³¹⁰ The Federal Government had threatened to execute Fitzhugh if the Confederates executed the Union Captains. Fitzhugh's family was worried with *The Watchman* reported that "there was much excitement of in the Lee family over the expected hanging of the two Union Captains which the Lee family knew would result in their son's own execution in retaliation."³¹¹ *The Watchman* writes that the people demand that the two captains should be executed. *The Evening Star* writes that General Lee knows such an execution by the rebels of the two Captains is contrary to all usages and laws of war and the reputation of Lee would suffer too much if he permitted the murder of the two officers.³¹² *The Watchman* stated that Lee threatened to resign his position and leave the Confederacy in disgust if the Captains are executed.³¹³ The *Annapolis Gazette* reported that Fitzhugh Lee was sent to Fort Lafayette.³¹⁴ Fitzhugh Lee would not be executed and neither would the two Union Captains. According to *the Congregationalist*, General Fitzhugh Lee was exchanged for General Neal Dow and the two Captains that were being threatened with execution.³¹⁵ After his exchange, Fitzhugh Lee would rejoin the Army of Northern Virginia and eventually become the second in command of the Confederate Cavalry.

The beginning of 1864 brought a new aspect to the way that General Lee was viewed by the Northern press. 1864 was an election year for President Lincoln and his opponent would be the deposed Commander of the Army of the Potomac, General McClellan. General Lee would be used by the pro-Lincoln Northern press against the Democrat Party, among whom were many

³¹⁰ "Fitzhugh Lee an Unwilling Traitor," *Milwaukee Sentinel* [Milwaukee] 3rd August 1863

³¹¹ "From Washington and Vicinity," *Watchman* [Montpelier, Vermont] 14th August 1863

³¹² "Why it is to be Credited," *Evening Star* [Washington D.C.] 14th August 1863

³¹³ "From Washington and Vicinity," *Watchman* [Montpelier, Vermont] 14th August 1863

³¹⁴ "Fitzhugh Lee," *Annapolis Gazette* [Annapolis] 26th November 1863

³¹⁵ "Gen. Butler's Department," *Congregationalist* [Boston] 18th March 1864

anti-war Democrats called Copperheads, and their nominee General McClellan during the Presidential Campaign as a way to paint McClellan as a man who was in league with the Confederates and did not want to continue the Civil War.

One of the first articles connecting General Lee and McClellan in a way negative to McClellan came from the *Sandusky Daily Commercial Register* that was reprinting a story from the *New York Tribune* that stated that McClellan was truly devoted to the interests of the rebel army as much as Robert E. Lee.³¹⁶ Another article written by the *Congregationalist* wrote that after the Battle of Antietam, that General Lee and General McClellan had a long interview before Lee retreated.³¹⁷ The *Congregationalist* article was refuted by the *American Traveller* which called it a foolish story that will do more to help McClellan than to hurt him and called the article outrageous libel.³¹⁸ The *Janesville Weekly Gazette* wrote that the *Chicago Times* had a cheerful editorial praising Lee's brilliant maneuvering and called the *Chicago Times* cheerful Copperheads and how a man has a right to rejoice over the victory of his friends.³¹⁹ The *Worthington Gazette* writes that the "Copperheads are predicting that Grant would be defeated by their great General Robert E. Lee and that two thirds of Democrats of the North are in sympathy with the rebels."³²⁰ The *Springfield Republican* wrote that "the Democrats wanted to pardon and embrace Jefferson Davis and Gen. Lee and banish Abraham Lincoln and Gen. Grant and Gen. Sherman."³²¹ The *Connecticut Courant* wrote that the Maine Democratic State Convention said that "General Lee was more of a champion of the rights of self-government than

³¹⁶ "Hon. John Minor Botts on Gen. McClellan," *Sandusky Daily Commercial Register* [Sandusky, Ohio] 26th January 1864

³¹⁷ "Summary for the Week," *Congregationalist* [Boston] 11th March 1864

³¹⁸ "Review of the Week," *American Traveller* [Boston] 19th March 1864

³¹⁹ "A Cheerful Copperhead," *Janesville Weekly Gazette* [Janesville, Wisconsin] 20th May 1864

³²⁰ "Latest News," *Worthington Gazette* [Worthington, Indiana] 2nd June 1864

³²¹ "The Democratic Convention," *Springfield Republican* [Springfield, Massachusetts] 1st September 1864

Lincoln.” *The Courant* asked if the “Democrats could point to a time when Jefferson and Andrew Jackson presented an admiring gaze of democracy as champion of self-government a man who was the leader of an army fighting to overthrow and destroy the government of the United States.”³²² *The Rochester Chronicle* wrote that the “Copperheads of the Democrat National Convention were unquestionably traitors as are Jefferson Davis, Robert E. Lee and P.T. Beauregard.”³²³ *The Press* wrote that “when McClellan won the nomination, the Rebels in front of Petersburg gave three cheers for McClellan.”³²⁴ *The Boston Evening Transcript*³²⁵ and the *Daily National Republican*³²⁶ both reprinted a story from the *St. Louis Democrat* saying that if the “Copperheads who are not satisfied with their party’s platform they should nominate General Grant if Grant whips Lee or nominate General Lee if he whips Grant.” *The West Jersey Press* printed an article about a group of McClellan supporters who passed through a train. “They came up to an old man from Baltimore and asked him who he preferred as president. The old man replied Lincoln, but he did have five nephews in the army who each preferred McClellan. The McClellan supporters cheered and one of them asked him under which general are your nephews and to the surprise of the McClellan supporters, the old man said General Robert E. Lee.”³²⁷ *The Daily Commercial Register* printing an article from the *Toronto Globe* simply stated that General Lee is McClellan’s best electioneering agent.³²⁸ *The Daily Missouri Democrat* printed an article that made McClellan seem like a coward and supposedly in a fit of despair called General Lee a great man-a great General-a very great General. The article goes on to say that General

³²² “Silas S. Drew,” *Connecticut Courant* [Hartford] 3rd September 1864

³²³ “Happy Family,” *Rochester Chronicle* [Rochester, New York] 15th September 1864

³²⁴ “The Rebel Cheers over McClellan’s Nomination,” *Press* [Philadelphia] 15th September 1864

³²⁵ “The Missouri Democrat,” *Boston Evening Transcript* [Boston] 17th September 1864

³²⁶ “The St. Louis Democrat,” *Daily National Republican* [Washington D.C.] 17th September 1864

³²⁷ “Which Side is McClellan,” *West Jersey Press* [Camden, New Jersey] 12th October 1864

³²⁸ “The Toronto Globe,” *Daily Commercial Register* [Sandusky, Ohio] 9th September 1864

McClellan during the Battle of Malvern Hill came on board the iron-clad *Galena* with a proposal to surrender the Army of the Potomac to General Lee and was talked out of it by Commodore Rodgers.³²⁹

It is not without argument that the South wanted McClellan to win the election for the presidency as they felt that they could get a peace agreement with him instead of Lincoln despite McClellan promising to continue the Civil War. Despite this promise, the Northern press that supported Lincoln did all that they could to paint McClellan as in league with the Confederacy. This linking of a presidential candidate to certain groups, person, or policy was part of the partisan politics that had often been produced throughout the history of the United States. There was no real connection between McClellan and the Confederacy. It is true that many Confederates preferred McClellan to Lincoln, but at no time did McClellan personally say he would pursue a peace policy with the South. The Northern press used supposed connections between McClellan and Lee to paint McClellan badly. This would have had an impact on the election as it would make McClellan and other Democrats out to be traitors.

During the Presidential Campaign of 1864 came what would be the first encounter between General Lee and General Grant; the Overland Campaign. The Overland Campaign began on May 4th with the Union Army crossing the Rapidan River. The first battle of the Overland Campaign would be fought at the Wilderness resulting in heavy casualties on both sides. Despite the heavy losses, General Grant did not retreat and instead moved further south meeting Lee's army at the Battle of Spotsylvania Court House. Despite not breaking Lee's lines, Grant again moved south and Lee moved to block him at the Battle of North Anna. The final major battle of the Campaign

³²⁹ "Gen. McClellan on Gen. Lee and General Surrender," *Daily Missouri Democrat* [St. Louis] 17th September 1864

was the Battle of Cold Harbor which resulted in massive casualties for the Union for no gain. Resorting to maneuver again, Grant surprised Lee by crossing the James River and threatening to capture the city of Petersburg. The resulting Siege of Petersburg which lasted from June of 1864 to March of 1865 would prove to be the nail in the coffin of the Army of Northern Virginia. General Lee knew that by being forced into a siege that it was only a matter of time before Grant starved his army. Even though Grant lost most of the battles, overall Grant defeated Lee in the Campaign by forcing General Lee's army into a position where the Army of Northern Virginia lost its ability to maneuver and protect the capital. Grant would use the larger Army of the Potomac by maneuvering on General Lee's flanks and forcing Lee to defend a wider parameter that would eventually overwhelm Lee's lines by forcing them to be extended beyond the capacity of the Army of Northern Virginia.

Discussing the Overland Campaign and commenting on Grant and Lee, The *Christian Watchman* wrote of the "Overland Campaign that this was the first time that Lee has lost offensive power and that Lee is overmatched in strategy by General Grant."³³⁰ The *Janesville Daily Gazette* stated in an interview reprinted from the *New York Evening Post* with General Grant that General Lee has found his master.³³¹

During the Overland Campaign multiple articles about General Lee would be published. Most of them covered the movements of the two armies and the location of various skirmishes. Many papers printed the victories and defeats suffered by Grant and Lee, but most of the articles that would be printed about General Lee outside of troop movements would be anti-Lee with a few pro-Lee stories being printed as well. A few bios were printed of General Lee with different

³³⁰ "No Need of Discouragement," *Christian Watchman* [Boston] 25th August 1864

³³¹ "An Interview with Gen. Grant," *Janesville Daily Gazette* [Janesville, Wisconsin] 12th August 1864

opinions than the normal Lee is great bios from earlier in the Civil War. Some Articles printed had to do with the fate of his property at Arlington and some anecdotes about General Lee.

The Milwaukee Sentinel gave a complementary description of General Lee himself calling him “robust with good height and dark eyes and complexion.” The *Sentinel* continues saying that “entered into the rebel schemes with reluctance but Lee is not a brilliant genius and that he is not the ideal Southern commander and that as astounding as Lee’s treason has been, he has a professional character that military men of all nations will regard with respect.”³³² *The Boston Evening Transcript* was less complementary calling Lee that “serviceable talent which is the tower of strength of men of mediocrity deportment and that he has left nothing that can be pointed to as denoting other than mere ordinary ability.” *The Boston Evening Transcript* states that “the perilous condition of Burnside at Fredericksburg required but ordinary military skill and at the Second Battle of Bull Run, no able General would have let go so easily his grasp on the demoralized troops of Pope.”³³³ *The Cincinnati Commercial Tribune* wrote that “Lee had generally been spoken of as a failure, shown in the want of the soldierly qualities for command.”³³⁴ *The M’Kean Miner* wrote in their bio of General Lee covering all his battles and stating that “he was a third rate commander who acquired his reputation as a general mainly though the deficiencies and insubordination of certain Union Commanders.”³³⁵

The *Daily Missouri Democrat* printed an article detailing the fate of General Lee’s Arlington Estate. Stating that “General Robert E. Lee is fighting to enslave the black man, the Secretary of War ordered that the Arlington Estate be organized into a Freedman’s Village for the protection

³³² “The Opposing Generals—Grant and Lee,” *Milwaukee Sentinel* [Wisconsin] 7th June 1864

³³³ “Lee as a General,” *Boston Evening Transcript* [Boston] 5th July 1864

³³⁴ “Grant and Lee Compared,” *Cincinnati Commercial Tribune* [Cincinnati] 19th August 1864

³³⁵ “Grant and Lee,” *M’Kean Miner* [Smethport, Pennsylvania] 2nd August 1864

of the black man and his family, and that the lands become a cemetery for the burial of loyal soldiers who died in Virginia from wounds inflicted by Lee's orders."³³⁶ The *Liberator* took great pleasure in describing what had become of Arlington Estate by telling how the Union soldiers were buried on the grounds and how the Freedmen gathered there were managing it to very good advantage.³³⁷ *The Boston Traveler* reported that "Sojourner Truth, the Negro prophethess has commenced housekeeping at the freedmen's village on Gen. Lee's estate in Virginia."³³⁸

Some humorous anecdotal articles about General Lee were printed by the Northern press. The *Indianapolis Daily Journal* printed an article that depicted General Lee as a witch that was using spells to help select the Democrat nominee for the President, General McClellan.³³⁹ Another by the *Boston Daily Advertiser* told a story about a party that General Lee had and that part of the meal was a little bit of middling that was not eaten. The next day General Lee asked his servant for the middling and the servant replied that he took it back because it was horrible and no one last night would eat it. The story ends with General Lee sighing deeply and pitching into a plate of cabbage.³⁴⁰ In another anecdote from the *Crisis* who reprinted a story from the *Richmond Whig* describes a story where a young soldier with one arm in a sling was trying to put his coat on with great difficulty. Suddenly an older officer got up and with some pleasant words helped

³³⁶ "General Lee's Lands Appropriately Consecrated," *Daily Missouri Democrat* [St. Louis] 24th June 1864

³³⁷ "Gen. Lee's Place," *Liberator* [Boston] 9th December 1864

³³⁸ "Sojourner Truth," *Boston Traveler* [Boston] 15th December 1864

³³⁹ "Cooking the Platform at Chicago," *Indianapolis Daily Journal* [Indianapolis] 3rd September 1864

³⁴⁰ "Anecdote of General Lee," *Boston Daily Advertiser* [Boston] 13th May 1864

the young soldier with his coat. The officer that helped the young soldier was General Robert E. Lee who was described as “not braver and great than he is good and modest.”³⁴¹

One of the most major anti-Robert E. Lee articles would appear during this year. Started by the *New York Times*, it was titled “*The Chivalry of the Rebel Gen. Lee*”. This story would be picked up by multiple papers around the North and it would lay out the treacherous family history of the Lee family by pointing out the various members of General Lee’s family and their supposed treachery against the United States. *The New York Times* writes that Lee’s Grandfather R.H. Lee wrote that when the South attained its natural degree of population that it should dissolve the Union and create its own country. They then state that Lee’s “great uncle” Light-Horse Harry Lee was stigmatized by Jefferson who called him an intriguer, an informer, and a miserable tergiversator. Maj. Gen. Charles Lee plotted to supersede General Washington and disobeyed orders at the Battle of Monmouth and disrespected General Washington. Great Uncle Arthur Lee was a libeler of Benjamin Franklin, John Jay, and Thomas Jefferson and was described as being singularly impracticable in his temper and disposition. That Uncle Henry Lee advised Aaron Burr to use desperate measures to defeat Thomas Jefferson and that Henry Lee was such a bad character that his own party rejected him for consulship at Algiers.

The New York Times then stated that General Lee was a liar and gave five examples concerning military matters such as the false announcement of the surrender of Gen. Steele in Arkansas. *The New York Times* also said that Gen. Lee has been guilty of the trickery of imputing to the Northern papers statements which are expressly given as rebel representations. Lee defenders supposedly state that Lee said these lies to keep up the drooping spirits of his soldiers, but the *New York Times* says that no soldier with honor ever lies and that Grant and

³⁴¹ “Anecdote of Gen. Lee,” *Crisis* [Columbus, Ohio] 14th December 1864

Meade would never degrade their own manhood and insult the manhood of their soldiers by such deception. *The New York Times* ends its article by saying “treason cannot be committed on any scale without its malignity extending to every part of the moral constitution. Fidelity lies at the very core of sound character, and when that rots, all rots.”³⁴²

While this article on the surface appears devastating to the status of Lee and his family, the *New York Times* did a poor job of actually researching General Lee’s family. This was noticed and commented on by the *Illustrated New Age* of Philadelphia. They reprint the part about Lee’s family then go about correcting the massive errors the *New York Times* made. First they point out that R.H. Lee was not General Lee’s Grandfather and that R.H. Lee did not have the taint of treason on him, but had signed the Declaration of Independence and died an honored patriot. The Second was that Light Horse Harry was in fact General Lee’s father and was a devoted friend to General Washington and gave the phrase, “First in War, First in Peace, and First in the hearts of his Countrymen and that General Washington named Henry Lee as one of four Major Generals of the Provisional Army. The Third was that Henry Lee was not nominated as counsel to Algiers, that Henry Lee died in 1818 and that it was Robert Lee’s half-brother Henry Lee IV. Fourth was Charles Lee was not a kinsman of General Lee but was an Englishman. *The Illustrated New Age* ends their article by saying “having made these specific denials of the truth of the *Times*’ History, we pause in our work, waiting to see what the exponent of the State Department will have to say.”³⁴³

The *New York Times* article was widely circulated. Copies of it were printed in Ohio, Wisconsin, and Maryland, but the *Illustrated New Age* was not. It is sad that none of the other

³⁴² “The Chivalry of the Rebel Gen. Lee,” *New York Times* [New York] 23rd May 1864

³⁴³ “The Truth of History—The Lee Family,” *Illustrated New Age* [Philadelphia] 25th May 1864

papers questioned any of what the times said and just reprinted the story without checking facts. Multiple other articles had previously listed “Light Horse” Harry Lee as General Lee’s father and the letter calling for the South to leave the Union as soon as its population was large enough written by Richard Bland Lee had also been printed. What this article could be is a smear article made to make Lee look worse than he had previously been depicted and that his whole family was fighting against the United States since it had been established. *The Illustrated New Age* apparently wrote their counter article more out of honoring dead patriots than to justify Lee as they did not seek to refute the other half of the *New York Times* article.

As the Siege of Petersburg continued, General Lee was promoted to General-in-Chief of the whole Confederate Army. While he had held this position at the beginning of the Civil War, during that time the position was more of an advisory role to President Jefferson Davis that held little power in controlling the Confederate Armies. This time General Lee would be given all the power he needed to control all of the Armies of the Confederacy. This was reported in the North with some papers having the point of view that the South was looking to make Lee a dictator. *The Centinel of Freedom* reported that the Richmond papers are “urgent in their demands that General Lee shall be made commander-in-chief of all the rebel armies or Dictator.”³⁴⁴ *The Milwaukee Sentinel* reported that “Confederate States were presented with a Christmas gift with General Lee as their Commander-in-Chief and that the South found it satisfactory to see the government of the Army entrusted altogether to Gen. Lee.”³⁴⁵ *The Syracuse Daily Courier and Union* reported that “it is now known that Gen. Robert E. Lee has been appointed Commander of

³⁴⁴ “Southern News,” *Centinel of Freedom* [Newark, New Jersey] 3rd January 1865

³⁴⁵ “Lee to be Presented to the Confederacy as Commander-in-Chief or Dictator,” *Milwaukee Sentinel* [Milwaukee] 4th January 1865

all the rebel armies in other words has been made Dictator.”³⁴⁶ *The Boston Post* printed a story from the *Richmond Enquirer* which stated “to General Lee the whole country looks for the efficient direction of all the armies. Upon his wisdom and firmness the country reposes all her hopes.”³⁴⁷

The Siege of Petersburg signaled the end of the Confederacy even though that end would not come for several more months. Once the Army of Northern Virginia lost its ability to maneuver it ceased being an effective military unit. General Lee’s army depended on its ability to out maneuver the larger Army of the Potomac, and with supplies always being scarce it could not stay in one place long before the troops starved. When the Siege of Petersburg ended with the Union breakthrough at the Battle of Five Forks, General Lee and the Army of Northern Virginia were forced to leave Richmond to its fate.

The Northern Press followed the pursuit with great joy. *The Albany Evening Journal* reported that “Lee telegraphed Davis on Sunday that he was driven back and must evacuate and that Gen. Lee and the remains of his army have retreated toward Danville.”³⁴⁸ *The Lowell Daily Citizen and News* reported that “it is regarded by military men as impossible for Lee to escape with a considerable portion of his forces.”³⁴⁹ *The Boston Traveler* reported that “Gen. Sheridan routed Lee’s army and that he expects to force Lee to surrender all that is left of his army.”³⁵⁰ The

³⁴⁶ “Letter From Washington,” *The Syracuse Daily Courier and Union* [Syracuse, New York] 21st January 1865

³⁴⁷ “Gen. Lee the Coming Man,” *Boston Post* [Boston] 27th January 1865

³⁴⁸ “Richmond! Lee Telegraphs on Sunday that it Must be Evacuated. It was Announced in Church,” *Albany Evening Journal* [Albany, New York] 6th April 1865

³⁴⁹ “Lee,” *Lowell Daily Citizen and News* [Lowell, Massachusetts] 6th April 1865

³⁵⁰ “Probable Surrender of Gen. Lee,” *Boston Traveler* [Boston] 7th April 1865

National American reported “the line of Lee’s retreat was marked by abandoned guns and ammunition, burnt wagons, caissons, ambulances, etc.”³⁵¹

As General Lee retreated he was constantly harassed by the Union Cavalry. Upon reaching Appomattox Courthouse, Lee found his escape route cut off. An attempt to break through the Union lines failed. After hearing of the breakout attempts failure, Lee famously said; “Then there is nothing left for me to do but to go and see General Grant, and I would rather die a thousand deaths.” On April 9th, 1865 General Lee surrounded the Army of Northern Virginia to General Grant ending the Civil War in the East. The Civil War would continue until the final battle of the Civil War at The Battle of Palmito Ranch on May 12-13, 1865.

With news of General Lee’s surrender, the Northern Press rejoiced the final capitulation of their enemy who had withstood the military might of the Union Army for four long bloody years. *The Albany Evening Journal* printed the Crowing Victory, Lee Surrendered in its headlines and printed the entire surrender conversation between General Grant and General Lee.³⁵² *The Boston Traveler* wrote that “the terms allowed by Gen. Grant were so moderate, that Gen. Lee would have been as mad as he was four years ago, had he not accepted them.”³⁵³ *The Cleveland Leader* wrote that “the tireless pursuit of the unwearied Grant, the once proud army of Lee had become a mere rabble and rout, and its commander, when he could not save it, surrendered it.”³⁵⁴ *The Daily Eastern Argus* stated that “the terms amount substantially to a full amnesty for officers and men and unmistakably foreshadow the adoption of a conciliatory policy on the part of the

³⁵¹ “Gen. Lee in full Retreat,” *National American* [Bel Air, Maryland] 7th April 1865

³⁵² “The Crowing Victory,” *Albany Evening Journal* [Albany, New York] 10th April 1865

³⁵³ “The Surrender of Gen. Lee,” *Boston Traveler* [Boston] 10th April 1865

³⁵⁴ “Glory to God!,” *Cleveland Leader* [Cleveland] 10th April 1865

President which will be accepted by the whole South and will secure the early restoration of the Union and its complete pacification.”³⁵⁵

With the Civil War over the Northern press began to increase their attacks General Lee during the first year after the Civil War ended. The Northern press felt that there was no need to waste compliments on their defeated foe and with four years of bloody combat and the death of hundreds of thousands of the Norths fathers, brothers, and sons, the Northern rancor was fully unleashed in print. There were calls for him to be hanged, that he was the worst traitor in the history of the country, that he had no morals and was not a real gentleman. Papers even began questioning his Christianity and the rumors of a trial. Now that the Civil War was over it became open season on General Lee and his character and the North threw into him with relish for most of the remainder of 1865.

After 1865 the newspapers did not fully let up on General Lee. While the number of attacks against General Lee would diminish as the years since the end of the Civil War went by, many papers would not forget or forgive as easily as other did. The papers would report occasionally on General Lee’s comings and goings, but most of the time you would see only the term former rebel general or on rarer occasions the word “traitor”. There were times that the old rancor would be printed and people of the North would be reminded of General Lee’s actions during the Civil War. However there were small snippets almost missed that speak of the Northern population coming to accept General Lee and lays the foundation of General Lee becoming a future American hero and icon.

³⁵⁵ “Midnight Rejoicing,” *Daily Eastern Argus* [Portland, Maine] 10th April 1865

In May rumors of a trial against Lee were mentioned. The *Waukesha Freeman* wrote that Lee was to be tried before the civil court for the high crime of treason.³⁵⁶ However any indictment was postponed as reported in the *Chicago Tribune* due to President Johnson's Proclamation of Amnesty and that General Lee had requested a pardon from the President.³⁵⁷ Multiple papers would report that Lee only took the oath of allegiance to the United States and had not requested a pardon. These reports often contradicted each other but we know that General Lee did request an official pardon from the President. The pardon was never accepted despite the fact that Lee signed the Amnesty Oath in October. Apparently Secretary of State Seward had given Lee's application to a friend.³⁵⁸ Lee's full rights of citizenship would not be restored until 1975.

The attacks began almost as soon as the surrender was fully celebrated. *The Janesville Weekly Gazette* stated that "The impression of General Lee was that of a humane man and that this impression has been much weakened by his course in attacking Fort Steadman while propositions were pending before Mr. Lincoln for an interview between Generals Grant and Lee thus abruptly terminating all hope of a pacific settlement of the contest. By this act General Lee has rendered himself responsible for the destruction of at least 30,000 lives in the battles that have since taken place. It is evident that he long since believed the cause of the Confederacy hopeless and had he been the humane man he has been supposed to be he should have arrested the mad Davis and put an end to the conflict."³⁵⁹

³⁵⁶ "It is announced from Washington," *Waukesha Freeman* [Waukesha, Wisconsin] 30th May 1865

³⁵⁷ "Lee and Stephens asking for Pardon," *Chicago Tribune* [Chicago] 17th June 1865

³⁵⁸ Glass, Andrew "*House Restores citizenship to Robert E. Lee*," Politico.com www.politico.com/.../house-restores-citizenship-to-robert-e-lee-july-22-1975-040085 accessed March 16th 2017

³⁵⁹ "Letter from the Federal Capital," *Janesville Weekly Gazette* [Janesville, Wisconsin] 20th April 1865

The Indianapolis Daily Journal wrote “those persons who fondly and foolishly fancied that General Lee was a character higher and nobler and more sensible than his master, Davis, will have been undeceived by the tenor of his farewell letter to the army which he surrendered to General Grant and that General Lee’s farewell address to the Army of Northern Virginia a slap in the face to loyal soldiers and that General Lee retires from the field as unrepentant and as foolishly defiant a rebel as his master, Davis.”³⁶⁰ *The Madison Wisconsin State Journal* compared General Lee to John Brown and stated “where Brown was merciful and kind towards the prisoners who fell into his hands, Lee allowed Belle Isle, Libby Prison and Andersonville to disgrace humanity. In everything wicked and criminal Robert E. Lee is far ahead of John Brown. Does he appreciate the generosity of northern foemen or does he fell about his throat in his dreams the encircling hemp which he must know his crimes entitle him to? Lee’s treason dwarfs that of Arnold.”³⁶¹

The Burlington Daily Hawkeye printed a story where seven Christian Commissioners payed their respects to General Lee who may not of told them about his whipping of slaves and the rubbing of their wounds with corn husks.³⁶² *The Gettysburg Adams Sentinel* called Lee an ingrate whose whole family was being fed with rations drawn from the U.S. Commissary.³⁶³ *The Christian Watchman* stated that Lee’s family are being supported by government rations and are

³⁶⁰ “General Lee,” *Indianapolis Daily Journal* [Indianapolis] 26th April 1865

³⁶¹ “American Rebellions-Past and Present,” *Madison Wisconsin State Journal* [Madison] 5th May 1865

³⁶² “A Christian Soldier,” *Burlington Daily Hawkeye* [Burlington, Iowa] 13th May 1865

³⁶³ “Robert E. Lee,” *Gettysburg Adams Sentinel* [Gettysburg] 23rd May 1865

entirely destitute.³⁶⁴ *The Bedford Independent* said that Lee was not a Christian because he fought in a cause which he confesses was not justified in appealing to arms.³⁶⁵

General Lee was also accused of being aware and doing nothing to help the Union prisoners in the POW camps. *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* wrote that "Lee should meet his deserts at the bar of public opinion, if not in the dock where stands the shivering instrument of the barbarities which his authority could have prevented- we mean the wretch Wirtz."³⁶⁶ *The Christian Watchman* wrote "there is a demand that Gen. Lee shall be punished to the extent of the law, but is he not safe under the conditions of his surrender to Gen. Grant and that something will come out in the course of the trial that shall bear hard on both Lee and Davis."³⁶⁷ *The Boston Post*³⁶⁸ and the *Cincinnati Daily Enquirer*³⁶⁹ reported that Henry Wirtz was charged with conspiring together with General Lee and others to destroy the lives of Union soldiers in rebel Southern Prisons and also with murder in violation of the laws and customs of war. *The New York Tribune* wrote that General Butler was calling for General Lee to be hung for his share in the Andersonville crime.³⁷⁰ However, Lee would never be tried for the crimes at the various POW camps. *The Christian Watchman* bitterly stated that "President Johnson has had the effects left at Arlington House restored to him. The occurrence is interesting as showing how determined is the government not to listen to the demands of Gen. Butler and other eminent Republicans that Gen. Lee shall be tried for treason and hanged."³⁷¹ The specter of the POW

³⁶⁴ "Personal," *Christian Watchman* [Boston] 1st June 1865

³⁶⁵ "What we can Expect from Lee?" *Bedford Independent* [Bedford, Indiana] 14th June 1865

³⁶⁶ "The Telegraph," *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* [New York] 30th September 1865

³⁶⁷ "Mr. Davis," *Christian Watchman* [Boston] 3rd August 1865

³⁶⁸ "To the Associated Press," *Boston Post* [Boston] 21st August 1865

³⁶⁹ "Charges and Specifications-the Trial of Captain Wertz Commenced in Washington," *Cincinnati Daily Enquirer* [Cincinnati] 22nd August 1865

³⁷⁰ "Andersonville Crime," *New York Tribune* [New York] 8th October 1866

³⁷¹ "Gen. Lee," *Christian Watchman* [Boston] 11th October 1866

camps would not leave General Lee even after Wirtz was hanged giving him the distinction of being so hated for his actions that Wirtz became the only Confederate officer executed after the Civil War. *The Lowell Daily Citizen and News* printed an article from the *New York Evening Post* that stated “Gen. Lee’s patriotism is no more useful than his humanity of which he himself boasts would be trustworthy. When he talks about humanity and kindness to those whom he wishes to be left in helpless dependence, does he imagine that people here forget Andersonville and Belle Isle? Does he think men and women here forget the cold and hateful cruelty of the rebel commander-in-chief who saw thousands of our brave fellows starve and freeze to death under his own eyes in the horrible swamp of Belle Isle, near Richmond?”³⁷²

With the end of 1865 the news would still report on General Lee. For the next five year prior to Lee’s death in 1870, Lee would be mentioned multiple times in both positive and negative articles. Some of the articles had to do with his duties as President of Washington College, which would later become Washington-Lee Collage, which he accepted on October 2nd 1865. *The San Francisco Bulletin* printed a letter from Gen. Lee that asked for money for Washington College.³⁷³ *The New-York Daily Reformer* wrote “that Cyrus McCormick donated 10,000 dollars to Washington College and that Gen. Lee is quietly seeking to advance the interests of the institution to the admiration of the students and all who know him.”³⁷⁴ Not all articles dealing with Washington College were good. *The Daily Inter Ocean* wrote that we believe with other men that a traitor ought not to be entrusted with the education of American youth.³⁷⁵ *The Jamestown Journal* reprinted a story from *The New York Times* that stated “if a man who wants

³⁷² “Gen. Lee; Andersonville; Belle Isle,” *Lowell Daily Citizen and News* [Lowell, Massachusetts] 25th September 1868

³⁷³ “A Letter from Gen. Lee,” *San Francisco Bulletin* [San Francisco] 10th January 1866

³⁷⁴ General Lee’s College,” *New-York Daily Reformer* [Watertown, New York] 18th January 1866

³⁷⁵ “Current Topics,” *Daily Inter Ocean* [Chicago] 21st March 1868

his daughters to grow up pure and virtuous sends them to a school in a brothel? Shall the next generation in the South be more loyal than the three previous ones, while he gives the education of the coming citizens into notorious rebel hands? Is R.E. Lee the deepest dyed traitor, biggest scoundrel and worst foe his country ever suffered from a decent man to sow seeds in the minds of the young men who are to be our Southern citizens hereafter?"³⁷⁶

The idea of General Lee for President of the United States was brought up in different years in the Northern press in articles that ranged from joking to bitter in tone. The idea that General Lee could run and win was unlikely, but in the South were a large portion of the electoral votes lay, the possibility would have been there if the Reconstruction governments of the South were not in place to prevent such an event. *The Wilmington Independent* wrote that "the last specimen of rebel impudence is a proposition of the *Mobile Register*, which places at the head of its columns the name of General Robert E. Lee as a candidate for the President of the United States in 1868."³⁷⁷ *The Christian Watchman* wrote that "with General Lee getting a full restoration of his property and a pardon then the General would be eligible to the presidency of the United States and might become the candidate for that office of a powerful party."³⁷⁸ *The Bloomington Weekly Pantagraph* wrote that "they were not surprised to find that the Democratic party of the South are in favor of their favorite but fallen hero for the Presidency. Robert E. Lee would doubtless be the unanimous choice of the Democrat party of the South and would not be distasteful to many at the North."³⁷⁹ *The Annapolis Gazette* wrote that "Lee's military reputation is beyond a doubt and the Southern Brethren could make no objection to him. The anti-war democrats of the North would fall in with alacrity. Ending with the statement let us have another

³⁷⁶ "Schools for a New Rebellion," *The Jamestown Journal* [New York] 17th April 1868

³⁷⁷ "Miscellaneous Items," *Wilmington Independent* [Wilmington, Illinois] 2nd May 1866

³⁷⁸ "Gen. Lee," *Christian Watchman* [Boston] 11th October 1866

³⁷⁹ *Bloomington Weekly Pantagraph* [Bloomington, Illinois] 22nd January 1868

stand up fight between the two representative men of the opposing principles of a patriot and a traitor. Ulysses S. Grant and Robert E. Lee.”³⁸⁰

General Lee spent the remainder of his life at Washington College. As it had multiple times during the Civil War, General Lee’s health would again make headlines. In October of 1870, Lee’s health took a sharp decline. *The New York Tribune* simply announced that “General Lee was stricken with paralysis. His recovery is considered doubtful.”³⁸¹ *The Boston Journal* gave a more detailed account with a different prognosis of Lee’s health writing that “Lee had a protracted and exciting meeting with the faculty of Washington College and on his return to his residence, fainted from fatigue and was placed in bed. His physicians confidently expect his recovery in a day or so.”³⁸² On the 6th of October, multiple papers such as the *Daily Critic* wrote that “Gen. Lee continues to improve. He is quite cheerful and communicative.”³⁸³ Despite the large number of articles about Gen. Lee recovering, it was not to be. On October 12th 1870 General Robert E. Lee died.

The new spread throughout the North quickly and many papers began to print their eulogies and final comments about the life of General Lee. Some would be attacks on his past while others would give honor to the fallen General. *The Daily Inter Ocean* wrote an article that described the heroic deeds of Lee’s family and gave a brief bio of General Lee himself and stated “whatever may be said of the choice of his side made by Gen. Lee in the late conflict, it has not been common even by the strongest partisans of the other to question his motives, doubt the sincerity of his convictions or impugn the purity of his character. No prominent man upon that

³⁸⁰ “Whom Will they Nominate,” *Annapolis Gazette* [Annapolis] 9th April 1868

³⁸¹ “Gen. Robert E. Lee stricken with Paralysis,” *New York Tribune* [New York] 3rd October 1870

³⁸² “Illness of Robert E. Lee,” *Boston Journal* [Boston] 4th October 1870

³⁸³ “Health of Gen. Lee,” *Daily Critic* [Washington D.C.] 6th October 1870

side came through the war with less of obloquy or retained in a higher degree the respect of those against whom he was enlisted.”³⁸⁴ *The New York Tribune* stated that “Gen. Lee goes to his grave with only the stain of treason upon his otherwise noble character. But the country pardoned him; to forget is the greatest charity we can now extend him.”³⁸⁵ *The New York Times* wrote that “Lee won the respect even of those who most bitterly deplore and reprobate his course in the rebellion.”³⁸⁶ *The Springfield Republican* decided to finally correctly give General Lee’s family tree that had been printed incorrectly in the past and wrote that “Washington College would keep the anniversary of Gen. Lee’s birth and for keeping that day like the birthday of Washington as a college anniversary hereafter.”³⁸⁷ *The Cincinnati Daily Gazette* wrote about the general mourning that went on in the South listing what major Southern cities had done to honor General Lee.³⁸⁸

While some papers gave honor to General Lee, other did not. *The Albany Evening Journal* wrote “few will be disposed to heap needless reproaches upon his grave. There is simply the truth of history to be observed and respected. He has already been tried before its tribunal and condemned. The mantle which is thrown over the departed Lee must not be suffered to cover his treason and in the coffin which entombs his inanimate body must not be buried the memory of his public crime.”³⁸⁹ Writing in response to the *New York Tribune* article the *Lowell Daily Citizen and News* simply put “only the stain of treason is a remarkable way of putting it.”³⁹⁰ *The Boston Journal* wrote “now that Gen. Lee is dead and gone, perhaps the best way to regard him

³⁸⁴ “Robert E. Lee,” *Daily Inter Ocean* [Chicago] 13th October 1870

³⁸⁵ “Gen. Lee,” *New York Tribune* [New York] 13th October 1870

³⁸⁶ “Gen. Robert E. Lee,” *New York Times* [New York] 13th October 1870

³⁸⁷ “The Lee Family,” *Springfield Republican* [Springfield, Massachusetts] 15th October 1870

³⁸⁸ “Death of General Lee,” *Cincinnati Daily Gazette* [Cincinnati] 14th October 1870

³⁸⁹ “Death of General Lee,” *Albany Evening Journal* [Albany, New York] 13th October 1870

³⁹⁰ “Gen. Lee,” *Lowell Daily Citizen and News* [Lowell, Massachusetts] 14th October 1870

morally is to place him among the martyrs of American slavery, a long sad list but closed at last and General Lee was himself one of the most treacherous of the whole array of traitors.”³⁹¹ The *Standard* wrote that “Gen. Lee’s name will go down in history connected with an attempt to break up the Union.”³⁹² *The Times* wrote that “it is proposed that each state of the South erect a monument to Gen. Lee. Such a man needs no monument. Benedict Arnold and Judas Iscariot are remembered the world over, and no monument was ever erected to them.”³⁹³

³⁹¹ “A Martyr to Slavery,” *Boston Journal* [Boston] 15th October 1870

³⁹² “Death of Gen. Lee,” *Standard* [Chicago] 20th October 1870

³⁹³ “Southern Items,” *Times* [Troy, New York] 10th December 1870

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The Northern newspapers never truly vilified General Lee. While articles about him that were negative would be printed, they never became a universal constant. Lee's reputation in the North would always be high and nothing he did against the armies of the United States seemed to really damage him in the eyes of the Northern press. It is because of this lack of turning General Lee into a villain to be hated that would help lead the North to eventually accept Lee as a hero for all of the country to hold up. That is not to say that Lee was instantly accepted as a hero after he had died. As former Confederates called for General Lee's birthday to be made into a holiday and monuments to be erected, the Northern press was negative about the attempts. The *Times* wrote that "there is a movement to make the anniversary of the birth of Robert E. Lee a legal holiday. This step would be worse than foolish. The sooner that section turns its back to the past the better for all concerned."³⁹⁴ *The New York Tribune* stated that "the attempt to make Lee's birthday a holiday would become a celebration of the Lost Cause."³⁹⁵ *The New York Times* wrote that "if Lee deserved a monument so too does Benedict Arnold."³⁹⁶ *The Baltimore American* wrote that "the Union Veteran Legion called the placing of a statue of Gen. Lee in the Hall of Fame an insult to the Union soldiers living and dead."³⁹⁷ As the Civil War progressed, General Lee's reputation rose and fell with the tides of battle. As General Lee won battles, his reputation

³⁹⁴ "Robert E. Lee," *Times* [Troy, New York] 19th September 1889

³⁹⁵ "Lee's Birthday," *New York Tribune* [New York] 23rd August 1889

³⁹⁶ "Arnold and Lee Monuments," *New York Times* [New York] 9th March 1903

³⁹⁷ "Object to Lee Statue," *Baltimore American* [Baltimore] 17th October 1903

became high in the opinions of the Northern Press. With the massive defeat at Gettysburg, General Lee's reputation fell until his eventual defeat.

Despite this after Lee's death in 1870 the tide began to turn. Men who were once opposed General Lee now began to speak favorably about him and U.S. Presidents began to call him great. Newspapers began to notice that people of the North gradually began to accept General Lee as an American hero. The *Daily Critic* stated that "the remains of General Grant and General Lee should be placed side by side in the crypt as the noblest possible expression of the restoration of peace."³⁹⁸ These opinions were printed in the Northern press. The editor of the *New York Tribune* Horace Greeley who was a fierce opponent of slavery and the Confederacy wrote in a speech that he gave that "he longed for the day when the name of Robert E. Lee should be honored and revered equally with the dead heroes of the Union armies."³⁹⁹ Charles Francis Adams Jr. who fought as a general in the Civil War and whose father Charles Francis Adams Sr. fought to keep England from recognizing the Confederacy as a legitimate nation gave a speech where he said that "the United States owes a debt of gratitude to Robert E. Lee for saving the country by not fighting a guerilla war."⁴⁰⁰ President Theodore Roosevelt called "Lee a greater General than Grant or Washington."⁴⁰¹

Even the feelings of the general population of the North towards General Lee were noted. *The Springfield Republican* noted that "Gen. Robert E. Lee seemed to be faring much better in the esteem of posterity than Jefferson Davis at least in the North, where formerly the one was as much a rebel as the other. The annual observance of Memorial Day serves to emphasize the fact

³⁹⁸ "Ulysses S. Grant and Robert E. Lee," *Daily Critic* [Washington D.C.] 25th July 1885

³⁹⁹ "Southern Sentiment," *Goshen Times* [Goshen, Indiana] 11th April 1872

⁴⁰⁰ "How Lee ended the War," *New York Times* [New York] 31st October 1901

⁴⁰¹ "Strenuous Misjudgment," *Rockford Republic* [Rockford, Illinois] 2nd October 1901

and this year more than before has northern appreciation of Lee been manifested. The tablet to the Confederate General in the New York Hall of Fame apparently closes the argument and fixes his name permanently among American heroes.”⁴⁰² *The Cleveland Leader* wrote “every year that passes since the Civil War makes Robert E. Lee a nobler figure in the sight of all his countrymen, North and South and he has not yet reached the full of his fame.”⁴⁰³

Robert E. Lee was never truly treated as the villain of the Civil War. While he was the face of the Confederacy even more than its president, Jefferson Davis, General Lee never was fully given into the hatred and rancor that men in similar positions in other countries that led rebellions would receive. As a rule the leaders of rebellions were never given positive press in the country they were fighting and they were certainly never pardoned and allowed to live in the country they tried to break away from or be allowed to live at all. Lee was given honor and glory in the country he tried to destroy. Men who Lee fought against declared him the best of them all and strove bring Lee into the status of American hero.

The research shows that as the Civil War progressed, General Lee’s reputation rose and fell with the tides of battle. As Lee won battles, his reputation became high and the opinions of the Northern Press reflected that perception to the point that even opinions about Lee’s status as a slaveholder and the treatment of his slaves and his struggle with secession were commented on. With the massive defeat at Gettysburg, General Lee’s reputation began to fall and his depictions in the Northern Press fell likewise until his eventual defeat. Instead of the classic fate of all failed revolutionaries, General Lee has become a hero and icon of the very country he sought to destroy. This has been shown to be partially due to the Northern press, presenting Lee to the

⁴⁰² “Jefferson Davis and Gen. Lee,” *Springfield Republican* [Springfield, Massachusetts] 1st June 1901

⁴⁰³ “Son of Light-Horse Harry,” *Cleveland Leader* [Cleveland] 12th June 1904

people as a great General and honorable man who simply made a single mistake and that this should not be held against him. The Northern Press themselves wrote articles apologizing for General Lee's actions. They made it seem that his decision to join the Confederacy was more out of misplaced loyalty than any actual desire to destroy the United States and that while owning slaves Lee was willing to free all the slaves in the South to save the Union. All of this was done in the name of reconciliation with the South and a desire to move on from the past and look to the future where America needed men for their youth to look up to, North and South. What better person for the South to idolize and at the same time show that the Southern citizens can be proud to be a part of the United States than Robert E. Lee; the reluctant secessionist, the man who found slavery an evil, a good Christian, and hero.

General Lee will always stand as an icon of the United States. Monuments to him dot the North and South while at the same time historians have made it impossible to fully degrade his reputation. Presidents have lauded his greatness, generals have studied his campaigns and tactics, school children learn about him more so than even Grant or Sherman, and historians write of his nobility and modesty. General Lee is always be considered by most people as the greatest general of the Civil War despite losing. That reputation and that legacy can all be traced back to the way the Northern press treated him by portraying him as they did. Because of this it was easy for the North as a whole to accept him and elevate him to the position of a hero of the United States. Robert E. Lee had for most of his adult life and well beyond his death been a polarizing figure. Many people from not only the United States, but other countries hold him in high regards and see him as a person that has the qualities that many people should have. Others see him as a rebel and a traitor, a man who fought for the destruction of the Union that his father helped to create and defended an institution that held millions of human beings in slavery despite

professing Christian virtues. Many say we should have the monuments built to him be preserved in order to remember our history while others want to remove those same monuments from both sight and memory because they represent a time of slavery and racism. This thesis has shown the evolution of the reputation of Robert E. Lee from an unknown soldier, to admired enemy, to an incompetent general and traitor, finally ending at an influential American icon. The most important thing that we must remember is that Lee himself did not actively participate in his rise to this status but was done by others either to create a new history in order to justify themselves and their Lost Cause or to help heal the nation from the wounds suffered by four long years of Civil War by embracing the man who led the rebel army. Karl Marx, who wrote about the Civil War, said it best:

Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living. And just as they seem to be occupied with revolutionizing themselves and things, creating something that did not exist before, precisely in such epochs of revolutionary crisis they anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past to their service, borrowing from them names, battle slogans, and costumes in order to present this new scene in world history in time-honored disguise and borrowed language.⁴⁰⁴

⁴⁰⁴ Marx, Karl. *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, (New York: Intl Pub, 1994) page 1

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