

'THAT MYSTIC CLOUD'
Civil War Memory in the Tennessee Heartland, 1865-1920

by

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Contents

ABBREVIATIONS	6
INTRODUCTION	7
1. MEMORY AND MOURNING	30
Footprints of War	33
Living With Death	36
Bad Death	43
Marking the Dead	48
Shades of Gray	60
2. RESTORATION OR RECONSTRUCTION?	69
Not So Now	73
Cause to Regret	80
Let Us Restore	85
An Uneasy Alliance.....	90
Ku Klux Come.....	97
They Told Me	101
Lee Still Lives	105
Seek Shelter Elsewhere.....	109
The Stupendous Contest.....	113
3. ROLL CALL FOR CONFEDERATE MEMORY	118
'Home Rule'	120
Live in the Living Present	124
Entirely from Memory	128
An Urgent Entreaty	139

	In Search of Amusement	149
	Not In Vain	152
	Fall In!.....	157
	Lynching Green Wells.....	166
4.	THE DISEMBODIED CAUSE	170
	We Were Comrades.....	173
	Lives of Difference	176
	Acts of Remembrance.....	182
	Disillusioned Black Republicans	190
	Black Legislators.....	195
	No Axes to Grind	198
	Not in Nashville.....	205
	Black veterans	212
	Bury the Past	221
5.	THE LONG SHADOW OF THE LOST CAUSE	227
	Mournful but glorious	232
	The Confederate Generation	237
	Rescue from Oblivion	242
	Bound by Love	253
	From a Southern Standpoint	258
	Building the Past	262
	Storing the Past	266
	Corners of the Field	271
6.	EPILOGUE	279
	BIBLIOGRAPHY	286
	Primary Sources.....	286
	Secondary Sources	291
	ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	303

Abbreviations

<i>CV</i>	<i>Confederate Veteran</i>
FB	Freedmen's Bureau (Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Land)
<i>JSH</i>	<i>Journal of Southern History</i>
NARA	National Archives and Records Administration, Washington D.C.
RG	Record Group
SBHLA	Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee
SCD	Special Collections, Duke University
SHC-UNC	Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill
<i>THQ</i>	<i>Tennessee Historical Quarterly</i>
TEHC	Carroll Van West, editor-in-chief, <u>Tennessee Encyclopedia of History & Culture</u> (Nashville, Tennessee: Rutledge Hill Press for the Tennessee Historical Society, 1998).
THS	Tennessee Historical Society
TSLA	Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee

Introduction

Everywhere it is the historic consciousness which has seized upon and controls our life and its manifestations—our letters and the expression of our thought. We shall not go out of our way to compare it with the French consciousness wrought by the great Revolution, or with the ripening of German thought and the intensifying of German unity which sprung from the Napoleonic wars. . . . The growth of this historic instinct throughout the country seems one of the main results of the war itself—a consciousness born of new feelings and ideas and conceptions, and derived from a closer discernment of the events and the development of the past. . . . The *historic* sense has grown in proportion as the *personal* feeling has become blunted.¹

J. B. Henneman, Sewanee Review (1893)

It is tempting, as J. B. Henneman suggested in 1893, to view the Civil War Era as a watershed in American consciousness, akin to the French Revolution in bringing forth a new form of historical sensibility. While, as is true in the case of both France and the United States, forces of modernity had begun to disintegrate traditional connections between experience and memory long before the revolutions of 1789 and 1861, the impact of the Civil War on the relationship between consciousness, memory, and identity, should not be underestimated—particularly in the South. Robert Penn Warren remarked that the Civil War provided Americans with their only ‘felt’ history, by which he meant “history lived in the national imagination.” The Civil War uprooted thousands from their homes, liberated many hundreds of thousands more, and had in many parts of

the South a totalizing impact upon society that often blurred distinctions between the battlefield and the homestead. The war touched the lives of all and took each individual to places that were different from before, thereby shaking the present from the deep grooves of the past and, as J.B. Henneman observes, producing a “historic instinct” to remember, rethink, and restructure the past lest it be lost for ever.

Recollections of the Civil War —through what Warren termed the ‘mystic cloud’ of memory—have often been an imperfect representation of history. As David W. Blight has observed, Americans’ fascination with the war has more often focused on its “music and pathos” than “its enduring challenges, the theme of reconciled conflict to resurgent, unresolved legacies.” In the former Confederate states, as a number of historians have shown, a valorized Confederate heritage—promulgating the myth of white unity, denying the history of slaves becoming citizens, and sustaining an ideology of white supremacy—became the touchstone for white Southern identity. Most recently, scholars such as Blight and Edward L. Ayers have worried about how the Civil War years have come to be preserved today in archives, represented in popular culture, and narrated by professional scholars and curators at battlefield sites. “There is no animosity,” Ayers has observed, in “historical or practical interpretations of the Civil War.”

It is clear that the North fought for purposes entirely good—for Union and the end of slavery—but Confederate soldiers also win respect for their bravery, their devotion, and their struggle against long odds. They seem to have been playing historical roles for which they are not to blame. . . . The war has become common property, with the treacherous parts helpfully roped off.

¹ J. B. Henneman, “Historical Studies in the South Since the War,” Sewanee Review 3 (May 1893), 320-339, quotations from 333, 324-25, 320, emphasis in original.

In understanding the genealogy of this present conundrum it is time to ask again, as John Hope Franklin did some forty five years ago, “by whom and how” has the Civil War era been preserved?²

The charge arising from Franklin’s question—to write a social history of remembering—has inspired a number of studies in recent years and it is a challenge that I take up in this dissertation. Recent moves into the study of memory by historians of the U.S. South reflect not only broader intellectual trends within the humanities but also a contemporary crisis of identity within the region. Since the modern civil rights movement shattered the claims of the ‘White South’ to a sovereign and unitary ownership of all things ‘Southern,’ the crisis of identity in the U.S. South—revolving around basic questions of definition as well as the identity claims of particular social groups—has stimulated waves of historical inquiry that have thoroughly destabilized received understandings of an earlier generation’s underpinning assumptions about the South. Seismic movement in the analytical frame of reference has led inexorably to a new critical examination of the very substances from which any history is constructed: the

² Robert Penn Warren, The Legacy of the Civil War, intro. by Howard Jones (Lincoln, NE.: University of Nebraska Press, 1998; orig. pub. 1961); David W. Blight, “Quarrel Forgotten or a Revolution Remembered?: Reunion and Race in the Memory of the Civil War, 1875-1913,” in Blight and Brooks D. Simpson, eds., Union & Emancipation: Essays on Politics and Race in the Civil War Era (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1997), 156; Gaines M. Foster, Ghosts of the Confederacy: Defeat, the Lost Cause, and the Emergence of the New South (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); Grace Elizabeth Hale, Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940 (New York: Pantheon Books, 1998) and W. Fitzhugh Brundage, ed., Where These Memories Grow: History, Memory, and Southern Identity (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Edward L. Ayers, “Worrying about the Civil War,” in Karen Halttunen and Lewis Perry, eds., Moral Problems in American Life: New Perspectives on Cultural History (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 145-166,

archives and attics of public and private record that constitute not so much of a factual account of experience but exist as treasure troves of memory that reveal traces of the past, purposefully preserved and surrounded by the silences of the maligned, the misrepresented and the misunderstood. “The historical South that exists today,” Fitz Brundage has written, “is the consequence not of some innate regional properties but of decades of investment, labor, and conscious design by individuals and groups of individuals who have imagined themselves as ‘southerners.’” Unpicking this past, examining the threads with which the tapestries of earlier generations were woven, has become a necessary part of the project of re-imagining the history of the South in the 21st century. “We need, in short,” Brundage continued, “a social history of remembering in the South.”³

Any social history of remembering needs to be precise about definitions. The term ‘memory’ refers to the cognate and psychic functions that permit individuals to represent the past. Richard Terdiman has usefully described memory as “the modality of our relation to the past” as something which “functions in every act of perception, in every act of intellection, in every act of language.” Human culture, then, is not merely inhabited by memory but is the product of memory – an inherited accretion of what has gone before and yet not all that has gone before. While we are always in the thick of memory – thinking through memory, in other words – the fact is that forgetting is what enables memory to function as the principal phenomena of human consciousness. Our inability to possess and embody all that has gone before creates a situation in which we

quotation p. 146; John Hope Franklin, “A Century of Civil War Observance,” Journal of Negro History 47 (April 1962): 97-107.

preserve particular features or attributes of the past through mnemonic codes and devices. Furthermore, we preserve generally what is most enabling and what allows us to carry on. “Loss,” Terdiman argues, “is what makes our memory of the past possible.”⁴

While the writing of history is dependent crucially upon a multiplicity of layers of remembering, there are three distinctions to be made between history and memory. First, memory lacks history’s critical perspective: whereas history reaches for a detached evaluation of events over the course of time, memory merely stabilizes objects and incidences through a contextualization of phenomena on the template of prior experience. Second, memory too lacks history’s sense of chronology: whereas history structures time sequentially, the functions of memory force time to fold back in upon itself. And memory lacks history’s sense (or pretension) of objectivity and is almost completely submerged in subjective contemplation. Nonetheless, as Terdiman notes, the only way to see memory, to “get some perspective on this apparently seamless and omnipresent function” is to historicize it.⁵

Historicizing memory related to the Civil War has sent scholars back to the five decades straddling the turn of the 20th Century, years in which the generations that fought the war, and who were immersed in its passions, were setting out their stall of reflections before passing on. The events of the 1860s, to no small degree, created a palpable sense of “then” and “now,” an unmooring of temporality and consciousness that generated

³ Brundage, “No Deed But Memory,” intro. Where These Memories Grow, 2-3.

⁴ Richard Terdiman, Present Past: Modernity and the Memory Crisis (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), quotations from pp. 7, 9, 22.

⁵ Ibid., 9.

intense anxiety. Post-war social and economic development in late nineteenth century America added to this sense of acceleration, producing what Pierre Nora has described in the French context as “an increasingly rapid slippage of the present into a historical past that is gone for good.”⁶ Peter Fritzsche, a scholar of German history, has remarked generally of modern memory that the late 19th Century produced a sort of ‘memory crisis’ when it became clear that cataclysmic changes – industrialization, urbanization, as well as war and its attendant consequences – were taking the past out of the present, producing a need to claim past experience through political action and to manipulate it to fit present-day identities.⁷ The terrible realization that the past was gone, detached by changed and changing circumstances from present realities, was one that Southerners all shared. It produced, as J.B. Henneman remarked in 1893, “a consciousness born of new feelings” – a “*historic* consciousness” that “has grown in proportion as the *personal* feeling has become blunted.” This “historic sense” was what gripped many white southerners of the Civil War era in the late 19th century and the realization that the past was an artifice, subject to manipulation (especially by the Yankees) prompted many to shape their own histories, to structure and sustain their post-war identities and political possibilities. But it was work that could not be done individually: they did it together, finding eventually

⁶ Pierre Nora, “Between Memory and History: Les lieux de memoire,” in Marc Roudebush, trans., Representations 26: Memory and Counter-Memory (Spring 1989), 25.

⁷ Peter Fritzsche, “The Case of Modern Memory,” Journal of Modern History 73 (March 2001): 87-117; see also Alon Confino and Peter Fritzsche, eds., The Work of Memory: New Directions in the Study of German Society and Culture (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002), intro.

greater unity of purpose and understanding than ever had existed during the years of civil conflict.

The sociologist Maurice Halbwachs, writing over 70 years ago, demonstrated with exemplary lucidity that acts of remembering are thoroughly social. Halbwachs demonstrated that the individual could only locate and narrate memory within a social setting – hence the term ‘collective memory,’ which I take to refer to a bundle of social memories referring to the shared understandings of any social group with common grievances, interests, and aspirations. Collective memory, while the result often of conflict, negotiation, and compromise, provides groups with what Brundage usefully describes as “a sort of genealogy of identity.” Any group’s social memory provides a mythologized past and a cornerstone of their identity. Like the myth of Roland Barthes’ *Mythologies*, a fully functioning collective memory gives sustenance to group identity – “it purifies them, it makes them innocent, it gives them natural and eternal justification, it gives them a clarity which is not that of an explanation but that of a statement of fact.”⁸

Late 19th Century Southerners, therefore, like all modern social groups needed actively to furnish their cognate store of memory while fighting against the memory claims of competing social groups. In the United States the Antebellum had become by the 1880s the site of touchstone memories, which while elusive, unfixed and contested, nonetheless loomed large in consciousness as a landscape against which to date and compare the new existences that the dissolution of slavery and the failure of Confederate ‘home-rule’ had created. After the utopias promised by proponents of both the

Confederacy and Reconstruction had run their pitiful course, American culture in the late nineteenth century was also animated by a triple consciousness of “what was,” “what might have been,” and “what is.” This triplicate temporal consciousness was further complicated by the spatial double consciousness of racial identity—of being either white and American or black and American.

Recent studies of late nineteenth century social memory have begun to explore the interplay of competing social groups, and I pick up that challenge in this dissertation. I take as given that the authority to shape and control memory is a dimension of social and political power and that individuals think about the past and form narrative explanations as members of social groups. What interests me most is how social memory is conveyed and sustained between individuals and across generational lines. As Richard Terdiman puts it: “Of course every culture remembers its past. But how a culture performs and sustains this recollection is distinctive and diagnostic.”⁹

Four broad questions inform my inquiry:

- In what ways did members of a regional society, torn by bitter divisions during the Civil War Era, fashion and share autobiographical and social memories of the period?
- How were these social memories sustained and transmitted to subsequent generations within the region? In other words, how did memory become history?

⁸ Maurice Halbwachs, On Collective Memory, trans. Lewis A. Coser (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Brundage, “No Deed But Memory,” 4; Roland Barthes, Mythologies (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972), 143.

- What functions did social memories of the war serve for community identity needs and, in particular, the maintenance of white supremacy during the Jim Crow era?
- In what ways did a subaltern African American memory of the Civil War Era survive in a community dominated by Confederate memorialization?

Believing that place matters, and that the social formation and cultural performance of memory can best be observed in local contexts, I focus my dissertation upon the Middle Tennessee heartland – a region and battle theater deeply divided in the 1860s by secession, federal occupation, emancipation, and reconstruction. The Middle Tennessee region comprises 35 counties covered nineteen thousand square miles stretching from the Cumberland Mountain plateau on the east to the Tennessee River on the west. The focus of this study is on the ‘heartland’ of the region, as Stephen V. Ash has termed it, which consists of 13 counties, contained mainly within the elliptically shaped geological basin around Nashville, 120 miles from North to South and about 60 miles across. The heartland in 1860 held almost 30 per cent of the total state population and almost 80 per cent of the wealth of the Middle Tennessee region.¹⁰ Whereas other scholars of Civil War memory have examined high intellectual culture, looked at the changing interpretations through time of individuals such as Lincoln or Lee’s Generals, or studied the former

⁹ Terdiman, Present Past, 3.

¹⁰ For a contemporary description of the geology of the heartland, see James M. Safford, Geology of Tennessee (Nashville: State of Tennessee, 1869); Stephen V. Ash, Middle Tennessee Society Transformed 1860-1870: War and Peace in the Upper South (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988), 2.

Confederate states as a region, the emphasis in my work is upon the memory work of competing social groups within the Middle Tennessee heartland and their struggles to locate, articulate, sustain, champion, transfer, and institutionalize conceptions of the past.¹¹

Viewing the war from a perspective of sixty or seventy years, Andrew Lytle and Donald Davidson, two of the Vanderbilt Agrarians native to the Middle Tennessee heartland, viewed antebellum Middle Tennessee society as a complete civilization where patrician values, a common heritage and devolved yet strong institutions sustained a yeomanry in a self-subsisting agrarian idyll that was to be shattered by the war.¹² Historians of the antebellum period have pointed to the realities behind the romance, detailing the differences amongst whites and the distinctive lives of blacks that existed within the romantic conception of a complete society. And yet, historians have found a

¹¹ Recent studies of Civil War memory, which focus on a symbolic figure or region of the South, include W. Scott Poole, Never Surrender: Confederate Memory and Conservatism in the South Carolina Upcountry (Athens, 2004); Peter S. Carmichael, The Last Generation: Young Virginians in Peace, War, and Reunion (Chapel Hill, 2005); Paul A. Shackel, Memory in Black and White: Race, Commemoration, and the Post-Bellum Landscape (New York: AltaMira Press, 2003). William Blair, Cities of the Dead: Contesting the Memory of the Civil War in the South, 1865-1914 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Kathleen Ann Clark, Defining Moments: African American Commemoration and Political Culture in the South, 1863-1913 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005); John Cimprich, Fort Pillow: A Civil War Massacre and Public Memory (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005). See also Alice Fahs & Joan Waugh, eds., The Memory of the Civil War in American Culture (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

¹² See, in particular, Donald Davidson, The Tennessee Vol. One: The Old River, Frontier to Secession (1946; rpt. Nashville: J.S. Sanders & Company, 1991), esp. Ch. XIX. Paul Conkin might well have been describing Davidson's view when he wrote of "the smug and self-assured patrician culture of the geographically favored central basin." Paul K. Conkin, "Evangelicals, Fugitives, and Hillbillies: Tennessee's Impact on American National Culture" in Carroll Van West, ed., Tennessee History: The Land, the People, and the Culture (University of Tennessee Press: Knoxville, 1998), 289

remarkable social cohesion in Middle Tennessee, as in other sub-regions of the South, that enables a close reading to be made on the assumption that most if not all shared a degree of common interests and collective understandings. “Most lived close to the soil,” Ash has written of Middle Tennessee, sharing “a common cultural heritage and like economic interests, and were tied closely enough to Nashville and the rest of the heartland by rail, river, turnpike, and history that they felt a genuine regional identity and community of interest.”¹³

Four in ten heartlanders were slaves in 1860. Kinship and neighborhood ties among blacks before the war were severely circumscribed by slavery and racism. Violence was everywhere and took many forms – from the whip of the white master or overseer to the denial of education and basic civil rights. But while existing in a condition that Orlando Patterson has aptly described as “social death,” slaves and free blacks were able to negotiate and sustain fraternal pockets of social support and resistance in places as diverse as the plantation slave quarter and the urban black church.¹⁴ On farms and plantations, slaves were closely supervised during the day but gathered at night to share stories, dreams, music, and the other consolations of life. Some episodes of black fraternal life were sponsored and supervised by whites—weddings, for example, or the traditional Christmas feast—and served to bind blacks even tighter in a subjugated role within the white social structure . But blacks often resisted these efforts and maintained their own social networks: In Maury County, for example, a big “June

¹³ Ash, Middle Tennessee Society Transformed, 12.

¹⁴ Orlando Patterson, Rituals of Blood: Consequences of Slavery in Two American Centuries (New York: Basic Civitas, 1998).

Meeting,” a day-long outdoor festival, was a long-standing tradition among local slaves, and provides evidence of the existence of an underground community surviving in a hostile environment.¹⁵ In towns such as Columbia, Clarksville, Murfreesboro, Shelbyville, and Franklin, slaves and a few free blacks constituted almost half of the population. But towns were more spatially integrated than cities and allowed less intimacy for blacks than that found on the farms and in the cities. Still, at least in religious activities, blacks were able to establish some autonomy. Three black churches existed in Columbia by 1860, in addition to the prayer meetings held at the homes of free blacks. In Nashville, a sizable free black community provided the catalyst for a flourishing black community. Seventy-two percent of free blacks in Nashville lived together in two wards near the waterfront and public square ; urban slaves intermingled indistinguishably with free blacks.¹⁶

The people of the heartland had neither desired nor sought to bring on the war. In the 1860 presidential election the preferred candidate was the local U.S. Senator John Bell, representing the constitutional unionists, with the bulk of the remainder going to John C. Breckinridge, the standard bearer for the Democratic Party. Abraham Lincoln’s Republicans were not on the ballot. As heartland planter and election commissioner John

¹⁵ Ibid., 59.

¹⁶ Lisa C. Tolbert, Constructing Townscapes: Space and Society in Antebellum Tennessee (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), ch. 6.

Bills remarked on the day after the election, “one Abe Lincoln elected” but “is not known here as a Candidate”¹⁷

The election of Lincoln was, as Ash reminds us, a challenge to the “prosperity and integrity of rural life.”¹⁸ The electors of the region knew this, and yet, while the state rejected calls for secession resoundingly by defeating a call for a constitutional convention in January 1861 by 69,000 to 58,000, opinion in Middle Tennessee was almost evenly divided. Nonetheless, the calls from South Carolina to reject the constitutionality of the election of Lincoln and secede peremptorily from the Union found few adherents in Middle Tennessee. One Nashville lawyer declared that “the course pursued by South Carolina [is] one of madness, demented folly.”¹⁹ Yet following Lincoln’s call for troops to quash the rebellion in Charleston, the mood of the region swung decisively behind its sectional interests with the states to the south. The June 1861 vote on secession was a fait accompli as the State of Tennessee had effectively seceded by the time voters went to the polls. Yet the vote recorded a decisive move on the part of the electors in the Middle Tennessee heartland to leave the union by a vote of 37,262 to 1,927.

The war that followed in the heartland was truly a civil conflict and the strategic significance of the main regional events on the outcome of the larger war should not be

¹⁷ “Statewide General Election for U.S. President, November 6, 1860,” Tennessee Election Returns, RG 87, TSLA; Diary entry for November 6, 1860, John Houston Bills Papers, UNC-SHC.

¹⁸ Ash, Middle Tennessee Society Transformed, 65.

¹⁹ A. Waldo Putnam to Andrew Johnson, December 22, 1860, in LeRoy P. Graf and Ralph W. Haskins, eds., Papers of Andrew Johnson vol. 4 (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1967), 73-74.

underestimated. Nashville fell quickly to Union forces following the failure by Confederates to hold the river forts on the Cumberland and the Tennessee. The heartland's major city became the largest garrison for the Union in the western theatre. The decisive failures to break the Union hold on the heartland at Stones River in 1862 and Nashville in 1864 foretold the collapse of the Confederacy. The Middle Tennessee region was second only to northern Virginia in the depth of destruction and the number of dead. In political terms the collapse of slavery, which began upon the appearance of Union forces, and the coming of reconstruction following Andrew Johnson's appointment as military governor in 1862, foreshadowed events elsewhere in the occupied South.

No two experiences of the war were the same and suffering was the common denominator. Most heartlanders outside of the city of Nashville were caught in the 'no man's land' between the limits of Union occupation and the extent of Confederate control.²⁰ Even the towns of Columbia, Pulaski, and Murfreesboro, where the Union garrisoned troops, changed hands from time to time; in the rural hinterland anarchy often prevailed with bushwhackers laying down their own version of the law. The novelist Evelyn Scott, raised in Clarksville, Tennessee on the upper ridge of the heartland, came close to capturing the maelstrom of war in her 1929 work The Wave. Eschewing narrative cohesion around a central plot or character, and avoiding the pull of landmark events, Scott deployed the metaphor of a wave to describe the irresistible and relentless pounding of the conflict's impact and significance. Scott's epic, one of the great fictional

²⁰ Stephen V. Ash, Conflict & Chaos in the Occupied South, 1861-1865 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), ch. 3.

treatments of the war, depicted individuals caught up in the forces of a conflict and tossed about like droplets of rain in a great ocean.²¹

The ways in which communities observed the momentousness of the war had begun during the early years of the secession crisis. As the rush to record observances and opinions in journals and diaries confirms, many heartlanders felt the need to bear witness to the events as they unfolded. Their reasons for doing so were many and cannot be neatly separated. Some, like the elderly planter Nimrod Porter, a veteran of 1812 and an early pioneer of the region, opened his journal early in 1861 with a lamentation of despair and tried to make sense of the unraveling of a society and a nation that he had helped create. Many others, such as Pulaski housewife Martha Abernathy, were firm in their convictions and wished to commemorate events in writing so that their descendants would inherit a written record. Correspondence flourished during the war (uncensored by the authorities) as individuals sought not merely to remain in touch between the battlefield and home but also to record a chronicle of momentous times. Nashville photographers did a brisk business in capturing on negative plates the images of fired-up soldiers, an iconography to comfort those on the home front and to record the faces of the fierce braves who set out to defend homes and families. Special days of commemoration

²¹ Evelyn Scott, The Wave (1929; rpt. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1996); for Scott's autobiographical account of her childhood see Background in Tennessee intro. Robert L. Welker (1937; rpt. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1980).

also emerged during the war as communities gave thanks for deliverance or marked the new times that were being ushered in.²²

The weight of history did not stop African Americans from believing that prophecy was on their side. From the moment that a true and lasting emancipation appeared feasible, blacks in Middle Tennessee acted individually or joined together in associations to press their cause and put freedom at the heart of the war's meaning. Not all Tennessee slaves had run to the ranks of the Union army or claimed them as liberators after the federal invasion of February 1862. Indeed, only a few were able to author their own fates during the war years; the majority remained captive to the possessive control of owners were frustrated by the conditions of early freedom and the illiberal attitudes of Union authorities. But for those who could find the company of friends and allies and were bold enough to act, the dislocations of war had provided many opportunities to seize the day and claim an influence over the war's ultimate meaning.

Defection from Confederate owners had often been the first act of freedom. Successful defectors then found themselves in communities of kindred souls—in the contraband camp, within the precincts of black Nashville, or in companies of the colored regiments. By the summer of 1863 evidence of coordinated activities among blacks began to emerge. On July 4th, a slave read the Declaration of Independence in Nashville, just as Union recruitment agents were fanning out across the region and organizing black regiments. By the following year, in October 1864, a delegation of Nashville blacks

²² Nimrod Porter diary, SHC-UNC; Elizabeth P. Dargan, ed., The Civil War Diary of Martha Abernathy, Wife of Dr. Charles C. Abernathy of Pulaski, Tennessee (Beltsville, MD., 1994)

attended the National convention of Colored Men in Syracuse, New York.²³ Upon their return from the convention, the Nashville delegates helped organize a local chapter of the newly founded National Equal Rights League. They also staged a mock presidential election in November to demonstrate the readiness of blacks for the rights of citizenship.

Although blacks had no political rights, they began asserting themselves in the public sphere. Black soldiers, preachers and teachers took the lead in coordinating public expressions of freedom in the last months of the war. Marches, usually led by black regiments with black businessmen serving as parade marshals, commemorated anniversaries of the Emancipation Proclamation (Jan. 1) or emancipation in the British West Indies. Soldiers organized an aid society, Sons of Relief, and courageous educators established country schools across the heartland. These efforts provided avenues through which blacks could represent an emancipatory version of recent events and lobby for the guaranteed extension of black freedoms.

While Tennessee Unionists were slow to pick up the mantle of black freedom, shifts in national and regional policy, tied directly to the actions of the slaves themselves, had opened fraternal lines of common purpose and understanding between the smallest black community in Middle Tennessee and Washington D.C. Few among the federal invasion troops, and even fewer of the region's native Unionists, were abolitionist by conviction when Nashville fell under Union control. But many quickly realized that slaves and free blacks, as an Ohio officer put it, were "the only friends we find." "They have heard of the abolition army, the music, the banners, the glittering arms . . . [and]

²³ The Nashville delegates included the Rev. Peter Lowery (A Disciples of Christ preacher), Abram Smith (a porter in the state legislature before the war), and Rev.

welcome us with extravagant manifestations of joy.”²⁴ Not all voices were as appreciative as this officer’s; many more Unionists saw “contrabands” as a nuisance or as a resource to exploit. But steadily the actions of slaves yearning to be free and willing to support a war that was enabling their freedom turned Union thinking around. Although Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation excluded Tennessee, blacks in the region nonetheless felt the impact of its revolutionary force as army recruitment agents and freedmen’s aid staff implemented the spirit of the proclamation on the ground. In 1863 Northern philanthropic societies established freedmen schools at Clarksville, Gallatin, Nashville, and Murfreesboro. That same year thousands of contraband were organized into colored regiments, given a blue uniform and a rifle, and placed at the service of the Union cause. Before the federal Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands appeared in the region, at least twenty Northern philanthropic agencies were active in Middle Tennessee. Some, such as the United Presbyterian Church’s Missionary Board (which was active at Murfreesboro and Pulaski) were religious. But the majority were secular. The Western Freedmen’s Aid Commission, based in Cincinnati, had offices in Clarksville, Gallatin, Murfreesboro, and Nashville. These developments brought Middle Tennessee blacks into association with northern and national groups in ways that gave vital strength of purpose and resources critical to the advancement of the freedmen’s cause.

Ransom Harris (a pressman at the Nashville Republican Banner).

²⁴ John Beatty, Memoirs of a Volunteer 1861-1863, ed. Harvey S. Ford (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1964), 93, quoted in Ash, Middle Tennessee Society Transformed, 106.

Black freedom, the revolutionary consequence of the war, promised to become the basis for a genuine regeneration of democracy within the region. That this promise proved ultimately to be illusory marks the tragedy of Reconstruction in Tennessee during the 1860s. Emancipation had been achieved within a tradition of American liberty and with a gloss of biblical prophecy. Neither of these traditions, however, were unequivocally on the side of the freedmen. For a true and long-lasting emancipation of a subjugated people to be achieved, white supremacy had to fall. But ingrained patterns of white supremacy—habits of thought and action; habituated tendencies and dependencies—persisted beyond the capacity of the war to alter fundamentally the racialized culture of the region.

This dissertation is divided into five chapters. Chapter 1 – *The Dead and the Reborn* – examines how the war’s immediate legacies, particularly the handling of the dead and patterns of mourning, shaped early forms of memory. The trauma of war-time death had a deep impact upon Confederate sensibilities, creating a mourning voice and a tradition of ‘social death commemoration’—performed largely by women—at the heart of memorial practices. Whereas the metaphor of death and loss hung over early Confederate memory, I also explore how Unionist and African American memories were joined briefly in powerful alliance and fired initially by a metaphor of rebirth—of the possibilities for a new beginning within a context of resurgent American liberal nationalism.

In Chapter 2 – *Reconstruction or Restoration?*— I explore how, between 1862 and 1870, fractious policies of Reconstruction—driven by the war needs of the Union and the political self-interests of leading white political figures—revealed deep fissures in the

pro-Union coalition and provided a common object around which forces hostile to an Emancipationist vision of the war could coalesce. In this chapter I provide close readings of leading agents of regional memory—military-governor-turned-president, Andrew Johnson; the sensational ex-slave musical troupe, the Fisk Jubilee Singers; and grassroots counterrevolutionaries in the Tennessee-grown Ku Klux Klan—to explore the interrelation of local, regional, and national trends during America’s Reconstruction.

Chapter 3 – *Roll Call for Confederate Memory* – focuses on particular moments in the mid- 1880s by which time a Confederate social memory had begun to emerge in staged reunions and within print culture. Veterans such as Sam R. Watkins (the author of Co. Aytch, a memoir of his wartime experiences) articulated versions of the past that attempted to secure their sense of honor, process lingering traumas, fortify contemporary political identities, and articulate an unapologetic language of regional pride and national reconciliation. This development accompanied moves toward an increasingly segregated society in a dialectical process where political change drew upon and fed into a festival of Confederate heritage. By 1895 communities of Confederate memory—veterans’ groups, newspapers, the Democratic Party, religious and memorial organizations—together enacted a cult of remembrance, ensuring that a Confederate ‘memory nation’ lived on in the hearts, minds, and bodies of local whites.

In Chapter 4 – *The Disembodied Cause* – I examine the efforts of regional blacks to resist their exclusion from political life in part by drawing upon an Emancipationist reading of the recent past to challenge the consolidation of a Lost Cause memory cult at the heart of a politics of white supremacy. It was a valiant but increasingly hard fight. With the Unionist-Republican coalition hopelessly divided—a situation exemplified by

the failure of the Grand Army of the Republic to sustain interracial activities at the local level—black communities lacked the social and political power to keep their social memories in the forefront of the region’s consciousness. Moreover, class and political divisions meant that no single historical narrative emerged from African American constituencies to challenge effectively the hegemonic claims of Confederate historical memory. Consequently, black and Unionist constituencies failed to keep an emancipationist social memory of the Civil War together in the context of a resurgent white supremacy and black disempowerment.

In the final chapter – *The Lost Cause Cult* – I focus on the mature stage of Confederate social memory and focus on the means of promotion and transfer that prominent social groups used to keep an increasingly codified Confederate reading of the past in the forefront of the region’s historical remembering. The founding in Nashville of the Confederate Veteran (1893), a periodical for ordinary soldiers, and the United Daughters of the Confederacy (1895), a historical and memorial association, signaled the range and depth of Confederate social memory. Both organizations put considerable effort into ensuring that their versions of the past were disseminated, defended, and made pre-dominant by the end of the nineteenth century. Efforts to valorize the lost memory of executed Confederate scout, Sam Davis, put the State to work in defense of Confederate history and epitomized countless efforts to mark the landscape with Confederate memorials. The Sam Davis story is one example of how what I term ‘memory entrepreneurs’ worked to position a Confederate social memory as the de facto state history. I explore how individuals such as Sumner A. Cunningham, Confederate Veteran editor and archivist John Trotwood Moore engaged in popular, scholarly, and cultural

pursuits in alliance with a range of local agencies to sustain a Confederate reading of the recent past. Voices from within African American communities challenged the new state history, but black cultural and intellectual life had been largely unmoored from a Union-Emancipationist tradition. The triumph of a Confederate historical ethos was made most plain in 1921 when the Tennessee General Assembly voted to extend veterans benefits to blacks who had remained loyal to their masters during the war years.

Throughout 'That Mystic Cloud' I tell the story of essentially two competing conceptions of the past—a Union-Emancipationist memory, rooted mainly in the experiences of African Americans, and a Confederate-Reconciliationist tradition championed by whites. Throughout I stress the point that the “memory wars” of the post-war South were conducted on interrelated levels—the personal or autobiographical, the social or collective, and the intra- and inter-regional—and in political contexts. At first, in the immediate postwar years, patterns of cultural memory were inchoate and contained many different orientations toward the recent past. But over time, I track the process of narrative cohesion around central themes that continue to feature local particularities while drawing upon regional and national trends.

By 1890 it is clear that a Confederate revivalism, which accompanied resurgence in the politics of white supremacy, had gained such force that it dominated cultural representations of the past within the region. Attention to local circumstances permits me to delineate the process of social memory formation (and dissemblance) and to detail in historical terms the ways in which social memories of particular groups either failed to establish themselves in regional consciousness or were championed and institutionalized

as a collective memory. In particular, I feature the role of what I term “memory entrepreneurs,” groups and individuals who worked to attach broad social memories to the identity needs of social and political groups. By the end of my study—in 1930—a Confederate-Reconciliationist memory is housed in the region’s libraries and archives, funded by State government, taught in the region’s colleges and universities, and inscribed upon the landscape in countless memorials and shrines to the Confederate cause. By contrast, constituencies of Union-Emancipationist memories lose their cohesiveness and lack the resources to combat the consolidation of a Confederate memory cult.

1. Memory and Mourning

It is now pretty well understood the Southern Confederacy has gone up & peace of some sort either for Weil or for Woe will take place shortly. With many aking hearts for the loss of there friends & there all. We will sit down & mourn in Sack Cloathes & ashes for many days, Weeks, Months & years to come.

Nimrod Porter, 29 April 1865¹

Once the War was over, the Confederacy became a City of the Soul, beyond the haggling of constitutional lawyers, the ambition of politicians, and the jealousy of localisms.

Robert Penn Warren, 1963²

In the Spring of 1865 the citizen armies of the Tennessee heartland bid farewell to war and moved to embrace peace. Their movements, however, went in hundreds of different directions, continuing the paths and pursuing the passions that war's fate and fortune had opened up. Though war had joined people together into communities of similar experience, no two heartlanders shared anywhere near the same experiences of war or felt precisely the same emotion at the dawn of a new era. Perhaps only in this, their common quandary, did the survivors of regions throughout America (like the survivors of all wars) share a condition that

¹ Nimrod Porter, diary, 29 April 1865, SHC-UNC.

² Robert Penn Warren, The Legacy of the Civil War, intro. by Howard Jones (Lincoln, NE.: University of Nebraska Press, 1998; orig. pub. 1961),14

none but poets could describe. Walt Whitman, in bidding good-bye to the war, declared “I know not how it may have been, or may be, to others.” But few heartlanders had the luxury of Whitman’s indulgently truthful perception – each “rank and file,” soldier and civilian, had their own experiences, which were compellingly real to them, and outside of their own kindred communities they knew little and cared even less about the experiences of others. Even if they had tried to capture the real war of Whitman’s imagining, it was just as impossible for heartlanders to convey and share “real war” in the late 1860s as it has been for historians subsequently to get it into their books. But they were (and we are) compelled to try—by the heavy weight of the dead, by the need to forget, and by the narrative imperatives of an ever-changing political and social life.³

The Civil War brought immense physical destruction to the Tennessee heartland. But it also ruptured consciousness, leaving a deep and lasting trauma and a palpable sense of distinction between the past and the present that was felt by many perhaps for the first time in their lives. Metaphors of death and re-birth, of despair and purpose, filled the spaces opened up by war’s violence and came quickly to dominate the social memory of the war. The living weight of the dead and the fact of emancipation within the twin contexts of a failed Confederate nationalism and a regenerated American nationalism, were the two main realities of the conflict for all, and both metaphors had significant impact upon the character and form of social memory. Real experience and a range of emotions gave these metaphors dynamic force but little cohesion. Different social groups, once bound together in time and space in systems of mutual dependency, now took on different orientations toward the past and the future. Former slaveholders and

³ Walt Whitman, Specimen Days (1882), quoted in David W. Blight, Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001), 6.

Confederates, their honor deeply invested in the systems and choices of the past, mourned the passing of the antebellum world and would struggle to accept the fragile new order that grew out of the conflict. Many former slaves, though their immediate futures were clouded by impoverished circumstances, felt themselves to be literally unshackled from the past and embraced jubilant visions of present portends for the future. Sitting above these two constituencies were the Unionist victors—imperious in power, determined to protect their victory from the challenges of the defeated, and yet divided over the nature and extent of the social revolution the war had produced.

What the most disconsolate and the most jubilant sentiments had in common in the Spring of 1865 was the need to narrate a story that attempted to make sense of the immediate past. What all shared was a novel sense of the past as an objective entity, shorn by violence from the present, and an anxious insecurity about competing visions for the future. Whether one's instincts were for restoration of the status quo ante bellum or for a reconstruction of society, what was needed was a fixed relation to the past. Most of this initial "memory work" was hidden from view, conducted in the private realm of unwritten autobiography and anchored in the mysteries of personal experience, social location, and religious faith. While many soldiers shared reflections on recent experiences while hanging out at grocery stores and grogshops, the avalanche of private correspondence that the war had generated now diminished to a trickle as reunited families no longer had the need to exchange news or felt the inclination to document the momentous times through which their lives passed. Newspapers, too, largely turned their attentions away from war news and encouraged their readers to focus energies upon rebuilding social and economic life. Only slowly did citizens of the heartland build or adapt institutions of memory out of social networks and develop the technologies and associated practices that would

enable, sustain, and transmit a fixed relation to the past. Yet social memories of the war began to emerge in grieving, consolation, and commemorative practices that marked either the sacrifices of the war or its consequences. Myriad and overlapping constituencies—groups that fought for different causes, experienced different wars, and had different ideas about the future—now built their postwar sensibilities upon the past through countless efforts to understand and commemorate the painful sacrifices and hopeful promise of the war years. With the war over, the struggle for the war’s memory and meaning (always a part of the war itself) would take on new force.

FOOTPRINTS OF WAR

What would an observer’s eyes have alighted upon as she surveyed the heartland at the conclusion of the Civil War? The northern novelist, Gail Hamilton, cast her eyes down from the Tennessee State Capitol and saw a “country war-shorn of its beauty.” “Everywhere we see the footprints of war,” Hamilton observed. “It is a bare and dreary pasture “rough with earth-works, bristling with forts.” “Every foot of ground,” she observed at the fields on the banks of Stones River, “has been struggled for to the death.” Upon traveling south through the rural counties toward the Muscle Shoals region of Alabama, Hamilton observed that “the only architecture that relieves the eye is the architecture of the war. . . . Years must pass before the marks of war are obliterated.” All of this was to Hamilton a sign of the region’s rebelliousness and she cast her mind back five years to the day when “Nashville had not tasted the cup from which she has since drunk so deeply and so bitterly.”⁴ When a Union officer rode out of Nashville on April 1 he found spring “fully inaugurated,” but his observations were also framed by the politics of war.

The region, he concluded, “must have been almost an earthly Paradise before Secession set its seal of desolation upon it.”⁵ Later that year, journalist and novelist J. T. Trowbridge visited Murfreesboro. He was informed that it was “a pretty, shady village, before the war.” But he found it in a denuded condition: “the trees had been cut away, leaving ugly stump-lots; and the country all around was laid desolate.”⁶ The marks of war also captured the attention of a correspondent from the New York Times, who observed a month after the Battle of Nashville that a “huge gaping trench and rifle-pit cordon around the city.” Outside the city limits, the devastation left a once rural idyll “denuded and bare as if planted in the heart of some Western prairie.” “It will stand thus for long,” he continued, “for these ghastly cuts, like those upon animate bodies, require time to cure.”⁷

Perceptions from heartlanders themselves were similarly full of political meaning but also reflected the varied experiences of war. Ruins dominated the perceptions of white farmers and community leaders. “An utter wreck,” was how one returning Murfreesboro preacher described his church in 1865, “nothing standing but the cupola, and the graveyard is also a desolation.”⁸ From his farm in Maury County, Nimrod Porter, a veteran of the War of 1812, saw devastation everywhere. During the conflict, soldiers from both sides had sacked his plantation of almost all its livestock, crops, and fencing, and robbed the inhabitants—white and black—of most of their valuables. The former sheriff and pioneer settler, a Unionist sympathizer but with

⁴ Gail Hamilton, Wool-Gathering (Boston: Ticknor & Fields, 1867), 200-214.

⁵ Frank Handy Diary 1864-65, 1 April 1865, SCD.

⁶ J. T. Trowbridge, A Picture of the Desolated States; and the Work of Restoration. 1865-1868 (Hartford, Conn.: L. Stebbins, 1868), 273.

⁷ “From Nashville,” New York Times, 8 February 1865.

two sons in the Confederate army, had kept a day book and diary throughout the war chronicling his losses. His long lamentation of ruin had reached its nadir in the four months between the Franklin and Nashville battles and Appomattox, during which time tens of thousands of Confederate and Federal troops, and scores of robbers, thieves, and bushwhackers, crossed back and forth feeding like locusts on his land. The law had once protected Nimrod Porter's sizable holdings in land and human property—but Confederate secessionism, the lawlessness of war, and the emancipation of his slaves (all of which he deplored) had practically ruined him. In 1860 Porter's 400-acre plantation had been assessed at \$40,000 with \$3,000 worth of livestock. He also owned twenty slaves. By 1865 his buildings stood defiantly upon a ruined landscape and most of his bondsmen had run away with the Federal army or to refugee camps around the heartland. Before peace arrived, Porter could conceive of no way to escape the cruelties of war: "If there was any place that we could go to get clear of our great troubles & misfortunes," Porter wrote in his diary after another raid. "I would agree to go any where to live in any kind of government that would stop our troubles & the impositions that are every day heaped upon us."⁹ But there was no escape, and the pro-Union father of Confederate sons suffered a further insult when a Federal party came to impress his last horse in January 1865. They left the 73-year-old Porter with an old mule branded with the name, "C.S.A. Col. Sydale," the former Confederate officer in charge at Columbia, the county seat.¹⁰

The chaos of war, with all its competing purposes and intentions, its tragedy, irony, and farce, and above all its cruel and unsparing violence, had left markings everywhere upon the

⁸ William Eagleton to Martha Pride, 17 March 1865, Pope Papers, TSLA.

⁹ Porter diary, 19 February 1865.

¹⁰ Ibid., 16 January 1865.

landscape, each mark open to tellings of what had happened and what it all now meant. Many looked to the State Capitol building, intact and heavily fortified, which continued to tower about the city of Nashville, a city grown prosperous on war. The Capitol's survival signaled to some the triumph of Republican government, but for others it marked a symbol of "Yankee oppression" and an object to recapture and redeem for Conservative purposes. The black shanties that dotted the landscape appeared to those of Confederate sympathies to be symbols of the pitiful fate of a race of people cast out from the protections formerly given by beneficent white owners. Yet for the Freedmen and their families, such hamlets were proud settlements of the liberated, a people who were now free to educate their children and author their own fates, however unfixed and uncertain the future must have seemed. Churches, some recently used as hospitals or armament storage houses, others stripped of their furniture and sacraments, began slowly to reorganize and provide places of succor and healing to the bereaved and the afflicted. The ruined farmhouses and outbuildings, and open fields stripped of fencing and trees, signaled to all the terrible price of war. And then everywhere there were the dead – by one estimate fifteen thousand buried in the precincts of Nashville alone – resting anonymously in shallow graves and waiting for re-interment and commemoration.¹¹

LIVING WITH DEATH

In both Confederate and Union communities, the dead exerted a heavy claim upon the living. One observer described the cemeteries in the environs of Nashville as so many cities of the

¹¹ "Interments within the City," Nashville Union American, 1 November 1866.

dead.¹² But it was not just at grave sites, and not only at the conclusion of the war, that the people of the heartland felt the pressure to sublimate their existence with those of the dead. All towns and rural hamlets in the Tennessee heartland were communities of the bereaved and at the conclusion of the war everyone seemed to be aware that the dead were now an integral feature of the physical and emotional landscape.¹³

Two predicaments confronted the survivors: how to grieve the loss of so many and what to do with their bodies. How local communities coped with the loss of life, and what they chose to do with the bodies of the dead, tells us a great deal about cultural patterns of mourning and remembrance.

The circumstances of war had made impossible the continuation of familial and religious rituals associated with death and often left the most basic questions unanswered—how did they die? where did they fall? what were their last thoughts? were they alone? did they suffer? where are their remains? Moreover, the traumas created by the sudden and violent death of relatives were the result of events that could never be fully known by the survivors however much they tried to seek out the true circumstances. Since the true circumstances of death were unavailable to the consciousness of survivors, the trauma of a distant death persisted in their lives. Many of the bereaved in the heartland were left in a condition of suffering that was beyond the capacity of conventional narratives of consolation and healing.

¹² Boston Evening Transcript 21 January 1864.

¹³ “Communities of the bereaved” is a term from Jay Winter, who rightly emphasizes the localized nature of mourning and the community-level response to death and bereavement. Jay Winter, Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 6

The contours of the new grieving process engendered by the war were underpinned by a lack of information about casualties of both the battlefield and the disease-infested camps and hospitals. Despite an absence of official censorship that would mark later wars, information about the whereabouts of injured or killed soldiers was especially hard to find. Because many area soldiers, Federal and Confederate, saw considerable action in Middle Tennessee, communication between the battlefield and the home front was perhaps better here than elsewhere. But even if the battles were on their doorstep—as was the case with Ft. Donelson, Stones River, Franklin, and Nashville—most local residents could only hear the roar of the guns and had to wait days for definitive information to arrive by letter or telegraph about the fate of their soldiers. During the federal siege of Ft. Donelson in February 1862, Nimrod Porter, who had two sons among the Confederate defenders, experienced “the most heart rending day . . . in all my whole life.” The “greate uncertainty of events, & the Suspence” was too much for him to bear. Over the following days, Porter’s mood was somewhat calmed as news trickled out, but still he “could not learn the certainty of it, [the] hundreds of reports verry Contradictory.”¹⁴

Those near the front lines were able to find and comfort their injured or dying men. For example, after Stones River, families came from around the heartland to check on the fates of their loved ones. After scouring the terrible scenes of dead and mortally wounded on the battlefields and lying in hospitals, some were relieved, others decimated, and yet others left without learning anything about their kinfolk.¹⁵ After the Battle of Franklin, young Tod Carter’s family did not have far to go before discovering his dying body since he had fallen within a few

¹⁴ Porter diary, 15-17 February 1862.

¹⁵ James Lee McDonough, Stones River – Bloody Winter in Tennessee (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1980), 152-65, esp. 154-55.

hundred yards of the family home; he was brought inside to die at home.¹⁶ Some heartlanders traveled farther afield in search of news: in the fall of 1861, a Pulaski doctor ventured as far as Virginia in search of a brother whom he had heard was wounded.¹⁷ But most waited at home in silence and waited and waited for news to trickle out in newspapers and private correspondence. Corroboration of the facts was often only available through the slow accretion of oral testimony. Misinformation and rumor proliferated. Even if relatives were informed accurately that their kin had been wounded, this was almost always followed by a fog of silence about the nature of the injury and the chances of recovery.

The pitiless circumstances of war provided situations so cruel that efforts by family members to be near the dying soldier or to reclaim the dead often made the situation worse and deepened the trauma of loss. The war's terrible violence across sectional lines meant that few families were able to be with their soldiers at the last hour and share in the staging of death. Aside from the sheer scale of the carnage, part of the problem was that there was no effective system of reporting casualties. Regimental officers often knew less than ordinary privates about the losses sustained after an engagement, and this knowledge traveled often unreliably via the telegraph wire and the postal letter to anxious folks at home. But despite the obstacles, Civil War soldiers and their families, together with military authorities and medical personnel, struggled mightily to maintain semblances of the Good Death ritual in the face of war. Historian Drew Faust has detailed the Victorian ritual of the "Good Death" as an art (the *Ars Moriendi*, or "art of dying") that revolved around a bed-side vigil and involved the exchange of last

¹⁶ James Lee McDonough & Thomas L. Connelly, Five Tragic Hours: The Battle of Franklin (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1983), 159-60

¹⁷ Elizabeth P. Dargan, ed., The Civil War Diary of Martha Abernathy, Wife of Dr. Charles C. Abernathy of Pulaski, Tennessee (Beltsville, MD., 1994), 11.

comforting words. The staging of a family communion at the time of death was seen by Victorian Americans as vital in any effort to cope with the transcendent significance of death and for the establishment of a relationship between the dead and the living. By the mid-nineteenth century, Faust argues, elements of the Good Death “had been to a considerable degree separated from their explicitly theological roots” and had become “a part of respectable middle-class behavior” and “part of more general systems of belief . . . about life’s meaning and life’s appropriate end.” The art of dying, Faust notes, also had an ecumenical and national appeal, transcending denominational and sectional lines.¹⁸

These middle-class conventions could not have been more crudely violated than by the circumstances that befell many families during the Civil War. Some experiences were so traumatic that they remained in the minds of survivors for years and decades after the war. Writing almost twenty years after the event, Confederate private Sam Watkins recalled an incident “on the field of death and blood.” While searching the battlefield of Chickamauga by lantern for injured comrades on the evening of the fight, he came across “a group of ladies, looking among the killed and wounded for their relatives.” “Coming to a pile of our slain,” Watkins recalled,

we had turned over several of our dead, when one of the ladies screamed out, ‘Oh, there he is! Poor fellow! Dead, dead, dead!’ She ran to the pile of slain and raised the dead man’s head and placed it on her lap and began kissing him and saying, ‘Oh, oh, they have killed my darling, my darling, my darling! Oh, mother, mother, what must I do! My

¹⁸ Drew Gilpin Faust, “The Civil War Soldier and the Art of Dying,” *JSH* 67 (February, 2001): 3-39, quotation from 8.

poor, poor darling! Oh, they have killed him, they have killed him!” I could witness the scene no longer. I turned and walked away.¹⁹

These women who happened upon the corpse of a family member on the battlefield at Chickamauga knew not how he died, were ignorant of his sufferings, and were unable to keep vigil or share in any exchange of last words. This death contained none of the ritualized features of a “Good Death.” We can only wonder at the trauma that must have persisted in their postwar lives. The narrative of their soldier’s life was painfully incomplete without knowledge of his final chapter; their grief at his loss forever stained and sustained by an absence of the details of death.

During the war, letters of condolence emerged as a genre of their own and through such correspondence associates of the deceased conveyed details of death that might comfort the bereaved. Dr. Charles C. Abernathy of Pulaski, recorded the death of a family friend in such a way as to convey to the deceased’s family the details of death, which included the deceased’s last words—“will you take good care of my mother?”²⁰ Such memorials were not always textual, especially among black soldiers. Comrades in Co. B, 12th U.S.C.T., evidently conveyed the news of James Wilson’s death at the Battle of Nashville to Katherine Wilson, the deceased soldier’s mother. By the time Katherine made a dependents’ pension claim, William Johnson told federal investigators that the soldier’s mother had asked him to tell his story “about a hundred times.” Katherine’s kinship connection to the dead soldier had been contested by another black woman and could not be confirmed to the satisfaction of pension investigators.

¹⁹ Sam Watkins, Company Aytch or, A Side Show of the Big Show (1882; rpt., New York: Plume, 1999), 88.

²⁰ Charles C. Abernathy, “In Memoriam,” in Dargan, ed., The Civil War Diary of Martha Abernathy, 72-74.

But the rehearsed stories of condolence from the soldier's comrades were taken as truth. The story was one of reformed bravery. One comrade, Frank Gaither, told that "He was carrying the colors and I saw them go down. I saw him after he was dead. He was shot right through the head. I saw George Hunter of Co. B., and Jones the drum major carry him off the field in a cart."²¹ Another comrade, William Johnson, provided additional details that gave Wilson's death an even greater significance. On the eve of the battle, Johnson testified, Jim Wilson "had been charged with mutiny and put under arrest." Johnson continued:

I understood he was tried and ordered to be shot, but . . . [on] The morning of the battle all the guards were taken from the prisoners and I told him that was a good time for him to get away and he said he would not go. And some how or other he got hold of the colors and carried them till he was killed.²²

Within hospitals, soldiers and nurses often substituted as family members for the dying soldier, some of whom were so delirious with fever or pain that they believed they were in the company of their mother or sisters. Military authorities and hospital staff generally aided families wherever they could, even in the case of enemy victims, to assemble elements of the "Good Death." After the Battle of Nashville, for example, a reporter for the U.S. Sanitary Commission observed the visitations of "suffering visitors" that "touch the heart with a painful force." "They are never turned away," he reported, and "every assistance is afforded them that our . . .

²¹ Affidavit of Frank Gaither, n.d. (c. Sept. 1884), Civil War pension file for James Wilson, Co. B 13th U.S.C.T., RG 15, NARA.

²² Affidavit of William Johnson, n.d. (c. Sept. 1884), Civil War pension file for James Wilson, Co. B. 13th U.S.C.T., RG 15, NARA. Johnson's testimony, though given in 1884, is corroborated by the official account given at the time of Jim Wilson's fate, except that Wilson had apparently been acquitted of all charges before the battle: "Tried by Genl. Court Martial for [unclear] Oct 28th & found not guilty & returned to duty. . . . He like a brave man got permission to join in the Battle of Nash 16th Dec., & then met with his death after fighting desperately &

knowledge of passing events, and our means can afford.” Many, however, found their loved ones “recorded with the dead, and return broken-hearted to desolate homes.”²³ Confederate families in Nashville generally found the military authorities to be accommodating in matters of the death ritual. One funeral attendee gave “credit” to the authorities “for not interfering with the funeral which was conducted strictly as that of an ordinary individual dying in an ordinary way.”²⁴ But these courtesies provided only temporary comfort to those experiencing the trauma of loss.

BAD DEATH

Grief, of course, was a private affair and one that rarely yielded a written record for the historian to evaluate. The few sources containing information on the grieving process are Confederate in their sympathies, reflecting both the dominant persuasion among white heartlanders and the privileges represented by education, the time for self-reflective leisure, and the presumption of self-importance that all diarists have—especially those whose writings end up in print or in archives. Black heartlanders undoubtedly experienced the pain of war-time separation and grief, but they were a people already fluent in the language of the deepest sorrows. For African Americans, the pains and dislocations of war, while keenly felt, did not mark a debilitating departure in the psychology of familial and religious life; moreover, the travails of war were

bravely.” Records of the Adjutant General’s Office, RG94, NARA: Book Records of Volunteer Union Organizations; 13th USCT Infantry; Descriptive Book, Companies A-K.

²³ J. S. Newberry, The U.S. Sanitary Commission in the Valley of the Mississippi, during the War of the Rebellion, 1861-1866 (Cleveland: Fairbanks, Benedict & Co., 1871), 375-6.

²⁴ John Berrien Lindsley diary, 2-3 October 1862, Lindsley Family Papers, Box 1, folder 4, TSLA.

more often than not co-joined with the hopeful expectation of what freedom might bring in the new order of things. For white heartlanders, however, and especially those of Confederate sympathy, the grief of war-time loss was for many a searing emotional experience that would echo loudly through decades of Civil War memory. Not only did the nature of Civil War death create its own trauma since the circumstances of loss could never be fully known to the survivors, the death of Confederate soldiers over time became part of a larger loss. If we are to understand the depth and resilience of Confederate grief—and its capacity to perform culturally across generational lines—then individual and family trauma needs to be situated within a broader picture of loss. Confederates, having banked everything on the new nationalism promised by southern secession, were losing more than their kinfolk to the war: they were also losing their economic wealth, their racial mastery, and their control over the course of future events.

The struggle to maintain a sense of ritual decorum at the hour of death was only possible for the wealthy or the well-connected in Nashville's Confederate community. But even then the barriers were almost insuperable and the consolation ultimately scant, as Rachel Craighead Carter's traumatic journey of grief illustrates. Her efforts to witness her brother's suffering, and to be at his side as he died, while providing some consolation in the short term nonetheless created a psychic trauma that blighted her postwar life.²⁵

²⁵ Freud's theory of "traumatic neurosis," which explained the compulsive reenactment of re-envisioning of a shocking happening or loss as something outside of individual control, has been usefully extended by Cathy Caruth. She argues that victims of trauma suffer far more than an "inadvertent and unwished-for repetition," and are subject to a "sorrowful *voice*" that cries out "*through the wound*." The "witness of the crying voice" unifies the story of the trauma with the ongoing struggle for existence, providing a "profound link between the death of the loved one and the ongoing life of the survivor." Cathy Caruth, Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative,

Early in the war, Carter's family had experienced "bad death" when, on July 26, 1862, she recorded in her diary that her "whole body was instantly unstrung" at the news of a cousin's death. His body, she noted, "was not recovered" and she supposed that he had died "in a hospital with no loved ones near to see him die." "How his innocent, pure noble heart," she observed, "must have ached to know—he was dying among strangers."

Weeks later, Rachel learned that her only brother had been killed at Perryville, but then learned after a sleepless night that he lay wounded in a makeshift Kentucky hospital at Harrodsburg.²⁶ Carter hurried with her parents to her brother's side only to learn that his wounds were in fact mortal. John Carter suffered a slow and lingering death with his family at his side. Rachel's description suggests that her vigil was full of affection, pain, and meaning:

Three months today since Bud was wounded. Bud asked the Doctor what he thought. He told him he couldn't live—it went like a dagger point in my heart. But he took it as calmly as possible, seems perfectly reconciled to die—said he supposed God thinks it best for him not to get well. He kissed us all goodbye. Called Ma his dear Mother God Bless her, when I go to heaven I'll watch over my Mommie, yes I will. It was very affectionate. My eyes are like lead.

After a vigil of thirteen weeks, her brother's agonizing end drew close. The pain became so unbearable for the dying man that he begged his father to "throw me out of the window or break my poor leg off" to ease the pain. Rachel found solace in her perception that her brother's sufferings had brought him close to "his Savior and made him very dear to him." On his last night, Rachel "layed on the bed by him a long time." She laid there for hours and that night

and History (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), esp. intro.; quotations from pp. 2, 8.

²⁶ The fact that Carter had learned from ex-president James K. Polk's widow that her brother clung to life must have given her family at least a sense of the possibility of a reprieve from death.

recorded that “my darling brother” was so dear to her heart. She hoped that his end would come soon, but still he lingered for another three weeks before passing away from them. “No sorrow is as great as our sorrow!” Rachel wailed in her diary the day after he died, though she found comfort that his placid face betrayed no evidence that “he had suffered ten thousand deaths.”

The family’s ordeal continued as they traveled back to Tennessee through heavy snow after searching several towns to find a casket big enough for the body. “We were afraid,” Rachel confessed, “our corpse might be insulted on the way, but I’m glad to say we had nothing of the kind to wound our feelings.” Still, she felt aggrieved that the mourning party had to travel in cars with “those wretched Yankees.” Back in Nashville, the family took to mourning dress and a full society funeral after permission was received from federal authorities to have the funeral at their home. Three friends of the deceased stayed up with the body all night, sitting next to a casket that now bore a brass plate recording that “John W. Carter died on the 18, Jan. 1863 of wounds received at the battle of Perryville.” He was 23 years of age. After the funeral, ten carriages traveled to the internment at Mt. Olivet cemetery. “We put him in the Gardner Vault,” Rachel noted, “until we can build a vault in his memory.”²⁷

John Carter’s death was as good a death as any Civil War soldier received. In many ways, given the circumstances, it was an almost perfect dramatization of the prevailing middle-class art of dying. Though he lingered painfully, he appears to have had adequate hospital care and received morphine to ease his pains. His family spent nearly four months at his side, sharing memories and exchanging tokens of love and affection, and nurturing the dying man’s soul in preparation for his death. He also experienced a religious revival and had time to reconcile

himself to God and prepare for his salvation in another life. In watching him die, his family was spared a lifetime of imagining him buried anonymously in a trench at the corner of some Kentucky field. Compare John Carter's death with those soldiers killed in battle and disposed of in parts unknown and you realize what a good death it was. Sam Watkins of the 1st Tennessee Infantry recalled how his company had abandoned a comrade, "shot through the head, his blood and brains smearing his face and clothes, and he still alive," to the "tender mercies of the advancing foe," never knowing when exactly he died nor where and in whose company he was buried.²⁸ Maury Co. farmer James W. Matthews waited almost seven months for confirmation of earlier reports that his son had indeed died at a skirmish near Resaca, Georgia, and, when he received an eye-witness confirmation from a paroled comrade, noted tersely in his day book only that "We heard today that Jas F. was certainly killed." The family had no chance of ever recovering his body.²⁹

John Carter's "good death," enabled by his family's wealth and social position, was ultimately however of small consolation to Rachel Craighead. With her Mother she visited her brother's tomb at Mt. Olivet "once or twice a week if we can get passes" and once unscrewed the casket to examine her brother's corpse. She wrote about her brother's death every day for years afterwards, once a month devoting a full page in her diary to his memory. Rachel's close

²⁷ Rachel Craighead Carter, diary, TSLA. Dr. Carole Stanford Bucy loaned me her transcript of the Craighead diary (which she hopes to publish some day) and I am grateful to her for bringing this source to my attention.

²⁸ Watkins, Co. Aytch, 95

²⁹ James W. Matthews diary, 24 November 1863, 15 May and 21 June, 1864, TSLA. Some of Matthews' neighbors, however, were able to recover remains. On Jan. 18 1866, Matthews noted that McCord Maxwell was buried at his church. Maxwell had been wounded on 15 May 1864 and died a few days later.

knowledge of the nature of her brother's death, and the context in which it occurred, seemed to deepen the trauma of her loss and create a psychic wound through which a grieving voice would continue to speak. And over time, this "other" voice would speak increasingly not only of the personal loss of her brother but of the loss of the world which they once inhabited together.

Grieving and mourning the dead had significant consequences upon the performance of Civil War memory in the Tennessee heartland. It produced a protracted grieving process that led many to search for the remains of their fallen kin in the years after the war. Moreover, the absence of the familial "good death" brought forth a collective search for what we might call a "social death commemoration" that persisted for decades and ensured that the trauma of grief and loss would remain alive at the heart of a Confederate commemorative tradition. "Death trauma" held particular significance for the performance of memory within Confederate communities, associated as it was with the failure of the Confederate cause and the loss of an antebellum world of absolute white authority.

MARKING THE DEAD

When the war was over the dead arose again, eased out of thousands of burial sites by the shovels of laborers and removed by cart and by rail to sites of private and public commemoration. About 30,000 Union dead, including over 1,900 black soldiers, were dug up by the U.S. Army and re-interred in national cemeteries at Stones River, Fort Donelson, and Nashville. These public sites of commemoration, established between 1864 and 1867, were partisan projects of Reconstruction. Their careful exclusion of Confederate dead was part of their design as places of democratic re-consecration – marking the sacrifices of so many loyal dead for the preservation of the Union and the enlargement of freedom. In an entirely separate

process, perhaps an equal number of Confederate dead were left for the most part to the tender mercies of private hands. Although the process began in the early postwar years, it took a much longer period of time for the Confederate dead to be removed by private citizens and associations to church or community cemeteries.³⁰

This re-interment process marked the early stages of public commemoration of the war and tells us a great deal about how cultural patterns of mourning and remembrance were fashioned from private circumstances of grief and in the midst of persistent sectional hostilities in the immediate wake of the war. Taking care of the dead was a somber duty felt by many at war's end and was a process invested with war's meaning. A flavor of this was given by a Unionist citizen who wrote in anger to Andrew Johnson protesting that the black Union soldiers were not being treated in an equitable way. While "the graves both of rebel & loyal soldiers" were "treat[ed] with equal respect," the correspondent noted that "Loyal Southern soldiers" (by which he meant "of African descent") were "treated with disrespect in being refused a decent & equal burial with their comrades there" and "are now buried apart, at the foot of the hill, in the wet & slimy soil." He concluded: "our laws have put them as privates & soldiers, on an equality with others, and clad them with the uniform of the Nation—as sacred to us & to all lovers of Liberty & Justice."³¹ The cause of Unionist emancipation had no better advocate than this impassioned observer (a New York Herald reporter and biographer of John Brown). But his

³⁰ James E. Rains, Brig. General, CSA, for example, was initially buried on the field at Murfreesboro; he was not removed to Mt. Olivet Cemetery in Nashville until 1888. Buckner and Nathaniel C. Hughes, Jr., Quiet Places: The Burial Sites of Civil War Generals in Tennessee (Knoxville: East Tennessee Historical Society, 1992), 89-90.

³¹ James Redpath to Gov. Andrew Johnson, 3 Aug. 1864, Leroy P. Graf, et al. eds., Johnson Papers vol. 7, 1864-1865 (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1986), 71-72.

cause was not the only one to become attached to the bodies of the dead. Confederate supporters were equally vociferous in urging that the greatest care and attention be given to Rebel dead.

As with the war-time reporting of casualties, there were no established procedures for dealing with the dead during the war. The Civil War may have been the first modern war, but state and federal bureaucracies sufficient to cope with the scale and nature of death from battle and disease did not exist in the 1860s. As early as September 1861, the Union Adjutant-General's office had directed that "accurate and permanent records" were to be kept of deceased soldiers and their places of burial.³² This was easier to do in Nashville-area hospitals where a combined effort by Army surgeons and civilians from the U.S. Sanitary Commission produced roll calls of the dead that were judged quite complete at war's end. But on the battlefields of the heartland, and in the hinterland where occupation was less entrenched than in the capital city, records of the dead came in piecemeal form. Most armies, if they had time, had buried their dead where they fell or more often in massed trenches, leaving signs either on grave-side wooden stakes or via possessions left with the body by which the dead could later be identified. If time did not allow for burial procedures, then the dead were left by retreating armies for enemy forces or local civilians to take care of. In federal hospitals the U.S. Sanitary Commission had responsibility for the dead, but all it could do for the unclaimed remains of the deceased was to bury them in adjacent "hospital cemeteries." The result was a hodge-podge of burial practices, few of them satisfactory to the bereaved.

Many local families were compelled to make their own arrangements and at least one Nashville undertaker made a hugely lucrative business out of embalming and shipping the dead.

³² See James F. Russling, "Cemeteries, National," Harper's New Monthly Magazine 33 (August, 1866), 312.

“Having buried all the Soldiers, Officers and Employees who have died at the Post,” declared city undertaker, W. R. Cornelius, he boasted of being in a position to provide a “record of burials . . . by which to furnish information to friends and relatives abroad, and to disinter bodies buried at this point.” Cornelius, described by one observer as the “government undertaker” and a pioneer in the practice of embalming, had buried thousands. His cemetery books showed that by June 1865 he had buried 13,631 federal soldiers, including 1,000 government employees. He also had buried 8,000 Confederate soldiers, and 10,000 “contrabands and refugees.” On top of that Cornelius had also embalmed and sent North the bodies of 5,000 Union officers and soldiers. Now employed by the U.S. Army to disinter the dead around Nashville, he had already by this early postwar date disinterred 3,500 for the national cemetery at Stones River.³³

Obsession with the dead led one local paper to reprint a story from a London medical journal that announced new procedures for “restoring the features of a dead body [that] has undergone putrefaction.” Because the body in question had only been buried half a foot underground, three hours of immersion in salt and hydrochloric acid restored the deceased’s features “so perfect[ly] that the body was positively identified.”³⁴

But most of the dead by the Spring of 1865 were now putrefied beyond recognition or in an even further developed state of decomposure. Some observers commented on the protruding, unsettled presence of the dead in the months immediately following the war. When Trowbridge visited Shiloh in the winter of 1865-66, he stumbled across a row of graves where a picket line

³³ Cornelius’ cemetery books examined by Benjamin C. Truman and published in the New York Times, 2 June 1865.

³⁴ Advertisement for W.R. Cornelius, “Government and City Undertaker and Embalmer,” Daily Press & Times 7 July 1865; “The Identification of the Dead,” Daily Press & Times 28 September 1865.

had made a stand. “Each soldier has been buried where he fell,” he observed, though “fires in the woods had burned the bottoms of the head-boards. At another point on the battlefield, he encountered a set of shallow graves where “many a poor fellow’s bones lay scattered about, rooted up by swine.” The most hideous sight of all, was “a grinning skull pushed out of a hole in the ground, exposing the neck-bone, with a silk cravat tied about it in a fashionable knot.”³⁵ On the Nashville battlefield, another traveling writer observed a “colored soldiers’ burying-ground . . .—rows of little hillocks close set side by side . . . every [one] hiding its story [but] which no man shall ever read.”³⁶

It was in order to make these hillocks and signs more readable that Union army officials began to address the question of reburying the dead in specially consecrated cemeteries. National cemeteries would bring due honor to the Union dead, provide sites where the bereaved could focus their grief, and stand as monuments to the survival of the Union and the memory of the terrible costs of secession. A model of sorts was provided by an informal monument, said to be the nation’s first Civil War memorial, on the battlegrounds of Stones River near Murfreesboro. Here members of Colonel William B. Hazen’s Union brigade had built in 1863 a memorial to fifty-five of their fallen comrades. A stone wall surrounded the cemetery, one hundred feet by forty feet, where limestone markers headed the graves and a monument eleven foot high listed the names of fallen officers and contained inscriptions of tribute to those who fell—“Their faces toward heaven, their feet to the foe.” The monument also created a link between battles in Tennessee since it noted those who fell at Stones River were veterans of Shiloh who had “left their deathless heritage of fame on the field of Stone River.” The overall

³⁵ Trowbridge, Picture of the Desolated States, 323-24.

³⁶ Hamilton, Wool-Gathering, 206.

effect drew wide attention from contemporary observers, one of whom commented that the view from a passing train was “so impressive in its lonely state, in the midst of all this wreck, that passengers make inquiries about it.”³⁷ The Hazen monument appealed to observers because the walled cemetery on the site of battle appeared similar to that of consecrated ground around a church. Its proximity to the railroad also allowed ready access to the bereaved and brought the monument to the attention of passers-by.

By the fall of 1865 cemeteries were already being developed at Gettysburg and Antietam in the eastern theater. But these were initially efforts of individual states whose citizens had fallen in battle at those sites. The U.S. Army had taken much more of a lead in developing cemeteries in the western theater at Chattanooga and Stones River where regiments of colored troops had been engaged in the grisly business of re-interring the dead for almost a year by war’s end. The cemetery at Stones River, begun in March 1864, collected the Union dead from within a sixty mile radius of Murfreesboro, including those buried along the line of the Nashville & Chattanooga rail road as far north as Lavergne and south to Cowan Station. The cemetery, a walled area of 16 acres posited between the rail road and the Nashville turnpike, was explicitly designed as a democratic space of national re-consecration – as accessible to all as possible and with no distinction, bar that of company and regiment, drawn between the dead. A stone wall surrounded the graveyard where, as Trowbridge noted, the dead lay “in such precise order, that one might imagine the dead who sleep beneath them to have formed their ghostly ranks there after the battle, and carefully laid themselves down to rest beneath those small green tents.”

³⁷ McDonough, Stones River, 142; Trowbridge, Picture of the Desolated States, 277-78; quotation from Hamilton, Wool-Gathering, 207; Russling, “Cemeteries, National,” 317-18, which contains copy of the inscriptions on the Hazen monument. See also line-drawing of the monument in Harper’s Pictorial of the Civil War, reprinted in McDonough, Stones River, 142.

Eventually 6,886 bodies were interned at Stones River, the vast majority of them (6,139) Union dead. The names of 2,562 were unknown.³⁸

The situation at Stones River was unusual, however, since most Union dead lay scattered, many in massed graves, at hundreds of sites throughout the heartland. An independent investigation into the condition of Union dead, published in Harper's, noted that "Tennessee has been so great a battle-ground . . . that she seems to require four" cemeteries. This view was shared by General George H. Thomas, who issued a circular calling upon all soldiers who had served in Tennessee for information on the burial sites of Union soldiers.³⁹ In early 1866 officers of Thomas's quartermaster staff submitted reports on the condition of the Union dead and made recommendations for the site of future national cemeteries. All agreed that action was imperative to ensure that further effacement of burial sites did not occur. At Nashville, 3,000 of the 17,000 Union dead in that city were buried in a portion of the old City Cemetery, but these graves, an officer reported, became "flooded with water at every heavy rain," which left the ground "covered with rubbish washed down by the current." At Fort Donelson, it was noted that an "accidental fire in the timber," or the "accidental encroachment of ploughshares" would "take from us what slight guides we now possess." In some sites around Nashville, the effacement of gravesites was being deliberately achieved by citizens who removed the headboards for fuel during the winter months. The reporting officers also found a wide scattering of Union dead – seven different burial sites in the city of Clarksville alone. The dispersal of the dead was

³⁸ Trowbridge, Picture of the Desolated States, 278; Genl. Thomas to Brig. Genl. Van Cleve, 29 March 864, and Reports on National Cemeteries, Dept. of the Cumberland No. 12, Stone's River, Sept. 26, 1867, "Stones River 1 of 3," Box 69, E.576, RG 92, NARA; see also, McDonough, Stones River, 229.

³⁹ Russling, "Cemeteries, National," 321.

especially galling when, as was the case at Franklin, Union and Rebel dead were interred together in closed ditches.⁴⁰

The proximity of Union and Confederate dead also stuck in the craw of local conservative communities. Throughout the war, Union dead had been buried in city cemeteries of towns that were under federal occupation – and now white communities wanted them removed.⁴¹ General Thomas, the victorious general at Nashville, had wished to establish national cemeteries on the battlegrounds at Nashville and Franklin in addition to a proposed site at Ft. Donelson and the cemetery at Stones River.⁴² But the cost of land and the hostility of local communities stood in his way. At Franklin, a board of investigation into establishing a national cemetery found that “the Citizens of Franklin will not sell to the Government at any price when the object of the purchase becomes known.” In the event of a forcible purchase or seizure of land, the board concluded that “a guard of 15 to 20 men will be necessary to prevent desecration.” The board recommended that the bodies be removed to a portion of the City Cemetery owned by the Federal government at Columbia.⁴³ The Union dead at Franklin were

⁴⁰ On Nashville, see Capt. E. B. Whitman to Maj. Gen. J. L. Donaldson, 12 January 1866, “Nashville 1 of 5,” Box 50; On Ft. Donelson, see Whitman to Donaldson, 8 March 1866, “Donelson, TN 1 of 3,” Box 27; and on Franklin, see E. B. Whitman to Bvt Major General J. L. Donaldson, 11 January 1866, “Franklin, TN,” Box 29. All these reports from E. 576, RG 92, NARA.

⁴¹ Union dead in city cemeteries included 3,000 at Nashville (eventually moved to the Nashville National Cemetery); 200 at Franklin (moved first to Rose Hill Cemetery in Columbia and later to Stones River National Cemetery); over 1,000 at Columbia (removed to Stones River); and 110 at Carthage, Smith Co. (eventually moved to Nashville).

⁴² See Thomas’ conversation with Trowbridge, Picture of the Desolated States, 284; Thomas’ intentions with regard to Franklin also noted in J. L. Donaldson to M. C. Meigs, 27 May 1866, Press Copies of Letters Sent, Book No. 1, E. 1126, RG 393, NARA.

⁴³ Quartermaster General, Sixth Division to Brevet Major General M. C. Meigs, Quartermaster General, U.S.A., 4th June 1866, “Franklin, Tenn.,” Box 29, E. 576, RG 92, NARA.

duly moved to Columbia in the summer of 1866, but they did not stay there long. Columbia was a town of strong Confederate sympathies throughout the late 1860s and it was eventually concluded that a national cemetery should not be permanently established there because “it would not have been respected by the majority of the people.”⁴⁴ The Franklin Union dead, therefore, were moved a third time in 1867 to the Stones River National Cemetery.

More successful than the failed attempts to establish national cemeteries at Franklin and at Columbia were efforts at Nashville – a city that had been under firm Union control for most of the war. Initially, Union officials contemplated building a national cemetery on the site of Ft. Negley, the famous fortress built by contraband slave laborers, which had fired the opening rounds at the Battle of Nashville. But it was believed that the city would eventually envelop the land, which at any rate was too rocky for the necessary depth required for interments. Land adjacent to Mt. Olivet, a private cemetery for Nashville’s well-to-do, was also discounted on the grounds of cost and its proximity to Confederate families. By the summer of 1866, Union officials focused upon a site to the north of the city on the Gallatin Pike, a site chosen for its accessibility because it was on land traversed by the Louisville & Nashville Railroad. In the first quarter of 1867, eleven thousand Union dead were removed to Gallatin. Eventually the Nashville National Cemetery contained 16,000 Federal dead (including over 3,500 unknown), which had been disinterred from 251 distinct burial places in Middle Tennessee and south central Kentucky. A large proportion of the dead came from hospital burial grounds in and around the city of Nashville and from nearby battlefields at Franklin and Bowling Green, Kentucky. These included over 1,900 dead from the U.S. Colored Troops division. As John R. Neff has pointed

⁴⁴ Annual Report of Bvt. Major G. W. Marshall, A.Q.M., dated Nashville, Tenn. 12 Sept. 1866, Relative to Burials near Columbia, Tenn., “Columbia, Tenn. Rose Hill Cem. #1,” Box 22, RG

out, “the only color line which applied to the National Cemeteries separated Blue and Gray, not black and white.” At the gates to the cemetery, the words of Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address were chiseled in stone connecting the Civil War dead, white and black (so long as they wore blue) with “a new birth of freedom.”⁴⁵ The railroad continued to run straight through the cemetery reminding visitors to and from Nashville of the great human cost of the war.

Some of the grand cemeteries underwritten by the Federal government held a small number of Confederate dead among the re-interred.⁴⁶ But most Confederate dead lay outside the national cemeteries, an arrangement that seemed to be to the satisfaction of both sides. Lacking access to government largesse, care of Confederate graves fell upon local communities. “The people do not yet possess the means to gather up the honored ashes of their heroic kindred and deposit them in imposing cemeteries,” observed the Nashville Union American in May 1866. Yet, the paper noted, “women of the South” were attending to “the pious duty of repairing the hitherto neglected graves of their countrymen who perished in the late war.”⁴⁷

Private and church cemeteries had claimed the bodies of many slain Confederates during the war years. The body of executed scout, Sam Davis, for example, was reclaimed by his father

92, NARA.

⁴⁵ “Inspection Report on Cemeteries at Nashville, Tenn.,” by Brevet. Col. C. W. Folsom, 14 September 1867, “Nashville, Tenn., 3 of 5,” Box 50, E. 576, RG 92, NARA. See also the Battle of Nashville Preservation Society’s website feature on the cemetery, URL <http://www.bonps.org/natlcem/natlcem.htm>. (last accessed June 2007). John Randall Neff, “Heroic Eminent Death: The Redefinition of American Nationality in the Commemoration of Abraham Lincoln and the Civil War Soldier Dead,” unpub. Ph.D. diss. (Univ. of Calif., Irvine, 1998), vii.

⁴⁶ This was true of battlefield cemeteries, such as Stones River, but hardly ever the case in cemeteries on land identified since the war, such as Nashville.

⁴⁷ “Our Cherished Dead,” Nashville Union & American, 13 May 1866.

and buried at the back of the family plantation in Rutherford County.⁴⁸ Not all burial places, however, were such a clear choice. After the Battle of Franklin, the bodies of Generals Strahl, Cleburne, Granbury, and Colonel Young were buried in Columbia's Rose Hill Cemetery—a cemetery that, as discussed above, also contained the remains of hundreds of federal soldiers buried during the occasional occupation of that town. For this reason the choice displeased Charles Quintard, the chaplain to the Army of Tennessee (and later Bishop of Tennessee), who made arrangements for the bodies to be removed to St. John's Episcopal Church, a private chapel on the grounds of the late Confederate General (the once Bishop of Louisiana) Leonidas Polk's plantation. Cleburne, one of the slain, had apparently remarked as he passed by the church on his way to Franklin that the church was “such a beautiful spot” it was almost worth dying for.⁴⁹ It was evidently a comfort to some that he got his wish.

Most relatives of the Confederate dead from Franklin, however, did not have the connections to get a spot at St. John's. Thousands of remains lay in trenches or in shallow graves identified, if at all, by wooden markers. By the Spring of 1866, the wooden grave markers were rotting after doing battle with the pitiless winter winds. To save the memory of the fallen from complete effacement, John and Caroline McGavock, the owners of Carnton, a plantation on the Franklin battlefield, developed a private Confederate cemetery on two acres of their land. The McGavocks home had been a Confederate field hospital in the immediate aftermath of the five-hour battle (150 had died there that first night) and it had already been sanctified in Confederate memory by oral reports that four or five (or was it six?) generals had

⁴⁸ Edward John Harcourt, “‘The Boys Will Have to Fight the Battles without Me’: The Making of Sam Davis, ‘Boy Hero of the Confederacy,’” Southern Cultures (Fall 2006): 29-54.

⁴⁹ McDonough, Franklin, 167.

been laid out on the porch after the battle.⁵⁰ As John supervised black workers in the removal of almost 1,500 remains, Caroline carefully recorded the names and regiments of the fallen Confederates.⁵¹ In time, Caroline McGavock's handwritten "Register of the Dead"—recording details of 1,255 known and 225 unknown Confederates from all twelve Confederate states—would become an almost sacred document, treasured lovingly and bequeathed to female descendants. The novelist Robert Hicks demonstrated the power of the McGavock cemetery within regional and national memory with the publication in 2005 of his national bestseller, The Widow of the South, a portrait of Caroline McGavock and a meditation on the meaning of the cemetery.⁵²

Whereas the region's federal cemeteries had collected the dead together without reference to state or rank, the remains in the McGavock Confederate Cemetery were arranged in orderly rows within sections divided by state, (ranging from 424 burial plots for Mississippi, and 230 from Tennessee, to Kentucky's five and two for North Carolina). The effect was that of a representative assembly of the dead, almost as if the representatives of Confederate Congress were meeting in a silent caucus. New headboards of cedar wood were set on each grave, which

⁵⁰ McDonough reports that while evidence confirms that Generals Otto Strahl, Patrick Cleburne, Hiram Granbury were laid out on the lower gallery of the Carnton porch, General John C. Carter was not taken to the McGavock home; he survived the battle but died of wounds at a home further south on the Columbia pike. The body of a sixth general, States Rights Gist, who went down in memory as being laid out at Carnton, was never taken to Carnton. Five Tragic Hours, 160-66

⁵¹ Local blacks, it would appear, did most of the grave-digging for both Union and Confederate cemeteries, an activity that may have prompted some to believe that grave-digging had become a necessary rite of citizenship.

⁵² Robert Hicks, The Widow of the South (Bantam Press, 2005)

lasted until 1890 when the local bivouac of the United Confederate Veterans replaced them with granite markers. In 1867 a relative of one of the deceased raised funds to erect an iron fence to surround the hallowed ground. Carnton remains to this day as a place of pilgrimage for white southerners. It is run by a local historical association and Rachel McGavock's "Book of Dead" is on display for descendants and others to consult.⁵³

SHADES OF GRAY

That the dead had become a constant reference and the object of commemoration even before the war had ended tells us that, as Jay Winter has observed in a different context, "grief and indebtedness, sadness and personal commitment" were the pillars of local memorialization.⁵⁴ But though the process of grief and commemoration were intensely personal experiences, they were also deeply social practices. Moreover, as social acts the art of grieving and commemoration were tied to the political objectives and identity needs of particular social groups.

The Civil War, experienced and distilled through millions of individual bodies and minds, was a profoundly social experience.⁵⁵ None but the wildest guerilla outlaw experienced

⁵³ Helen Potts and Helen Hudgins, McGavock Confederate Cemetery, Franklin, Tennessee (Franklin: Franklin Chapter, #14, United Daughters of the Confederacy, 1989), 1-17; Annie E. Cody, History of the Tennessee Division United Daughters of the Confederacy (Nashville: Cullom & Ghertner Co., n.d.[1946?]), 97-99; TEHC, 125-26, 334-35. The only non-Confederate buried in the cemetery is Marcellus Cuppet, an ex-slave of the McGavock family, who died aged 25 (as his marker notes) "whilst assisting in reintering of the confederate dead."

⁵⁴ Winter, Sites of Memory, 97.

⁵⁵ As Maurice Halbwachs has observed, individual memories of experience—and, we might add, experience itself—are so completely subsumed within frameworks of social memory that the notion of individual memory is an abstraction almost entirely devoid of meaning. Individuals

the war years outside of a social group. From networks of kin and neighborhood groups to regimental companies and contraband camps, all the residents of the Tennessee heartland, whether Federal or Confederate, enslaved or free, male or female, lived through the war as members of social groups. These groups drew upon antebellum connections, but they also grew out of the circumstances of war, providing what Jay Winter terms “adoptive or informal kinship” networks that functioned over time to sustain the impressions of shared experience in social memory. Between 1862 and 1866 the most culturally resilient of these groups provided members with the material resources to survive the war; then, once the war was over, they enabled public expressions of consolation and commemoration. In other words, surviving war-time social networks, together with the networks that emerged at war’s end, enabled individuals to think socially about their war experiences, which enabled them to think historically about the war. Social groups within the Tennessee heartland would provide the critical agencies through which a regional culture of the Civil War would be constantly reproduced and recreated.⁵⁶

Whereas African American and Union constituencies inherited an expanded social and political world in April 1865, Confederate communities felt an acute sense of diminishing

first make sense of their experiences through inherited systems of belief and analysis and then seek to share and recall the meaning of those experiences within a network of overlapping social communities. Memories then are both informed by and speak to the material spaces that social groups occupy. Memories are inherently and irretrievably social. Maurice Halbwachs, On Collective Memory, edited, trans., and intro. by Lewis A. Coser (1941; rpt. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

⁵⁶ On “adoptive or informal kinship” (or “fictive kinship” – the author uses the terms interchangeably), see Winter, Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning, 40, 50. My three-stage notion of social group progression is derived from Winter’s “pathway” of mutual help provided by groups and individuals in the First World War. Winter’s terms are “knowledge, then consolation, then commemoration.” See Ibid., Ch. 2, esp. 29-31. My understanding of the cultural replication and reinvention of memory, or “surrogation,” is derived from Joseph Roach, Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance (New York: Columbia University Press,

expectations. Defeated on the battlefield, occupied at home, and wracked by internal divisions, White social groups turned instinctively toward a conservative political philosophy, drawing upon a strong lineage of antebellum political thinking. The old leadership class, augmented now by a generation of men such as John C. Brown of Giles Co. and Nathan B. Forrest of Bedford Co., generals who had had a “good” war, called for an acceptance of the defeat of secession and of the fact of emancipation. But they expected a quick end to military occupation and a resumption of the old privileges of dominating political, economic, and social life. It was an argument that drew upon deep pools of historical memory and a visceral and emotionally-charged opposition to black freedom. As the *Lincoln County News* argued in February 1866: “While we fully recognize the death of slavery and accord to the black man certain rights and privileges, we yet contend that ours is a white man’s government, so intended by our fathers.”⁵⁷ It was not long before community institutions—churches, political groups, newspapers—picked up the conservative mantra and, in the face of Republican rule, fashioned a surprisingly uniform position in social and political affairs.

Stephen Ash has described the mood of white Middle Tennesseans in 1865 as “a curious amalgam of grief and joy, resignation and hope.”⁵⁸ Many felt genuine sorrow (and perhaps a little shame) at the failure of the Confederate cause, but there was joy at the reunion of families, however hard their early postwar circumstances were. Resigned to federal control, most whites hoped that it would not be long, once their loyalty was proclaimed, before control of society

1996), 2-3. Roach defines surrogation (p.2) as a continual state of cultural affairs that replaces “actual or perceived vacancies . . . in the network of relations that constitutes the social fabric.”

⁵⁷ *Lincoln County News*, February 10, 1866.

⁵⁸ Stephen V. Ash, *Middle Tennessee Society Transformed 1860-1870* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988), 226.

would be theirs' again. A profound sensibility of loss pervaded formerly Confederate communities in the immediate postwar years. Most families were bereaved, some many times over, and all mourned to varying degrees the loss of nationhood and of state autonomy. Even Nimrod Porter, a man of Union sympathies who had attempted to prevent his sons from enlisting in the Confederate army, felt the sense of loss at the coming of "peace of some sort" and predicted that "we will sit down & mourn in Sack Cloathes & ashes for many days, Weeks, Months & years to come."⁵⁹ The harsh reality of defeat caused many to lose themselves in despair and bitterness. "At first I felt as if I could not bear [defeat]," Lucy C. Bailey of Montgomery County wrote to her brother in July 1865, "and it is hard enough now."⁶⁰ When contemplating the fate of crippled Confederate soldiers, one newspaper editor pointed with bitterness to their greater sufferings. "Our failure," he remarked, "places our cripples beyond the pale of assistance by the Federal Government. No Pensions, no bounties, no land grants inure to them. The decrepid [sic] Confederate soldier must rely upon the kindness of friends."⁶¹ Such sentiments allowed the bonds forged by the Confederate experience to persist beyond the failure of the Confederacy itself, united in bitterness against the Unionist victors.

One indicator of the depressed circumstances within Confederate communities is provided by the timing and scale of relief and memorial activities. Though benevolent societies had mustered quickly into action at the opening of hostility in 1861, it took many months for memorial and aid societies to appear after the war's close. A Benevolent Society was established

⁵⁹ Porter, diary, 29 April 1865.

⁶⁰ Lucy C. Bailey to her brother, 7 July 1865, in Lucy Catherine Bailey Papers, TSLA, quoted in Ash, Middle Tennessee Society Transformed, 226.

⁶¹ "Our Confederate Dead," Nashville Union & American December 16, 1865.

in Nashville in early 1866, but this was fully twelve months after the war had concluded in the Western Theater, and as late as July 1866 local papers were comparing the philanthropic actions of Middle Tennesseans unfavorably with those of “the ladies of Missouri.” “It is earnestly desired,” the editor entreated, “that every county in Tennessee should be represented in this benevolent undertaking, and for this end editors throughout the State should notice it in their columns, and urge upon our ladies to co-operate.” By the end of the year, at least in Nashville committees had been appointed – usually in affiliation with churches – and reported raising some twelve thousand dollars for the relief of maimed soldiers and their families throughout the state.⁶² By 27 April 1866 memorial societies were mobilized sufficiently to attend to the graves of Confederate dead, though the strength of these groups does not appear to have been as strong in Nashville as elsewhere in the South.⁶³

Although some mobilized to provide relief to those in greater distress, many more turned to religion to provide a salve for their losses and hurt pride. Since the early days of the “Great Awakening” in the early 19th century, religious culture in the heartland had contained an evangelical flavor. A wave of revivals had taken place in the Army of Tennessee toward the last years of the war, and there is evidence that a revival swept the region in 1865-66. “The religious interest manifested in our city for some time past appears to be constantly deepening,” a Nashville newspaper noted in February 1867, “and at present four of the churches are nightly

⁶² “The City,” Nashville Republican Banner February 24, 1867; Cody, History of the Tennessee Division United Daughters of the Confederacy, 10.

⁶³ “Our Cherished Dead,” Nashville Union and American May 13, 1866. This is the only report on the 27 April memorial activities to appear in the Nashville press; that it occurred more than two weeks after the event suggests that editors were picking up on reports in other regional newspapers. No detail of local activities was given.

crowded with young and old from all quarters.”⁶⁴ Self-chastisement and a search for atonement appear to have been partly behind this. But spiritual communities also seemed to be viewing the war, emancipation, and now Reconstruction as one vast criminal act that had brought an avalanche of impiety and lawlessness – though not, of course, among the truly penitent.⁶⁵

Though religion undoubtedly continued to serve for many as an essential value system, it no longer held the power to comfort and direct lives that it had enjoyed before the war. As Anne C. Rose has argued, the war “recalled religion for support in a time of crisis, but could not restore faith’s former influence.”⁶⁶ Yet religious narratives and precepts persisted and became central to the region’s historical consciousness. The melding of religion and history, as Charles Wilson has argued, created a distinctive civil religion in southern communities.⁶⁷ It was this amalgam of Confederate experience and religious belief that produced a distinctive historical culture for white communities. The political project of Redemption from Reconstruction and the cultural project of sanctifying the Confederate cause and the antebellum past would in time become suffused with religious meaning and imagery.

In the immediate short-term, however, conservatives felt themselves a community under siege. Defeat, disempowerment under Union control, and the vaunting of black civil rights by the war’s victors, coalesced together to form the impression of a continuing conspiracy to subjugate white Southerners. Yankee characterizations of conservative opinions had something

⁶⁴ “Revivals,” Nashville Republican Banner May 23, 1867.

⁶⁵ Ash, Middle Tennessee Society Transformed, 242-44.

⁶⁶ Anne C. Rose, Victorian America and the Civil War (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), ch.1, quotation from p. 19.

⁶⁷ Charles Reagan Wilson, Baptized in Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause, 1865-1920 (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1980).

of a self-fulfilling antagonism, since low estimations of the loyalty and cooperation of former Confederates were bound to exclude conservatives further from power and deepen their sense of siege. In reporting conservative attitudes to the Congressional Committee on Reconstruction, members of the State Central Committee of the Union party of Tennessee (a body consisting mainly of Union army officers) concluded that though “the *designs* of the great secession majority of Tennessee may have been changed by the events of the war . . . their sentiments, sympathies, and passions remain unchanged.” The Union Party petitioners continued:

They welcome peace because they are disabled from making war; they submit because they can no longer resist; they accept results they cannot reject, and profess loyalty because they have a halter around their necks.

In concluding their pessimistic assessment, the petitioners concluded that most Confederates, even those who went into the war reluctantly, “came out the bitterest of rebels.” “It may well be doubted whether the capacity for patriotism is not extinguished in many of them.”⁶⁸

Under the weight of such characterizations, it is not surprising that many former Confederates felt the need to engage in a historical defense of the South, in general, and of their own actions, in particular. As a number of historians have observed, Confederate sympathizers nurtured faith that an “impartial history” would ultimately vindicate the justice and truth of the Lost Cause.⁶⁹ There is some evidence of Middle Tennesseans engaging in these pursuits as early as the late 1860s. For example, one Nashville paper published an advert from a Memphis publisher in June 1866 calling for agents to canvass for Pollard’s The Lost Cause, “the only

⁶⁸U.S. Congress. House. Memorial of Citizens of Tennessee. 39th Cong., 1st sess., 1866. Mis. Doc. No. 55, pp.91-95.

⁶⁹ See, for example, Thomas J. Pressly, Americans Interpret Their Civil War (1954; rpt. New York: The Free Press, 1962), 100-107.

official Southern History of the War. “I want an energetic, influential man or woman in every county and town to canvass for this popular and rapid selling work,” the publisher boasted, promising from \$100-250 a month for successful salesmen. In another incidence, one young Confederate veteran earned a living in the winter 1867-1868 by hawking the subscriptions to the publication Lee and His Generals around the rural counties south of Nashville. Some former Confederate leaders from the region also participated in the Memphis-based Confederate Historical Association, a society of some 200 members by 1869. But these scattered activities lacked any coordination and Nashville would not become a center for Lost Cause history and myth-making for another twenty-five years.⁷⁰

The postwar fortunes of the Tennessee Historical Society gives us some insight into the historical sensibilities of Nashville’s elite in the late 1860s and 1870s. The Society descended from a group of antiquarians that had first organized in 1820 to collect and preserve the artifacts of state history and to supervise published writings of the same. When war came, the Society disbanded and failed to meet, as a report on the interregnum observed, while the “ominous blackness” of war “absorbed every mind.” Much of the Society’s collections were then destroyed or lost during the federal occupation of the State Capitol. After the war, it took almost

⁷⁰ “Agents Wanted,” Nashville Republican Banner 7 June 1866; See Edward John Harcourt, “Who Were the Pale Faces?: New Perspectives on the Tennessee Ku Klux,” Civil War History 51 (March 2005), 23-66; This officer’s association apparently began as early as 1866 but was re-organized under the leadership of Isham G. Harris and Gideon J. Pillow on 15 July 1869. It thus predates the more influential Southern Historical Society, established in Virginia. In the early 1890s the Association became Camp No. 28, Bivouac No. 18, United Confederate Veterans of Tennessee. J. Harvey Mathes, The Old Guard in Gray: Researches in the Annals of the Confederate Historical Association (Memphis: S.C. Toof & Co., 1897), 19-21; Nathaniel Cheairs Hughes & Roy P. Stonesifer, Jr., The Life and Wars of Gideon J. Pillow (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press), 310); Gaines M. Foster, Ghosts of the Confederacy: Defeat, the Lost Cause, and the Emergence of the New South (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 50-52.

nine years for the Society's reorganization, but even at that late hour (March 1874) there was little interest in preserving and recording the State's Confederate past, perhaps because a number of prominent Union citizens were among the membership. When J.G.M. Ramsey, a staunch secessionist from Knoxville and the author of The Annals of Tennessee to the End of the Eighteenth Century (1853) suggested that the reconstituted society might become an "auxilliary [sic] to the Southern Historical Society," the Confederate historical association based in Virginia that was beginning to publish robust defenses of Confederate actions, his proposal was met with a loud silence. In the Society's first meetings after reorganization, discussion focused not on the recent battles of Ft. Donelson, Shiloh, Stones River, or Nashville, but on the Revolutionary-era Battle of King's Mountain. Early commemorative efforts were focused upon the centennial of the Mecklenburg Declaration, which prompted the cultivation of historical ties with North Carolina, ties connecting to the Revolutionary era, not the more recent Confederate past.⁷¹ The place of the Confederate experience in the heartland's historical memory was too sensitive a task for the patricians of the Tennessee Historical Society. This, in truth, partly reflected divisions in political affiliations during the war. But the absence of a Confederate past in the early post-war proceedings of the Society confirmed the death of the Confederate project, a dream that under Union occupation and Republican government would not endure—or at least that is how it seemed in the early post-war months and years.

⁷¹ Harriet Chappell Owsley, "The Tennessee Historical Society: Its Origin, Progress, and Present Condition," THQ 29 (Fall, 1970): 227-242; "The Past and Present Condition of the Society," reprinted in minutes 7 May 1874, Minutes (original) Tennessee Historical Society, 1849-75, THS Office Files 1790-1985, VI-A-3, Box 13, folder 1, TSLA; J. G. M. Ramsey to Anson Nelson, 23 March 1874, reprinted in minutes for March 25, 1874, Minutes (original) Tennessee Historical Society, 1849-75, THS Office Files 1790-1985, VI-A-3, Box 13, folder 1; for a brief biography of Ramsey, author of The Annals of Tennessee to the End of the Eighteenth Century (1853), see TEHC, 774-75.

2. Restoration or Reconstruction?

“The rebels are as rebellious now in this great Middle Division of Tennessee, as they were in 1861, and their papers are more malignant, if possible.”

Governor William G. Brownlow, 19 April, 1866⁷²

“How great the revolution has been. . . . A new order of things has been introduced. . . . But let us not speak unadvisedly. It is true that there is a class of men who cling to the ideas and memories of the past.”

Rev. H. S. Bennett, 5 Feb. 1871⁷³

The war was over. Now another conflict emerged over the meaning and legacy of the military struggle, a struggle that had taken the residents of Middle Tennessee from debates over the contested right of secession to the incontrovertible fact of emancipation. While virtually all wished for peace and a fresh beginning, few grasped the enormity of the tasks ahead—and fewer still appreciated the full weight of the past upon their present circumstances. Though the death of secession and slavery were widely if not uniformly accepted, peace in Middle Tennessee proved illusory as hostilities between armies devolved into personal and political enmities and as the terrible legacies of slavery became ever more apparent. Beneficence, tolerance, forgiveness,

⁷² W. G. Brownlow to J. McKinn, 19 April 1866, Brownell-Bugenhagen Misc. Papers, New York Public Library.

⁷³ “Sermon,” Tennessee Tribune 20 Feb. 1871. The Rev. Bennett’s remarks were delivered at the Fisk University Chapel in Nashville, Tennessee.

and leadership were desperately required to salve the wounds of war and temper the emotions that the conflict had enraged. But the war had disrupted the systems of state power and shattered the traditional forms of authority and dependency upon which the social structure had depended. In such circumstances, the old collective frameworks for social remembering and political action, which had sustained society before the war, were no longer capable of binding people together under the new order. Yet memories of what had gone and what had happened were everywhere and at the core of everyone's identity. The political challenge of Reconstruction was to come up with new frameworks around a sense of accountability and responsibility that would allow a slave society to move forward toward a greater republican future while somehow bringing together the recent pasts and future interests of Freedmen and former slaveholders, Conservatives and Radicals, former Confederate soldiers and occupying Union troops.

Reconstruction, as David Blight has argued, was "one long referendum on the meaning and memory" of the war. But referendums are produced by circumstances where there is no clear political mandate or entrenched authority, and consequently Reconstruction in Tennessee, as elsewhere, was argued in different registers by groups of individuals who marched to different drummers and hummed different tunes. The war had created a class of historically conscious actors—yet there was little harmony in historicized imaginings of future possibilities. The memories which provided the foundation for the identities of different social groups extended deeply into the past. Little wonder, then, that the task of reunification and regeneration was beyond the political leadership of the state – leadership which was quick to ascribe guilt over the war yet severely compromised in its effectiveness to move forward by its inability to feel shame over slavery. Without an overarching framework for a genuine renewal of the social contract, political life became a feast of enraged human emotions that shaped perception, guided action,

and framed political debate in ways that intensified conflict and swamped prospects for a mediated peace, deepening the trauma of war and postponing the work of reform and reconciliation.⁷⁴

Reconstruction in Tennessee was a comparatively truncated and unique affair, running from the appointment of military governor Andrew Johnson in February 1862 to the Conservative electoral triumph of August 1869 and its capstone constitutional convention of January 1870. Between 1862 and 1869 civil life in Tennessee witnessed a sharp and violent contest on a set of questions over the political meaning of the war and the extent of the social revolution it had seemed to produce. Who now constituted ‘the people’ from whom the government claimed consent? What meaning did freedom have for emancipated African Americans? On what terms should former Confederates gain pardon for the ‘sin’ of secession? What constitutional changes should Tennessee make in order to gain readmission to the Union? Each of these questions was being grappled with on a local, regional and national level, and in each arena they involved personal acts of remembering and forgetting. The imperatives of political life provided contemporaries with a means of mapping the complex of personal reflections – yet the harrowing task of reconciling whites to black freedom defied easy solution.

The political battles over Reconstruction in Middle Tennessee defined the region’s memory for many decades to come. Personal acts of remembering the war in future years would, in large part, bear the texture and narratives of the public sphere. In time, Reconstruction would loom even larger than slavery and the war in the region’s historical consciousness. For African

⁷⁴ David W. Blight, Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001), 31. My understanding of memory, accountability and political community has benefited from a reading of W. James Booth’s Communities of Memory: On Witness, Identity, and Justice (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), esp. chapter 2.

Americans, it was a time of promise and achievement that proudly marked the genesis of their emergence as a free people. Writing in the late 1930s, the Fisk University scholar Alrutheus Ambush Taylor would prepare a careful study of the role played by African American actors in the political, social and economic recovery of the State during Reconstruction. Taylor described the work of many government agencies, including the Freedmen's Bureau, in positively supporting and enabling the actions of the former slaves.

By contrast, for white conservatives, once their supremacy was restored, Reconstruction would become a nightmarish melodrama, a caricature of the truth, imposing fears of racial equality and political impotency upon the real circumstances of the 1860s. In preparing a thesis on Reconstruction for the Vanderbilt University historian Frank L. Owsley in the mid-1930s, Weymouth Tyree Jordan felt no obligation to attribute agency to African American actors and concluded that the positive effects of the Freedmen's Bureau "were almost nil in improving the condition of the Tennessee negro." "Most harmfully," he concluded "it further estranged him from the whites." In black memory Reconstruction would leave a legacy of pride and achievement from which the continuing struggle for civil rights would draw precedent in the twentieth century. For most whites, however, the folk memory of Reconstruction became a space in which rage flourished and on which a new culture of segregation could be grounded and justified.⁷⁵

⁷⁵ Alrutheus Ambush Taylor, The Negro in Tennessee, 1865-1880 (1941; reprinted Spartanburg, SC: The Reprint Company, 1974), 14; Weymouth Tyree Jordan, "The Negro in Tennessee during Reconstruction," unpub. M.A. thesis (Vanderbilt University, 1934), 145-46, emphasis in original.

NOT SO NOW

Emancipation had a profound effect upon regional memories of the war. More than the defeat of Confederate nationalism, emancipation was the event for all heartlanders that marked off the post-war world from antebellum realities. The emancipation experiences of many thousands provided a catalyst for the development within social groups of a narrative of liberation and deliverance rooted both in New Testament theology and American nationalism. In the heady days of the early postwar years African Americans throughout the heartland made many occasions on which to sing jubilees and to lay foundations for their versions of the past. Whatever hardships they faced, and however strong the painful legacies of slavery must have been, blacks embraced their new liberties with jubilant enthusiasm, using the new social networks now open to them to stage performances of celebration and commemoration. The first such commemorations appeared on the anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation (January 1) and gradually increased in frequency to include the anniversaries of the ratification of the State amendment abolishing slavery, the ratification of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth amendments, and Independence Day.⁷⁶ Such occasions were informed by an amalgam of religious and political symbolism, fusing narratives of Christian deliverance and a democratic rebirth into powerful and enduring forms of community identity.

But just as much as they celebrated the dawning of a new era in American democracy, African Americans and their allies realized that new struggles were being engaged on two fronts – the need to build up their own communities and institutions, and the need to resist and combat the efforts of conservative whites to control and narrate their course. In waging these battles, blacks made history in the image of their own struggles, and we should see the post-war

commemorative tradition as a cultural off-shoot from the social and political battles of the period. Though there was disagreement and debate within African American circles as to the correct forms of commemoration, their historical vision was more uniform in the early post-war years than it would become later on. Still, noticeable differences emerged even at this early stage between the visions of blacks and the roles prescribed for them by their white allies in the Army, the schools, the Republican Party, and the Freedman's Bureau. These divisions were portentous because the struggle to put liberation at the heart of the war's meaning was critically dependent upon the maintenance of interracial Unionist alliances.⁷⁷

For a brief, shining moment in the Spring and Summer of 1865, however, it seemed as though the stars of the nation's highest ideals, and the fates of the region's long-suffering slaves, were magically aligned. When the abolition of slavery in Tennessee became official on March 20, 1865, the black population swamped downtown Nashville in euphoric celebration. Dressed, as one observer noted, "in their best *go to meetin' clothes*," a grand procession headed by two brass bands from the colored regiments snaked its way through the "principle thorough-fares of the City" in a jubilant walk for freedom.⁷⁸ Though virtually all were free by the time the new

⁷⁶ Taylor, Negro in Tennessee, 1865-1880, 230.

⁷⁷ For other commentary on the post-war African American commemorative tradition, see Kathleen Ann Clark, "History is No Fossil Remains: Race, Gender, and the Politics of Memory in the American South, 1863-1913," unpub. Ph.D. diss. (Yale, 1999), ch. 1; Kathleen Clark, "Celebrating Freedom: Emancipation Day Celebrations and African American Memory in the Early Reconstruction South," in W. Fitzhugh Brundage, eds., Where These Memories Grow: History, Memory, and Southern Identity (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 107-32; W. Fitzhugh Brundage, The Southern Past: A Clash of Race and Memory (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2005), esp. ch. 2; Stephen V. Ash, Middle Tennessee Society Transformed 1860-1870 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988), 192, 209;

⁷⁸ Frank A. Handy Diary, 20 March 1865, SCD; see also Ash, Middle Tennessee Society Transformed, 192.

Republican State Assembly ended slavery by constitutional amendment, such an occasion provided a watershed in the cultural lives of African Americans. The spring of 1865 marked a new era of historical consciousness that marked off what many called “Paul’s Time” from “Isaiah’s Time.”⁷⁹ Black educator, Rev. David Wadkins, caught the momentousness of the hour at an October 1865 celebration of 6,000 freed persons when he described the efforts of a recent State-wide convention of black men: “The time was when a body like that would not have been permitted to meet in this section; it would have been feared they were plotting insurrection. Not so now.”⁸⁰

The celebrations came in waves in the months after the war when it seemed that all dreams were possible. Few of the broadsides and newspapers produced by and for the Freedmen have survived, and we are obliged to turn toward the often hostile and condescending commentary of surviving white sources to gain glimpses of the freedom celebrations. One such observer was Nimrod Porter, a farmer in Maury County opposed to emancipation, who reported in the summer of 1865 “one continual excitement from day to day with the negroes.” Some of the occasions took place on public holidays (July 4) or on dates marking release from bondage (January 1). But almost every week seemed to be a time of joyous celebration. On July 30 Porter reported “a great many Negroes” were at Columbia where they “hung Jeff Davis in ifigie”

⁷⁹ This insight appeared in the Columbia Herald, 29 October 1869, when the editor remarked: “The negroes of this county, when referring to the period of their slavery, call it ‘Paul’s Time’ and when speaking of the present say, ‘Isaiah’s Time.’”

⁸⁰ “Celebration by the Colored People,” Nashville Daily Press & Times 6 October 1865. The Press & Times I believe misidentifies the speaker – it was probably the Rev. Daniel Watkins, a Church of Christ preacher who had bravely run educational establishments for blacks in Nashville for over three decades. For descriptions of his efforts, and in particular his role in educating some of the Fisk Jubilee Singers, see Andrew Ward, Dark Midnight When I Rise: The Story of the Jubilee Singers Who Introduced the World to the Music of Black America (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2000), 5-6, 37-38, 43, 49, 54, 57, 78, 420n.42.

and “had a verry greate to do. Two years later, in 1867, Maury County blacks were still celebrating: on May 10 Porter learned of “a very greate Jubilee . . . (a picknick)” at nearby Spring Hill; just two weeks later, another “picknick” attracted “several thousand blacks.” “There are about 3 days in the week they have a gathering some where,” Porter noted with disapproval.⁸¹

While many of these celebrations, as Porter intimated, were community affairs, serving as a time of social fellowship, it is unlikely that any were devoid of a broader political meaning. The Freedmen’s new nationalism was most evident, of course, on 4th July, a national holiday that they embraced with tremendous enthusiasm and in alliance with their white benefactors and allies. On the first Independence Day of the postwar world, about twenty five hundred freedmen and women congregated at Columbia and participated in a long procession. “To them,” a sympathetic correspondent for a Nashville newspaper noted, “it was truly an occasion of rejoicing, as linking them in a double sense to the cause of freedom.” The patriot liberty claimed in 1776, however, was very much in the background as the procession’s banners claimed the liberty of 1863 as the cause of the celebration. After the speakers and a band, the procession was led by 325 schoolchildren heralded by banners proclaiming “Freedmen’s Schools, instituted May 1, 1865” – “Improvement, Industry, Education,” – and a sign of homage to the Great Emancipator: “We Mourn the loss of Abraham Lincoln, our deliverer, who died a victim to slavery, a martyr to liberty.” Brig. Gen. Clinton B. Fisk, the head of the Freedmen’s Bureau for Kentucky and Tennessee, thanked the assembly for their good order and pledged that under his authority men would be judged by their moral worth and not by the color of their skin. “God

⁸¹ Nimrod Porter diary, 24 August 1865, 30 July 1865, and 10 & 25 May 1867, SHC-UNC.

save the King,” allowed Nimrod Porter sarcastically, who saw little point in making speeches to “the pure & emacalate Ethaopa [sic].”⁸²

Emancipation Day (January 1) established itself in 1866 as the grandest celebration in the Tennessee heartland. A long procession, headed by the colored infantry regiments stationed in Nashville and followed by the various relief and professional associations, marched through the principal streets of downtown, ending up at St. John’s African Methodist Episcopal church. The band of the 15th U.S. Colored Infantry led the way. Included in the procession were theatrical floats depicting scenes of slavery and slave auctions. One dray wagon was loaded with cotton, a reporter noted, and a second with hay. A third contained “a number of black children, over whom presided an auctioneer, beseeching the bystanders to bid high for a choice lot of young negroes, all emblematical of their past condition.” Addresses by colored preachers celebrated the audience’s new freedoms and traced the history of slavery in the U.S. up to the present time.⁸³

Officers of the Freedmen’s Bureau often participated in these early commemorative proceedings, and the Union army and local officials usually offered their permission and protection for the marchers.⁸⁴ Clinton B. Fisk was a regular attendee and stressed the responsibility of citizenship while pledging to uphold the rights of the freedmen. At the 1866 Emancipation Day celebration, one of Fisk’s subordinates “made a feeling address to the audience touching their new status, privileges in the present condition, and their responsibilities

⁸² “The Fourth at Columbia,” Nashville Daily Press & Times 17 July 1865; Porter diary, July 4, 1865.

⁸³ “Grand Celebration,” December 30, 1865, and “The Celebration,” January 1, 1866, Nashville Daily Press & Times.

⁸⁴ An announcement for the 1866 Emancipation Day celebration thanks “General Thomas and the Mayor of the city for their kindness in favoring us with their protection.” “Grand Celebration,” Nashville Daily Press & Times, December 30, 1865.

to themselves and to the country.” Other Union whites also welcomed the occasions, the editor of the Daily Press & Times declaring that, while some would “sneer at such occasions, . . . to us the anniversary and its celebration has a solemn signification, pointing to the day when prejudice shall die out, and to the period when the freedmen will be acknowledged to be men with like passions with us, subject to the same ambitions which animated the hearts of the ancient Britons who once themselves were slaves.”⁸⁵

These sentiments provided the Freedmen with strong alliances, but as the Freedmen’s early political conventions showed, white support was in significant ways a patronage of paternalism and not one that welcomed full participation of African Americans in social and political life. Nonetheless, expressions of Jubilee that were at once proud, boastful, hopeful, and enduring, gave black social memories a distinctive character. While the sorrows of slavery persisted, and although blacks faced considerable hardships and an embittered hostility from many whites, the optimism, ambition, and simple joyousness of what we might term “the emancipation moment” characterized black social memories of the war more than any other feature. Black leaders were determined to take these emotions and, with them, frame and sustain new political possibilities – civil and political equality with whites, authentic black political representation, autonomous social institutions, and freedom from persecution.

Black freedom, the revolutionary consequence of war, promised briefly to become the basis for a genuine regeneration of democracy within the region in 1865 and 1866. Indeed, prospects for the cause of African American freedom seemed propitious in the months after the Battle of Nashville. In their storming of Confederate entrenchments at Shy’s Hill to the south of the city, black soldiers had staked a claim to citizenship and won the plaudits of most Union

⁸⁵ “The Celebration,” Nashville Daily Press & Times, January 1, 1866.

observers. Nashville's black population increased dramatically during the 1860s and developed a cohesive community of its own, including its own newspaper, the Colored Tennessean.⁸⁶ All across the Tennessee heartland black congregations declared their independence from white churches and provided venues for the worshipful celebration of freedom. Schools, founded in some cases by the Freedmen's Bureau or northern missionary philanthropic societies, attracted the enthusiastic patronage of blacks. The emergence of the Republican Party as a governing party in Tennessee during Reconstruction also provided blacks with a powerful political network; Union Leagues and other political organizations worked to mobilize black support for the party's political future. The combined efforts of blacks, the Freedmen's Bureau, the American Missionary Association, and local white patronage, came together most impressively at Fisk Freedmen's School, which opened its doors in January 1866. "The times are not now as they used to be," remarked General Clinton B. Fisk at the school's opening exercises. The crowd cheered thunderously when Fisk, looking out at the young boys playing in the band, remarked that the creators of "such sweet music" were just a short time ago "listening to the notes of the horn of the overseer [but] today, thank God, they blow their own horn."⁸⁷

With slavery dissolved, black freedoms formed the root of all changes in relationships and dependencies requiring negotiation and a new equilibrium. In politics, black freedom provided the new force with which Union authorities could seek to reshape the political landscape of the region. In religious and moral affairs, reformers also saw opportunity to redeem

⁸⁶ Many black communities across Tennessee produced newspapers in the late 1860s – but few remained in print into the 1870s and hardly any editions can be found today in the archives of the region.

⁸⁷ "Opening Exercises of the Fisk Freedmen's School," Nashville Union & American 1 January 1866.

Southern culture of the corrosive effects of slavery. But for that to happen, white supremacy had to be challenged – most of all by whites themselves.

CAUSE TO REGRET

The deeply felt instinct to restore the privileges of white supremacy united white society across the social and political divide. In seeking pardons and compensation from the Federal government for war-time losses, Southern citizens professed their innocence at the charge of persistent disloyalty, while conceding little ground in their defense of past actions. In corporate bodies across the region, former Conservatives staked out a position that was at once accepting of defeat, insistent upon future privileges, and assertive in defense of past actions. At a September 1865 meeting in Columbia, the county seat of Maury, fifty miles south of Nashville, a large assembly met under the joint chairmanship of former U.S. Senator A.O.P. Nicholson and former Confederate General Gideon J. Pillow. In the resolutions passed at the meeting, a fine distinction was drawn between their “acceptance” of the outcome of the war and their “acquiescence” in the abolition of slavery. Other resolutions supported Andrew Johnson’s restoration policy yet called for a more lenient amnesty policy, restoration of the elective franchise, and relief from military law and organizations.⁸⁸

Confederates believed that their laying down of arms was sufficient evidence of their willingness to submit and expected a quick restoration of former privileges. Under the lenient amnesty programs of presidents Lincoln and Johnson, only a few former leading Confederates were excluded and required to petition for a special pardon. Despite the humiliation of

⁸⁸ “Meeting in Maury County” and “The Meeting in Maury [editorial]” Nashville Daily Press and Times 14 September 1865.

submitting humble petitions to Andrew Johnson, the once hated military governor of Nashville, scores of Confederate leaders from the region filed pleas in order to remain at liberty and have their confiscated properties returned. Both Senator Nicholson and General Pillow had received general pardons by the time they came to chair the Maury Co. meeting.

In petitions to Lincoln and Johnson, Senator Nicholson (who unlike Johnson, Tennessee's other U.S. senator in 1861, had resigned his seat) stated that he was initially opposed to the secession of the states and saw himself as a victim of the revolution of 1861. He explained his resignation from the U.S. Senate owing to his "believing in the sovereignty of the States" and "in the right of peaceable revolution by the people of a State." Although Nicholson had "acquiesce[d] cheerfully," as he had written in 1861 to Gov. Isham G. Harris, in the decision of the June 1861 referendum "which dissolves our political connection with the Government of the United States," he wanted Lincoln and Johnson to understand that he never resigned his Senate seat "for the purpose of aiding or promoting the alleged rebellion" but "in obedience" to what he regarded as a "legitimate exercise" of a "sovereign power." After Tennessee's secession, finding himself unable to go along with the "more ultra portion of Southern leaders," Nicholson explained that he had retired from public life and left "the responsibility of the revolution to those who had undertaken on both sides to control and manage it."

This was an astonishingly passive reading of the recent past by a former U.S. Senator. Others, Senator Andrew Johnson amongst them, would have pointed out that Senator Nicholson had proactively resigned his post rather than stand by the nation in its hour of peril – and yet Johnson would have seen this as an act merely of political misjudgment. Neither of Tennessee's sitting U.S. Senators at the time the war began believed that slavery had been wrong; their disagreement was a tactical and not a moral one. Feeling no shame about slavery (nor sensing

any need to affect shamefulness in correspondence with Andrew Johnson), former Senator Nicholson, as a consequence of his playing no part in the political life of the Confederacy, furthermore felt no need to “admit any guilt[,] nor does he feel conscious of having committed any act which could be tortured into the crime of conspiracy”—a charge upon which he was indicted on 16 April 1865.⁸⁹

General Pillow’s position was trickier, since he had led forces in combat and had finished the war as Confederate prisons commissioner – and treason, which was how Johnson judged this behavior, was something to be shameful about. But Pillow, a distinguished U.S. veteran of the war with Mexico, was a well-connected man, and at war’s end he visited Nashville and secured the influence of powerful friends in the military (including Union Gen. George H. Thomas) to support his petition of clemency. Pillow’s considerable wealth had been destroyed by the war, and he used this to good effect in asking whether this was “not enough suffering and punishment for one error?”⁹⁰ His error, Pillow freely confessed, was that after clinging to the Union, “and exercis[ing] all my influence to hold it together as long as there was hope of a peaceful adjustment,” he then chose to support the Confederacy, but “not until *war actually existed*.” “How deeply I have had cause to regret the course, I then felt it my duty to pursue,” he conceded. In sending Pillow’s petition to Washington for Andrew Johnson’s attention, Tennessee governor William G. Brownlow completed the General’s humiliation with the following endorsement: “I

⁸⁹ A.O.P. Nicholson to Isham G. Harris, June 24, 1861, “Some Tennessee Letters, 1849 to 1864,” ed. Joseph H. Parks, *THQ* 4 (1945), 253-54; Case of A.O.P. Nicholson, Case Files of Applications from Former Confederates for Presidential Pardons (“Amnesty Papers”), 1865-1867, Group I: Pardon Applications Submitted by Persons From the South, Roll 50 (Tennessee), NARA.

⁹⁰ Pillow lost investments in all 81 of his slaves and saw his assets drop between 1860 and 1870 from almost half a million dollars to little more than \$30,000. Ash, *Middle Tennessee Society Transformed*, 188, 160–161; Maury County, Tennessee, County Tax Records, 1870, TSLA.

never thought him a bad or cruel man, but a vain and ambitious man. Being intensely Southern, and a large slave owner, he was influenced to [enter] into the rebellion, as I believe, against his judgment.” By extension, then, Pillow’s support of slavery’s protection and expansion was neither bad nor cruel but merely vain and ambitious. In neither case, Johnson judged, was there cause for shame or accountability. Johnson pardoned his old enemy (Pillow) on August 28, 1865, after which Pillow set out restoring his economic fortunes (unsuccessfully).⁹¹

General Pillow’s apology, driven by self-interest, was less careful than Senator Nicholson’s legal defense of past actions and was precisely the kind of repentance that Union victors wanted to hear. Over time Nicholson’s defense would gain currency as a narrative by which former Confederates would seek to justify their actions during the war. By contrast, Pillow’s apology (which at the time was itself more than a little disingenuous) would be seen as a confession-under-duress and exactly the type of narrative capitulation to avoid. A third explanatory narrative for past actions emerged in the months immediately following the conclusion of the war. This was the narrative of the dutiful Confederate soldier, which in time would become the most common narrative of all. Few soldiers found the time or felt the inclination to record their memoirs as early as 1866, but twenty-two-year-old James L. Cooper, a returning Confederate veteran, was the exception. This young veteran of the 20th Tennessee Infantry, aware of the momentous experiences through which he had passed, attempted to record his experiences without delay, knowing “the failings of my memory, and aware of the fact that it will not improve as age comes on.” Like Senator Nicholson, Private Cooper portrayed himself

⁹¹ Hughes & Stonesifer, Life and Wars of Gideon J. Pillow, 300-302; Case of Gideon J. Pillow, Case Files of Applications from Former Confederates for Presidential Pardons (“Amnesty Papers”), 1865-1867, Group I: Pardon Applications Submitted by Persons From the South, Roll 50 (Tennessee), NARA.

as a man very much controlled by events. He was in a “feverish anxiety” to enlist in 1861 “for fear the fighting would all be over before I got into it.” But, unlike the Senator, Cooper swore that “were I asked to explain the reason for going into the army I do not know that I could do it.”

He continued:

I had not much idea of patriotism. I was a mere boy, and carried away by boyish enthusiasm. I . . . felt that I should be disgraced if I remained at home, which other boys no older than myself were out fighting for the south. That word south was very dear to me, and there was a feeling of pride that I could claim a home in the south. I did not love the North and after I had been in the army for a while every other feeling was lost in hatred to the Yankees and desire to be free from them.

Cooper’s frank assessment of his motivations say much about the shallow depth of Confederate patriotism, his actions being more the result of sectional chauvinism and masculine pride than a political attachment to the Confederate cause. Thus Cooper, we should not be surprised, welcomed the “liberty to go home, once more.” “I am afraid if the truth were known,” he offered candidly, “that we were not as sorry as we should have been. The feeling of relief was so great that for a time all else was forgotten in the satisfaction.”⁹²

We can see the roots of a white Confederate civil war memory in the early postwar narratives provided by Senator Nicholson’s constitutional defense, General Pillow’s unreserved capitulation, and Private Cooper’s sentiments from the bivouac. Over time, Cooper’s sentiments would become attached to Nicholson’s defense in a robust and reasoned argument for the constitutionality of secession, the honor of Confederate service, and the need to avoid shame or apology in explaining past actions. Pillow’s defense would find few adherents and would

⁹² James L. Cooper 1844-1924, Civil War experiences (1866), MfFilm 517, Heard Library, Vanderbilt University. A typescript of this memoir is among the Civil War Collection, box 12, “Memoirs,” folder 11, TSLA.

become the defense most feared by ex-Confederate soldiers and statesman alike that cared for their reputations and honor.

LET US RESTORE

The time for a historical defense of the Confederacy, however, lay in the future. The most immediate challenges for Confederates lay in the present as they sought to restore their farms to prosperity and to tackle the political issues of the day. A key question in Tennessee, as across the nation, concerned the willingness of Southern white society to accept political change as part of the war's myriad consequences. Northerner Whitelaw Reid believed that "The simple truth is they [the Confederates] stand ready to claim everything, if permitted, and to accept anything, if required."⁹³ This view, one of the cardinal beliefs of the Radical Republicans in Congress, is one which also instructed the Republican efforts in the political resettlement of Tennessee. Tough action was required to assure that the State gained readmission to the Union, to punish appropriately the supporters of secession, and to ensure that the old order did not return. The defeated supporters of the Confederacy, it was believed, would take their punishment like men and accept political disqualification for a number of years. It was a fatal miscalculation, especially once the Republicans realized that they would need the electoral support of the Freedmen in order to remain in power.

But the administration of William G. Brownlow, a vitriolic opponent of secession who believed that Confederates were traitors who should be punished, kept African American actors outside his tent. Although brave and progressive souls rallied to Brownlow's side, the governor's *revanchism* and racism essentially drained what little opportunity there was for a

progressive regeneration of political society in Middle Tennessee after the war. Lincoln's eloquent invocation of the "mystic chords of memory" in the Second Inaugural Address had pointed toward the possibilities of building a new political settlement, as envisioned in his remarks at Gettysburg, on the twin basis of the country's revolutionary heritage and equal rights.⁹⁴ Tennessee, however, had few politicians of Lincoln's stature. For a brief time both Andrew Johnson and William G. Brownlow, the outgoing and incoming governors of Tennessee in 1865, both appeared to be recognizing the implications of emancipation. But eventually their long-standing enmity toward black civil and political rights undermined the achievements that had potentially been won. African American leaders in Tennessee pressed early and hard for full inclusion in the new political settlement. But quickly they were disappointed in their quest as their Union allies, while supporting the extension of civil rights to blacks, proved unwilling partners for a truly interracial politics and antagonized white conservatives with their vitriolic denunciations of those who had supported the Confederate cause during the 1860s. Conservatives, moreover, drew upon the deeply racialized culture of the region to curtail freedom for blacks and produce new forms of subjugation.

Lincoln had understood that the overarching challenge of Reconstruction was to restore and reinvigorate the collective frameworks of regional and national remembering, but it was left to others to fashion a politics on the ground that would regenerate American democracy. To

⁹³ Quoted in Blight, Race and Reunion, 44.

⁹⁴ No modern scholar believes that Lincoln, had he lived, would have pushed for reparations from the South and a redistribution of wealth to account for the injustices of slavery, as some of the more radical members of his party believed to be necessary. Nonetheless, the genius of Lincoln's leadership in the final months of the conflict was to suggest that supporters of slavery and the Confederacy could have forgiveness and restitution of former privileges while at the same time suggesting that the Freedmen could enjoy all the rights of republican liberty.

advance and secure freedom at the heart of a post-war settlement, black leaders needed a sustained and equitable alliance with Union and Republican authorities; they also required cooperation and understanding from former slaveholders, the group that claimed truly to love and understand them. Few whites, however, rushed to the new standard with the commitment and dedication required. Many worked actively to delimit and dethrone the freedoms that blacks gained as a consequence of the war. “It is a melancholy fact,” General Clinton B. Fisk, the regional head of the Freedmen’s Bureau, noted in early 1866, “that among the bitterest opponents of the Negro in Tennessee are the intensely radical loyalists of the mountain district—the men who have been in our armies.”⁹⁵ The old antebellum order was a past that all whites shared, and in prosecuting the advantage in the early postwar years the white Republicans of Middle Tennessee realized that the antebellum heritage of white supremacy which they shared in common with conservative whites provided a surer foundation upon which to build the new order than the heritage of emancipation.

Andrew Johnson’s leadership, as military governor since 1862, had created a difficult legacy for his Republican successors. Johnson, a stubborn and vain man whose main political instinct was a hatred of the entrenched aristocracy, had labored under a number of handicaps as war-time governor. First, he had no clear division of authority with federal army commanders and constantly warred with his generals over policy and procedure. In 1864, against the advice of military commanders, he had attempted to restore county administrations, an effort that ended in dismal failure but foreshadowed his later attitude toward local government as President. Moreover, Johnson inherited a fragile Union coalition of old-time Whigs distrustful of the

⁹⁵ Fisk, quoted in W.E. Burghardt Du Bois, Black Reconstruction in America: An Essay Toward a History of the Part Which Black Folk Played in the Attempt to Reconstruct Democracy in

leadership of an Eastern Tennessee Democrat. He also alienated moderates in Nashville by his penchant for locking up ministers and other community leaders who refused to recite oaths of loyalty to the Union and to him personally as governor. Since Johnson believed, like Lincoln to some extent, that the citizens of the Border States were essentially loyal in their sympathies and had been bamboozled into supporting the Confederacy by a secessionist clique, he underestimated the task ahead. Johnson's wartime governorship was not without its successes—after all Union forces never lost their grip upon Nashville—and in 1864 it looked for a moment as if he were bidding to become the former slaves' friend and champion. But his attitude toward the Freedmen was patronizing and paternalistic in the extreme and his support for black freedom was contingent upon it being a necessary and effective war measure and did not originate in a conception of individual liberty. Both Johnson's policy and style did not help develop robust frameworks for a Union-Emancipationist understanding of the war to flourish.

The problems of Johnson's governorship were compounded under the administration of William G. Brownlow, the firebrand Methodist preacher and newspaper editor from East Tennessee whom Johnson appointed to office in the spring of 1865. Brownlow had made a national reputation for himself during the war with diatribes against the Confederacy that entertained Northerners as much as they enraged Southerners. Shot at, beaten and imprisoned by his enemies in East Tennessee, Brownlow hardly brought a sentiment of peaceful reconciliation to the job; indeed, many contemporaries charged him with a vindictiveness ill-suited to the moment. His pronouncements as Governor threw kindling wood on the simmering fires of resentment and anger amongst the Confederate community. Moreover, while he was no supporter of racial equality, in aligning himself with the Radical Republicans in Washington

America, 1860-1880 (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1935), 144.

D.C. while simultaneously excluding Tennessee blacks from full participation in political life, Brownlow stretched to the breaking point the fragile coalition of Unionists seeking to take Tennessee forward from its slave and Confederate past.

It was under the leadership of first Johnson and then Brownlow, however, that Tennessee democracy was restored and many of the central issues of Reconstruction tackled. Johnson's proclamation, on 26 January 1865, calling for the holding of elections and for the readmission of the state to the Union, gave confirmation (if any were needed) of his conservative credentials. "By united action," he proclaimed, let us "restore the State to its ancient moorings again." This would require, to be sure, ratification of the 13th amendment abolishing slavery, but Johnson also believed that Tennessee should "remove the disturbing element from your midst". This cryptic reference to the expulsion of blacks was carefully concealed, but elsewhere Johnson was more candid: "I hope the negro," he said in a speech before a Union assembly in the Tennessee House of Representatives in early 1865, "will be transferred to Mexico, or some other country congenial to his nature, where there is not that difference in class or distinction, in reference to blood or color." Brownlow concurred with his fellow East Tennessean on at least this point and as governor had the temerity, in his inaugural message, to the reformed Assembly on 6 April 1865 to, on the one hand, castigate secession for its "bigoted, murderous, and intolerant spirit" while declaring "that it is certainly proper and right for the legislature of Tennessee to determine to what extent this State shall be overrun with the emancipated." "I am, myself," he continued, "the advocate of providing for them a separate and appropriate amount of territory, and settle them down permanently, as a nation of freedmen." Both Johnson and Brownlow were expressing racist sentiments that a former Confederate newspaper editor put more cogently: in exercising political rights, black Tennesseans constitute "an antagonistic element in our midst that sooner or

later will grow into a bloody conflict between the races, and the fate of the Indians will assuredly be theirs.”⁹⁶

AN UNEASY ALLIANCE

Not all Republicans were racist, however, and fewer still were outsiders. Unlike those in most other former Confederate states, Tennessee’s Republicans were largely home-grown men with a Whig political past and an essentially benevolent, if patrician, view of black civil rights. Typical of this political type was Samuel M. Arnell of Maury County. A native of Middle Tennessee and a slave owner before the war, Arnell had entered political life in 1861 as a principled opponent of secession. Reaching into his family’s past, he had felt compelled to denounce the Confederacy as treason “because my ancestors had given their blood for the Country.” He suffered persecution, as many Unionists did, in the latter years of the war, and was forced to flee his home in the face of Hood’s 1864 invasion.⁹⁷ As a member of the Brownlow Assembly in 1865 (and subsequently a Representative in the 39th Congress) Arnell authored the franchise acts which excluded former Confederates from voting. Looking back upon these events 40 years later,

⁹⁶ “Governor’s Proclamation” (Johnson, 8-9) and “Governor’s Message” (Brownlow, 13-16) in U.S. Congress. House. Admission of Tennessee, 39th Cong., 1867 Mis. Doc. no. 55; Lincoln Co. News, July 20, 1867,.

⁹⁷ The Arnell home was sacked on the order of a Confederate officer, an act which created such bitterness in his wife that thirty years later she wrote a 33 page remembrance of it. Cornelia Churchwell Arnell, “A Union Woman’s Remembrance of Hood’s Raid?” Samuel Mayes Arnell Collection, Special Collections, University of Tennessee Knoxville, ox 1, folder 9. Arnell’s 1866 biographical statement can be found in Phillip A Egelston and Ronald W. Fisher, Jr., “The Charles Lanman Collection of Tennessee Autobiographies,” The Journal of East Tennessee History 65 (1993): 72-74. See also Kathleen R. Zebley, “Unconditional Unionist: Samuel Mayes Arnell and Reconstruction in Tennessee,” in Carroll Van West, ed., Tennessee History: The Land, the People, and the Culture (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1998): 180-200.

Arnell believed that it was “an absolutely just demand” to require that the State government be reconstituted and readmitted to the Union by “loyal men alone.” The Brownlow regime, he argued, “disfranchised nobody; secession had brought [that] about.” The policy adopted by the Radicals in Nashville was “liberal almost to weakness, free of hate, with a stern face only to the leaders of the Rebellion.”⁹⁸

With men like Arnell coming into power in the winter and spring of 1865-66, it seemed that all was possible. When Tennessee’s new civil government arrived at the State Capitol on 5 April 1865, the white delegates found that the building presented a huge banner bearing depictions of black soldiers and schoolchildren and quotations from the Founding Fathers.⁹⁹ The Revolutions of 1776 and 1863 were here briefly co-joined at the citadel of state power, eclipsing temporarily the state’s long slave past and deeply racialized culture. A few months earlier, at a State constitutional convention, white Republicans had declared that slavery and involuntary servitude were ‘forever abolished’ and prohibited throughout the state; further, the legislature was forbidden from making any law “recognizing the right of property in man.” The convention also cleansed the State of its past association with Confederate secession, judging the 1861 declaration of secession “an act of treason and usurpation, unconstitutional, null, and void.” The convention also, in effect, erased time by declaring that no statute of limitations operated during the Confederate era.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Arnell, “The Fighting Parson,” unpub. (c.1892), 284-86, Arnell Collection.

⁹⁹ Cincinnati Gazette 6 April 1865, quoted in John Cimprich, Slavery’s End in Tennessee, 1861-1865 (University, Ala.: University of Alabama Press, 1985), 118.

¹⁰⁰ See Admission of Tennessee, 6-8.

But the Freedmen and the new political class of white Republicans sat in an uneasy alliance. The Union's emancipation policy had critically divided Tennessee Unionists, revealing serious fissures in the alliance. At the most fundamental level, the Unionist divisions on emancipation revealed a critical distinction between blacks and most whites about the sources and purposes of emancipation. Most Blacks viewed their war-time liberation within the context of a divinely inspired liberal nationalism. The words of Julia Ward Howe's "Battle Hymn of the Republic" illustrated that some whites shared this ideology. But, while it remained a good campaign song, fewer and fewer Republicans subscribed to its ideological tenets in the post-war years. Most Tennessee Republicans, particularly those from East Tennessee but also most Northern officers in the U.S. army, viewed the Emancipation Proclamation as a pragmatic war measure. While they had no desire to overturn the result of the war, few white Republicans saw any reason to think that white rule was now compromised by a need for a political accommodation with the Freedmen.

The ominous dislocation of the Republican alliance emerged shortly after Andrew Johnson's departure for Washington D.C. in February 1865, when a white-dominated constitutional convention, under William G. Brownlow's leadership, short-changed the Freedmen's expectations. The Brownlow convention certified emancipation and effected a rapid readmission of Tennessee back into the Union. African American leaders appealed to the mythical memory of a more racially tolerant time and the fact that freed blacks had enjoyed the franchise in Tennessee until 1834. But their entreaties were ignored, and blacks were initially excluded from the makeshift political sentiment. The Brownlow Convention set in place the uneasy and fractured coalition that was unable to sustain a Republican government in the long term.

The new regime would be consolidated in large part by its ability to pass judgment on the Confederate past. Neither Johnson nor Brownlow were sparing in this regard. “We have been, in Tennessee, torn asunder by civil war,” Johnson observed in January 1865, “and all our public and private interests broken down, and the folly of the rebellion has surely been sufficiently demonstrated to admonish all classes that they can no longer live in hostility to the national government.” Brownlow, as was expected, went further, and in a message reported in full in the newspapers and in a printing of ten thousand copies, the new Governor called secession “an abomination that I cannot too strongly condemn, and one that you cannot legislate against with too much severity.” The Confederacy had brought ruin to the state, he argued, and all its works must be buried forever and its leaders and supporters appropriately chastised.¹⁰¹ “Clemency at the sacrifice of justice,” Brownlow warned his East Tennessee readers in May 1865, “is the abandonment of government. . . . They who are guilty of [treason] have forfeited all rights to citizenship and to life itself.”¹⁰² While trashing the past four years, however, the architects of the new order were unwilling to embrace the radical prospects of the future. Both Johnson and Brownlow, for all their differences, saw racial integration as incompatible with reunion. Black Tennesseans had high hopes of inclusion in the political process in 1865, and Nashville’s African American elite pressed early, and sometimes in powerful alliance with northern and Union agencies, for full civil and political rights. Perhaps naively, Nashville’s black leaders trusted

¹⁰¹ “Governor’s Proclamation” (Johnson, 9) and “Governor’s Message” (Brownlow, 13-14) Admission of Tennessee; see also Thomas B. Alexander, Political Reconstruction in Tennessee (1950; rpt. New York, 1968), 71-72.

¹⁰² Proclamation issued 30 May 1865, quoted in Alexander, Political Reconstruction in Tennessee, 59-61.

Andrew Johnson and lamented his departure from the city, presenting him with a gold watch valued at \$350 for “his untiring energy in the cause of freedom.”¹⁰³

Black men in rural communities were also keen to act collectively in pursuit of their common interests. For example, in 1865, shortly after Congress established the Freedmen’s Bureau, over one thousand freedmen from Lincoln County petitioned for a local man who had proven himself sympathetic to their needs to be appointed county agent.¹⁰⁴ Blacks further argued that the war-time service of soldiers in the U.S.C.T. regiments qualified them both for the franchise and equal civil rights with men. In petitioning the State constitutional convention in January 1865 to “complete the work begun by the Federal government during the war,” leading African Americans in Nashville called for the franchise and equal civil rights in the courts. “Will you declare in your revised constitution that a pardoned traitor may appear in court and his testimony be heard, but that no colored loyalist shall be believed even upon oath?”¹⁰⁵ The fifty nine petitioners reminded the delegates that free blacks had voted prior to 1834 in Tennessee and that Andrew Jackson had once sought black votes. At the heart of this petition was an understanding that the war required a new settlement that, while revolutionary, nonetheless had

¹⁰³ See Nashville Times and True Union, 18 January & 25 February 1865.

¹⁰⁴ Local whites eventually blocked the nomination, but this example is nonetheless evidence of local blacks using a broad Union network to press their cause. See my article “The Whipping of Richard Moore: Reading Emotion in Reconstruction America,” Journal of Social History 36 no. 2 (Winter 2002), 263.

¹⁰⁵ Taylor, Negro in Tennessee, 2.

antecedents in the regional and national past. If Andrew Jackson once stumped for the free black vote, why not Andrew Johnson and William G. Brownlow?¹⁰⁶

The appeals were repeated in the Spring at the first session of the new Assembly. But both the convention and the legislature, however, failed to deliver – and one has to wonder whether Andrew Johnson gave his gold watch so much as a glance once he had reached Washington D.C. While the ratification of the 13th amendment was easily approved, the predominant concern in the legislature was not with the enlargement of freedoms but with their curtailment. A bill “in relation to free persons of color” severely curtailed black liberty and raised national uproar when it passed the House by a vote of 38-18. The measure foreshadowed the infamous Black Codes which would shortly come in other former Confederate states. It provided that contracts between whites and blacks were illegitimate unless witnessed by a white person; it denied the right for blacks to testify in court against whites; and ominously suggested that black prisoners could, at the discretion of the courts, be bonded to work for white men. The Bill also called for blacks to register with county clerks and to pay 25 cents each for identification certificates. In assessing this lamentable development Harper’s Weekly concluded that the actions of a Unionist body in Tennessee showed “that the spirit of slavery does exist.” The New York Times, however, a supporter of Andrew Johnson, endorsed the proposed measure calling it a model for the future.¹⁰⁷

The Tennessee Black Codes never became law; the measures were defeated by a filibuster in the State Senate. Pressure for civil and political rights from the Freedmen would

¹⁰⁶ William Gillespie McBride, “Blacks and the Race Issue in Tennessee Politics, 1865-1876,” unpub. PhD. diss. (Vanderbilt University, 1989), 27-28; Taylor, Negro in Tennessee, 6; Nashville Times and True Union 4 January 1865.

¹⁰⁷ Harper’s Weekly 10 June 1865; New York Times 3, 6 & 9 June 1865.

quickly play in to the political self-interest of the Tennessee Republicans. Required by Congressional Republicans to ratify the 14th amendment, granting African Americans civil rights and equality under the law, the Tennessee Republicans, intent on the perpetual disfranchisement of former Confederates, quickly came to recognize their dependency upon the African American vote. In the midst of a bruising debate, Brownlow had assured his supporters that the ratification of the 14th amendment in 1866 did not mean black enfranchisement, which, he said, did not “suit my natural prejudices of caste.”¹⁰⁸ But by 1867 he was forced to change course and black men were enfranchised in February 1867. That this was initially more an act of political expediency than racial egalitarianism was made clear by the explicit denial to blacks in the franchise bill of the privileges of sitting on juries and holding public office (though petitions from Freedmen got these restrictions lifted in 1868).¹⁰⁹ Once black males were enfranchised, Union League organizers coordinated the political participation of freedmen, giving Brownlow an emphatic reelection victory in August 1867, the first election in which freedmen voted.¹¹⁰

The extraordinary sight of former slaves walking to the polling station past their former owners who could not vote was one that Samuel Arnell would never forget. Almost forty years later he recalled how “one old negro above seventy years of age, with a cotton hoe on his

¹⁰⁸ William Ganaway Brownlow, message to General Assembly of October 2, 1865—May 28, 1866, reprinted in House and Senate Journals (Nashville, 1866), 11.

¹⁰⁹ Thomas B. Alexander, “Political Reconstruction in Tennessee, 1865-1870” in Richard O. Curry, ed., Radicalism, Racism, and Party Realignment: The Border States During Reconstruction (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1969), 57; Paul H. Bergeron, Stephen V. Ash, and Jeanette Keith, Tennesseans and Their History (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1999), 165-172.

¹¹⁰ The Republican Party in Tennessee did not need black votes to win the governor’s election of 1867 but was in jeopardy of losing its majorities in the Assembly without the support of blacks. Alexander, Political Reconstruction in Tennessee, 141-162.

shoulder—badge of his employment and former slavery—as he voted, reverently bowed his knees and said; ‘Thank God, I have voted the ticket I wanted to vote.’” Recalling the scene in the 1890s, at a time when most Tennessee blacks found it impossible to vote, Arnell recalled the “memorable” day on which “a civil revolution had taken place that would never be effaced—the chattel had become a human creature. Chief Justice Taney [author of the infamous 1857 Dred Scott decision] had been reversed, the negro at last had some rights the white man was bound to respect.”¹¹¹

Despite Arnell’s proud remembrance, however, the truth was that the Brownlow government was playing cruelly with the expectations of the freedmen—talking up their rights when they needed to please their allies in Washington D.C., extending voting privileges to blacks when it suited party interest, but denying full participation in the political process. Not a single African American sat in the Tennessee Assembly during the state’s aborted reconstruction. Despite this, however, in the eyes of its political opponents the Brownlow regime appeared to depend upon the black vote and consequently lacked any legitimacy in the eyes of the majority of whites outside of the Republican stronghold of East Tennessee.

KU KLUX COME

The majority of whites in Middle Tennessee who were arraigned against the Republicans were united by racism, to be sure, but also by a desire to forgive and forget the Confederate escapade and settle back into the old ways. This in 1866 was the view of the largely disfranchised, since, under a revised franchise law of April 1866, it had become increasingly difficult for Conservative whites to prove their wartime loyalty and get a certificate of registration to vote from Brownlow-appointed election commissioners. Under this measure, any individual who had

¹¹¹ Arnell, “The Southern Unionist” 318-319.

voluntarily fought against the United States was permanently disfranchised.¹¹² The franchise restrictions enraged those now disqualified from voting. One Nashvillian termed the restriction “unjust, oppressive, [and] humiliating to a large portion of our Citizens, who, after the termination of the unhappy and terrible war, in good faith and the deepest sincerity, returned to perform their duty in upholding and sustaining the Government.”¹¹³ Under these circumstances, with freedmen boldly exercising their new freedoms to vote, to move about at will and to sell their labor at competitive rates, the racist attitudes of many whites (who had failed in their efforts to court the black vote in the 1867 state elections) hardened and emerged in new forms of subjugation: the physical chastisement of political opponents, threats against the liberty of African Americans, and sometimes outright murder.

Paramilitary groups, the most famous of which—the Pulaski Ku Klux Klan—gave birth to the term Kukluxism, began to spread to many county towns after the 1867 elections. Gangs of white men had been chastising Freedmen since before the conclusion of the war. But now their activities would gain a sharp political significance. The Nashville Republican Banner made this clear on 4 January 1868, in an editorial calling for a revolutionary movement to unseat Republican rule and restore the racial subjugation of the region’s blacks. “In this State,” the paper argued,

reconstruction has perfected itself and done its worst. It has organized a government which is as complete a close corporation as may be found, it has placed the black man over the white as the agent and prime-move of domination; it has constructed a system of machinery by which all free guarantees, privileges and opportunities are removed from

¹¹² Alexander, Political Reconstruction in Tennessee, 98-112.

¹¹³ Thomas J. Smiley to William B. Campbell, Jan. 30, 1867, Duke-Campbell Correspondence, Box 37, SCD.

the people. . . . The impossibility of casting a free vote in Tennessee short of a revolutionary movement . . . is an undoubted fact.

The Banner in conclusion urged readers to avoid national political contests in the presidential election year of 1868 and instead put energies into building “a local movement here at home” that would end Republican rule.¹¹⁴ The bodies of African Americans would be the new battleground upon which whites would contest the political future of the state.

African Americans would never forget the horrors perpetuated by the Ku Klux. Terror and violence, whether organized or random, was part of the political experience of emancipated African Americans in the 1860s. As David Blight has pointed out, “many ex-slaves remembered the Ku Klux Klan as part of a continuum from former slave patrols to lynchings to numerous forms of vigilante violence in the South well into the twentieth century.”¹¹⁵ The Ku Klux ensured that fear would also be associated with memories of first freedoms. “Didn’t see any Ku Klux Klan,” Naisy Reece, born in 1857 a slave in Williamson County, told oral historians in the 1930s, “but I always got scared and hid when we’d hear they were coming.”¹¹⁶ Another woman recalled less fortunate circumstances: “Ku Klux came to our house and took my papa off with them. I recollect all about it,” she told interviewers nearly seventy years later. “My papa died with knots on his neck where they hung him up with ropes. It hurt him all his life after that.”¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴ “Shall We Organize?” Nashville Republican Banner, 4 Jan. 1868. For a detailed account of the origins of the Ku Klux, see Edward John Harcourt, “Who Were the Pale Faces? New Perspectives on the Tennessee Ku Klux,” Civil War History 51 (March 2005): 23-66.

¹¹⁵ Blight, Race and Reunion, 108.

¹¹⁶ George P. Rawick, ed., The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography (19 vols; Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1972), vol. 16t Tennessee narratives, 64.

¹¹⁷ Rawick, The American Slave, vol. 08a Arkansas narratives, 338.

As late as the 1980s a sound recording of voices from an African American community north of Nashville caught stories such as “Ku Klux Come to the Hickman House” and “Ku Klux Come to Aunt Nelley Smith’s”, narratives that recalled the dangers of Reconstruction with valiant accounts of black self-defense.¹¹⁸

The turn toward violence was, in retrospect, an inexorable move for conservatives seeking to fix new social and political relationships in a way which provided continuity with the remembered past of slavery. Some Ku Klux would actually affect an appearance of the Confederate dead. The initiation ritual of one Ku Klux group, the Pale Faces of Maury County, made this connection clear: “A large tent [or bivouac] was in the hall room,” one veteran recalled in the early twentieth century, “and a sentinel paced to and fro; near by was a gallows, and before the initiate was to be hanged there was a terrible scuffling and firing of pistols.”¹¹⁹ The ritual required that all initiates, some too young to have seen the war firsthand, test their mettle against the veterans in order to become the representatives, as Ku Klux, of the living dead of the Confederacy. Performances of death were not unusual within male fraternal orders, which often required new initiates to be ‘re-born’ into the fraternity. But given the very real culture of death that pervaded Confederate communities in the postwar years, and given the ghostly performances of Ku Klux nightriders effecting an appearance of Confederate dead, these features of the Ku Klux ritual demand close attention. Ku Klux mythologists claimed that the nightriders donned sheets and pretended to be avengers of the dead because it intimidated ‘superstitious’ blacks. But the violence surely was intimidation enough. The locus of ghostly revelation

¹¹⁸ “Free Hill, a Sound Portrait of a Rural Afro-American Community: Traditional Song, Narrative, and Sacred Speech from Tennessee,” recorded by Elizabeth Peterson and Tom Rankin. Sound recording held by the Tennessee State Library and Archives.

¹¹⁹ Marcus B. Toney, The Privations of a Private (Nashville: n.p., 1905), 124-26.

resided within the performers themselves, and the performance tells us more about the psychological needs of the Ku Klux than the supposed fears of their victims. The families of most Ku Klux activists were bereaved during the war. Being a Pale Face, or Ku Klux, provided the cultural space within which white men could sublimate their identities within the Confederate dead, mourn their loss, perhaps atone for not having fought, or assuage guilt for deserting the cause toward the end. Given the political, socio-racial, and emotionological contexts of Reconstruction, the rituals of the Ku Klux should be seen as the carnivalesque performances of white racial identity, a sort of pale face minstrelsy perpetuating an identity dependent upon a sublimation with the dead, the continued subjugation of the racial other, and the violence resistance of the alien outsider. Viewing Ku Klux acts not only as a paramilitary project (geared toward the political redemption of the state) but also as a racial identity project (geared toward the cultural rehabilitation of white men as masters of their own world) helps us to understand the wide-scale sympathy of white Confederate communities throughout the Tennessee heartland toward the politics and practices of KuKluxism.

THEY TOLD ME

A close examination of the violence perpetrated by the Ku Klux enables us to take the temperature on the ferocity of conservative opposition to any sort of Reconstruction. Although the catalog of violence throughout Middle Tennessee in the late 1860s suggests personal motivations—the victims invariably knew their attackers—the perpetrators always invested their acts with deep political meaning. Take, for example, the attack on Richard Moore, a former slave and Union veteran from Lincoln County, in the summer of 1868 when political contestation about Reconstruction had reached a critical juncture in Tennessee. Moore would

later testify before Republican investigators in Nashville that sixteen Ku Klux, led by former Confederate veterans from his neighborhood who were known to him, broke into his home on 30 July and struck him about the head with pistols and sticks. They then took him outside and, in Moore's words, "stripped me and whipped me with a strap of leather with a buckle on its end, striking me 175 licks." After inflicting their punishment, Moore's assailants asked him if he was a Radical Republican. They then demanded his pistol and voter registration certificate. "They told me," Moore testified, "that I nor no other colored man should vote in the Presidential election" that fall. Finally his assailants dared him to take his bloodied shirt—the ancient symbol of sacrifice which was gaining fresh currency in battles over Reconstruction—to the Republicans in Nashville, threatening to kill him if he did so.¹²⁰

The ritualized whipping of Richard Moore was in many ways an unexceptional event. An epidemic of similar hate crimes and murders took place in the summer of 1868. But the surviving texts describing the incident capture a full measure of the emotional forces that were shaping the contours of civil war memory and determining the political future of post-emancipation Tennessee. The sources relating to the whipping tell conflicting stories that cannot easily be reconciled but are themselves clear evidence of the contestation in play. In addition to Moore's testimony the incident was reported briefly by the Nashville correspondent of the Cincinnati Gazette which, in turn, drew a response from a local paper in Lincoln County, the scene of the assault. The Gazette, which had been cataloging assaults on the Republicans of Middle Tennessee, merely reported that the Ku Klux has taken another "discharged colored

¹²⁰ State of Tennessee, Report of Evidence Taken before the Military Committee in Relation to Outrages Committed by the Ku Klux Klan in Middle and West Tennessee (Nashville, 1868), 46-47. For the full text of Richard Moore's remarks, and a lengthier disquisition on the meaning of this episode, see Harcourt, "The Whipping of Richard Moore," 261-282.

soldier” and “whipped him until life was nearly extinct.”¹²¹ The Fayetteville Observer’s riposte was illuminating:

Richard Moore was whipped by some unknown persons, though not unmercifully and not for being a Federal soldier, for he never was one, but for conduct that would have brought the same or worse punishment to a white man. While a slave Dick was recognized as a bad Negro. Since emancipation, he has gone ‘from bad to worse,’ adding insult and abuse to his other faults, and obtrusively boasting that ‘no d—d white man should run over him,’ he ‘had been at the bottom but was now a top rail,’ etc. No notice was taken of his course, until his outrages culminated in a wanton defamation of the character of a respectable white lady. Then they ‘went for him.’¹²²

The two newspaper accounts scarcely seem to be representing the same event. Yet they illustrate not only conflicting visions of a postwar society but also the dramatically different memory contexts in which meaning was extracted and actions explained. The actions encapsulated within and aroused by the assault on Richard Moore’s body contained layers of historical meaning and heavy doses of anger, frustration, and moral indignation. In a strictly economic sense, the whipping of Richard Moore registers the effort by whites to reassert old disciplinary prerogatives over former slaves. The diminutive name ‘Dick’ was a clear indication of the paper’s effort to infantilize Moore and to deny his right to equality with whites. The charge of sexual impropriety, referenced by the press as the trigger for the assault, tells us more about the fears of white men than it does about the supposed behavior of Moore. In political terms, the assailants meant to suppress black support for the Republican Party and galvanize black electoral support for the Democrats through intimidation. They stripped Moore not only of his clothing but also his rifle and voter’s registration certificate, the very emblems of his new-found freedom.

¹²¹ “More Outrages by the Ku Klux Democracy,” Cincinnati Gazette, 4 Aug. 1868.

All of this seems clear. But if we look closer at this event we see something white hot – the demonstration of ferocious emotion framed by a reassertion of an old prerogative (the control over Moore’s body) and an implacable opposition to changed realities (the fact that Moore was now a citizen). The assailants’ chosen punishment underscored the attempt to continue an antebellum form of punishment and to reinvent techniques to control the black body. The whip had been the omnipresent instrument of a slaveowner’s power. But whereas the antebellum Tennessee code had authorized up to forty lashes for offenses ranging from unlawful assembly to selling goods without authorization, Richard Moore was gang-whipped by sixteen attackers who inflicted 175 licks from a buckled belt that likely broke his skin. Antebellum planters in the main carefully calibrated their use of punishment when ownership of the victim was not in question. But with the collapse of the legal and political pillars supporting slavery the certainty of violence under slavery was being replaced by the severity of new forms of punishment and domination.¹²³

Richard Moore’s ordeal was not exceptional and its political meaning was clear. In thousands of violent encounters throughout the heartland blacks, and sometimes white Republicans, experienced similar ordeals. Republican rule had, if anything, cemented conservative opposition to a Unionist memory of the Civil War within deep-lying cultural presumptions of white supremacy and framed in emotional terms in contradistinction to the Yankee outsider and the racial other. The violence provoked Brownlow to even greater paroxysms of invective: “these organized bands of assassins and robbers,” he declared in calling

¹²² “A Whipped Negro,” Fayetteville Observer 13 Aug. 1868. Emphasis in original. See also, Ash, Middle Tennessee Society Transformed, 211, which first alerted me—albeit obliquely—to Richard Moore’s story.

¹²³ Harcourt, “Whipping of Richard Moore,” 267-271.

a special session of the Assembly in the long, hot summer of 1868, “[should] be declared outlaws by special legislation, and punished with death wherever found.”¹²⁴ The Assembly duly held an investigation into the lawlessness and passed a new militia law which, as Ben Severance has recently shown, provided for a time interracial militia troops across the state to keep order and protect African American communities.¹²⁵ But beyond the militarization of the state, a situation which soon would prevail in other states under Congressional Reconstruction (but not in Tennessee), the Republicans found themselves in a bind. In prosecuting their aims via means of terror, white supremacists had mounted a challenge to the entire Reconstruction project by presenting state authorities with a stark choice: give up the cause of the Freedmen, the Ku Klux were implying, or engage us in a guerrilla war. It was a challenge that the fragile Republican alliance, for all its rhetorical commitment to civic freedoms for blacks, was not prepared to meet with sufficient force. In effect the rural counties of Middle Tennessee were ‘redeemed’ for the white supremacist cause in 1868 and their redemption, so called, was achieved largely through propaganda, intimidation, and violence driven by an implacable emotional opposition to both the demagogic and democratic designs of southern Republicanism.

LEE STILL LIVES

Shortly after Brownlow’s appointment to the U.S Senate in 1869, the Republican coalition fractured and fell quickly out of power. That race lay at the heart of this was clearly seen by Tennessee Republican William M. Connelly. In an assessment of the situation for Thaddeus

¹²⁴ Brownlow quoted in Allen W. Trelease, White Terror: The Ku Klux Klan Conspiracy and Southern Reconstruction (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1971), 43.

Stevens, the Radical Republican leader in Washington, Connelly argued that the conservatives were driven by a desire to curtail black freedoms – they show “enmity toward all who stand in the way of the reestablishment of slavery in some form.” The Radicals, he continued, “are not detested because they are loyal to the Union but because they favor giving protection to negroes.”¹²⁶ This situation effectively meant that it would be fatal for the Republican Party to continue to champion the Freedmen’s cause. Brownlow’s successor, DeWitt C. Senter, a moderate Republican from East Tennessee, relaxed martial law, demobilized the guard, and allowed the re-enfranchisement of all former Confederates. The Republican Party split in two and Senter was actually endorsed by the Conservatives in the 1869 election against a more radical opponent.

The Conservatives emerged victorious and immediately began undoing the work of Reconstruction. The Conservative-dominated Assembly repealed the Ku Klux Klan Act and the State Guard Act and abolished the state school system. The legislature also repealed a law banning segregation on public transport as well as protective legislation for black laborers. The work of restoration, however, did not stop there. At a new constitutional convention in 1870 the state of Tennessee effectively turned its back on the work of Reconstruction. Of the 75 delegates, eight men had held the rank of colonel or higher in the Confederate service, as well as several of lesser rank. While the new constitution acknowledged universal manhood suffrage, they also instituted a poll tax which virtually assured the rapid decline of the black vote.

¹²⁵ Benjamin Severance, Tennessee’s Radical Army: The State Guard and Its Role in Reconstruction 1867-1869 (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2005).

¹²⁶ Daniel W. Crofts, “Reconstruction in Tennessee: An Assessment for Thaddeus Stevens,” The West Tennessee Historical Society Papers 43 (Dec. 1989): 13-27, quotations 18, 19.

The remnant of the State Republican Party met to reorganize in emergency session and decried the work of the convention and “their Ku Klux and Pale Face allies.”¹²⁷ Black leaders were similarly appalled. James C. Napier led a delegation to Washington D.C. in March 1870 calling on the federal authorities to invalidate the election of 1869 and put the state under the kind of military rule currently existing in every other former Confederate state. But the tide of Radicalism nationally was on the wane and President Grant refused to get involved.¹²⁸ When a few months later, Robert E. Lee died, the Nashville newspapers eulogized the president’s former foe as a “great hero” and observed that stores all around the public square were draped in mourning. General William B. Bate, who had participated in the Convention and would later serve as governor of the State, addressed a public meeting on the topic of why Lee “still lives.” “Though he has passed from earth he has a monument in the breasts of his people and will live in their memories second only in fame to George Washington.”¹²⁹ When journalist Robert Somers, a sympathizer of the Confederacy, visited Nashville in 1870 he observed that the “dictatorship of Parson Brownlow . . . has passed away like a nightmare.” Meeting an old Confederate on the steps of the State Capitol building, Somers detected a degree of rejoicing in the veteran’s mood:

¹²⁷ Broadside, “The Republican Party in Tennessee Reorganized. To the Republicans of Tennessee and the United States. Memorial, Resolutions and Proceedings had at a Convention held at the Capitol, Nashville, February 16th, 1870,” SCD.

¹²⁸ The best recent account of the collapse of Reconstruction in Tennessee is in Paul H. Bergeron, et al., Tennesseans and Their History 176ff; see also Alexander, Political Reconstruction, chs. 14 & 15; Taylor, Negro in Tennessee, ch. 4; and Roger L. Hart, Redeemers, Bourbons & Populists: Tennessee 1870-1896 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1975), ch.1.

¹²⁹ “Death of Gen. Lee,” Nashville Union and American, Oct. 15, 1870; see also Nashville Republican Banner 13, 14, 15 & 16 October 1870; Columbia Herald, 21 & 28 October 1870.

“‘We are now getting up-stairs pretty well at last’ seem to be the general feeling of the white people of Tennessee,” he concluded.¹³⁰

The events of 1870 set in place a pattern for future generations with Conservative Democrats the pre-dominant political force in Middle Tennessee. In November 1870, voters elected as governor John C. Brown, a former Confederate general and associate of the Pulaski Klan. The next four governors would all be former Confederates. It was an unmitigated disaster for the Freedmen. The brief promise of Reconstruction had brought hope to so many that the resettlement after the war would provide racial equality. Their bitterness was evident in the language contained within a report submitted to the State Convention of Colored Men which met in Nashville in February 1870. Citing mountainous evidence of “alarming atrocities” and “crimes against humanity” the authors decried the situation that while “the fiends in human form who have perpetrated these crimes . . . are still at large” the “lives and property of the colored population . . . are unsafe in the extreme.” Noting that appeals to authorities in Tennessee had proved “fruitless” the report begged Washington to intervene.¹³¹ Left in the wilderness, the Republicans were open to the intimidation of their enemies which, in the Tennessee Tribune’s estimation, “amounted in many portions of the State to a practical disfranchisement of a large class of the legal voters of the State.” They could only hope to “lay the facts before the people” and “demand redress of the proper State and local authorities, “and then if the remedy does not

¹³⁰ Robert Somers, The Southern States since the War, 1870-71 intro. by Malcolm C. McMillan (1871; rpt., University of Alabama Press, 1965).

¹³¹ Quoted in Taylor, Negro in Tennessee, 79-80.

come we shall invoke the intervention of some power able and willing to . . . save our State from further infamy and disgrace.”¹³²

Other commentators looked to a higher power for deliverance. Sure that the Ku Klux were “men of a past age . . . fighting with all the senseless fury of despair against the logic of events” the Rev. Bennett, speaking at the Fisk University Chapel in February 1871, invoked the “legitimate conclusion” by “which the Christian calls Providence” as the final outcome of the war.¹³³ Outside influence, however, was lacking as the Republican enthusiasm for Reconstruction waned. Symptomatic of the kind of support forthcoming from Washington was provided by Senator Carl Schurz who appeared in Nashville on September 20, 1871 to address an audience of white Unionists and former Confederates. Stressing the theme of national reconciliation, Schurz called for the disarming of the “alienation of feeling between those lately arrayed against each other” and decried the “acts of usurpation” of the Reconstruction governments. After making his remarks Schurz was showered with congratulatory letters and a communication of support from some two hundred former Confederate soldiers in Tennessee.¹³⁴

SEEK SHELTER ELSEWHERE

Reading the mood of the heartland wisely, many blacks were not prepared to wait upon the wished-for intervention of some outside power and sought deliverance from oppression outside

¹³² “A Misrepresentation Corrected and the Truth Told,” Tennessee Tribune 12 Dec. 1870.

¹³³ Tennessee Tribune, 20 Feb. 1871.

¹³⁴ Frederick Bancroft, ed., Speeches, Correspondence, and Political Papers of Carl Schurz (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1913), vol. 2, 257-85; see also Hans L. Trefouse, Carl Schurz: A Biography (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1982), 199; Blight, Race and Reunion, 123-24.

the State. In their thousands blacks from Middle Tennessee began to move out of the state to seek a promised land in Arkansas, Oklahoma, Kansas (the land of “John Brown” as some observed) and Illinois. In the twelve months following the state convention of 1870 one local paper estimated that “over one thousand of the colored citizens of Rutherford country” had left Tennessee to “seek shelter elsewhere from the violence, oppression and tyranny which they could not resist and against which no protection was furnished.”¹³⁵ In Maury County, Cap Jordan, a black schoolteacher who had been chastised by white thugs as early as 1864 for teaching colored children to read, led a party of four hundred freedmen to Florida. In the most famous instance of mass migration, Benjamin “Pap” Singleton, founder of the Tennessee Real Estate and Homestead Association, spearheaded an exodus which took more than seven thousand southern blacks (mainly Tennesseans) to Cherokee Co. and Lyons Co. in Kansas.¹³⁶

Of those who stayed, perhaps the most impressive appeal to outside and higher powers for an emancipationist reading of the Civil War came from a singing troupe of the freedman school, Fisk University. Organized by Fisk’s treasurer, George L. White, a Union veteran of Gettysburg and Chancellorsville, the Fisk Jubilee Singers, as they were called, took the sorrow songs of slavery—what northern missionaries had termed ‘spirituals’ when they first heard them—to Northern and to international audiences, turning hearts and minds on to the cause for which they sang: the survival of an independent black educational institution in post-Reconstruction Tennessee. The biographies of the first Jubilee Singers embodied the diversity of

¹³⁵ “The Exodus,” Tennessee Tribune 9 Jan. 1871.

¹³⁶ Columbia Herald, 20 Aug. 1869; Nashville Daily Press & Times, 7 Dec. 1869; William Cohen, At Freedom’s Edge: Black Mobility and the Southern White Quest for Racial Control, 1861-1915 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1991), 168-74; Taylor, The Negro in Tennessee, ch.6; Daniel M. Johnson and Rex R. Campbell, Black Migration in America: A Social Demographic History (Durham: Duke University Press, 1981), 51.

the struggle for freedom and equality in Middle Tennessee. Five of the founding singers were former slaves who, as their biographer Andrew Ward notes, “experienced the war in sundry ways” but all were marked by the events of the 1860s which revolutionized their lives.¹³⁷ The original troupe toured from 1871 until 1878, refused to sing for segregated audiences, and melted the hearts of listeners from Kentucky to Boston. Their success raised \$150,000 for Fisk University, ensuring its survival, and ignited a jubilee craze that, as one recent scholar has observed, “rapidly permeated numerous levels of popular culture and established itself as a new American musical tradition.”¹³⁸ Full biographies of the singers quickly appeared in print, as did their songs, as northern publishers sated an appetite for an intimate understanding of the history and musical sensibility of the jubilee phenomenon.¹³⁹

The Jubilee Singers mined deep seams of black social memory singing mournfully of the sorrows of slavery and the joy and hopefulness of liberation. Their music, the haunting and prophetic monuments of the black folk experience were, to be sure, reified versions of the authentic field song in concert form. But their ability to communicate feeling and emotion to northern audiences points to the power of their songs to win hearts over to their cause. On some occasions the singers would encounter discrimination in public transportation and hostility from audiences who expected blacks on stage to fulfill their expectations of blackface minstrelsy, the most popular art form in nineteenth century America, and for their programs to include jokes,

¹³⁷ Jennie Jackson, one of the original singers, was born a free woman, the grand-daughter of Andrew Jackson’s almost lifelong body servant, George Jackson. Ward, Dark Midnight When I Rise, 22-28.

¹³⁸ Sandra Jean Graham, “The Fisk Jubilee Singers and the Concert Spiritual: The Beginnings of an American Tradition,” unpub. Ph.D. diss. (New York University, 2001).

¹³⁹ The best contemporary biography is J.B.T. Marsh, The Story of the Jubilee Singers; With Their Songs (Boston, 1880).

dances, and catchy tunes. Their self-conscious refinement and formal posture was part of an effort to impress upon audiences the respectable accomplishments that a school such as Fisk could bring to black southerners. As musicologist Ronald Radano has argued, “the songs seemed to test the limits of white comprehension, expressing a transcendent musical perfection born out of some uncharted realm.”¹⁴⁰ Social convention prevented the Singers from touring in their own State; their safety, in the era of the Ku Klux could not have been guaranteed if they had.¹⁴¹ But what if they had? There was no better advert for the work of Reconstruction than what George L. White of the American Missionary Association had achieved with the raw talent of the Singers, and they were a great advertisement for the wider work of the AMA and other northern societies in establishing black educational establishments. If lines of black men at the polling booth, and squads of armed black militia in the towns, enraged white conservatives, what effect would a group of singers have had?

A glimpse into the richer possibilities of Reconstruction is provided by an incident which occurred on the Singers’ journey home to Nashville from a concert in Memphis. Stranded at a small-town hotel, the troupe was menaced by a crowd of drunk, electioneering Democrats who taunted White and threatened violence against the Singers. Later, at the train station a mob had gathered and the Jubilee Singers started to sing as the crowd closed in menacingly. Gradually, as Ella Sheppard recalled, the mob stopped their jeering and taunting and took off their hats. “We were softly finishing the last verse of ‘Beyond the smiling and the weeping I shall be soon . . .’

¹⁴⁰ Ronald Radano, “Denoting Difference: The Writing of the Slave Spirituals,” Critical Inquiry 22 (Spring 1996), 519.

¹⁴¹ The Jubilee Singers did not sing at Vanderbilt University, a historically segregated college less than a mile away, until 2001.

when we saw the bull's eye of the coming engine and knew that we were saved.”¹⁴² The emergence of the Jubilee craze in the North coincided with a Christian revivalism in the churches of the former Confederate communities of Middle Tennessee. As they fought for their society's ‘redemption’, white heartlanders were (as Stephen Ash has argued) “haunted by a deep-rooted conviction that their people were not only tyrannized by enemies without but enthralled by wickedness within.”¹⁴³ But sinfulness, as charged by the region's preachers, did not include the chastisement of African Americans, and while a revivalism won the souls of Middle Tennesseans in numbers unmatched in previous decades it failed to cure them of their racism. The revivalism in white churches, of course, occurred at the same time that blacks were establishing their own autonomous churches in the wake of the war, which broadened the chasm between the capacity of the two communities to find shared meaning in their common religiosity or of the revolution that had occurred in their midst. The Jubilee Singers won plaudits and philanthropy on their tours of the Northern states and of Europe, but it was not enough to combat opposition and weakness within the Republican project at home.

THE STUPENDOUS CONTEST

In 1872, ten years after he had accepted Lincoln's invitation to become the State's military governor and begin the work of Reconstruction, former president Andrew Johnson ran for Congress from Tennessee.¹⁴⁴ His opponents were Benjamin F. Cheatham, a former Confederate

¹⁴² Ward, Dark Midnight When I Rise, 118-19.

¹⁴³ Ash, Middle Tennessee Society Transformed, 242.

¹⁴⁴ The seat, an at-large seat, had been granted Tennessee as part of Congressional reapportionment. Hart, Redeemers, Bourbons, & Populists, 15.

General standing for the Democrats, and Horace Maynard, a moderate figure in the state Republican Party. As a candidate for office, Johnson's purpose was not merely to emulate the career of his distinguished predecessor, John Quincy Adams, who had sat in Congress after his own one-term presidency. Johnson was after vindication from critics of his maverick stands against the Confederate Democrats of 1861-1865 and the Radical Republicans of 1865-1868. Speaking in Nashville, 24 August 1872, Johnson sought to reclaim the mantle of the independent workingman's champion and ardent constitutionalist that had propelled him to political stardom before the war. While his opponents drew freely upon their roles in the 1860s and engaged in rancorous charges concerning dishonorable conduct during the Rebellion and Reconstruction, Johnson urged the electorate to practice a studied forgetfulness about the past. "You are all familiar with what happened," Johnson told a crowd in Memphis later that summer in remarks typical of those made across the state. "Rebellion and revenge was the order of the day," he dismissed, "and under such circumstances many things ought to be forgiven and forgotten." Repeating these sentiments to a Northern correspondent, Johnson urged that "the past be forgotten, let us have reconciliation, and amnesty."¹⁴⁵

Johnson's experience should have taught him better.¹⁴⁶ The politics of the 1872 election were infused with the memories of the Rebellion and Reconstruction and his efforts to re-ignite

¹⁴⁵ "Speech at Nashville, Tennessee," 24 August 1872, in Paul H. Bergeron, ed., The Papers of Andrew Johnson, vol. 16, May 1869-July 1875 (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2000), 344-380, quotations from 366 and 380.

¹⁴⁶ General Cheatham's campaign was run on "the idea," as one of his supporters put it, "that an old fashioned Democrat & a true Confederate cannot be wrong." Horace Maynard – the eventual winner, since Johnson divided the Democrat vote – responded in kind, questioning the Generals loyalty and judgment and bemoaning the capture of State government by Redeemer Democrats in 1869.

an antebellum politics of collective memory were bound to fail in a state-wide election.¹⁴⁷ While Johnson saw correctly that forgiveness was linked to forgetting and that both were essential to the establishment of a new post-war order, he misjudged the extent to which the issues of the 1860s lay unresolved at the heart of American politics. Johnson's campaign for personal redemption also overlooked the fact that forgiveness and forgetting required a political discretion and judgment. Moreover, Johnson failed to appreciate that forgetting *was* remembering – that in calling upon voters to forget the recent past he ignited thoughts about what that past contained, permitting his political opponents to provide characterization in place of his empty rhetoric. In sum, Johnson misjudged the character of collective memory and underplayed the difficulty of fashioning a common text of collective remembering from which successful political action could be drawn.

Johnson's failure was Tennessee's too. Reconstruction in Tennessee demonstrated that, despite the shattering of Hood's army on the battlefield south of Nashville, there was no clear winner of Tennessee's civil war. Politics and public ritual, therefore, became sites of violent contention as Republicans sought to press an advantage against former Confederates determined to salvage as much of the old world as possible from the wreckage of the war. The defeat of the Confederates and the liberation of African Americans had effected a rupture not least of memory but of personal and collective narratives of identity. But the ability to articulate statements about the war's meaning and legacy was dependent largely upon social and political power. The historian Michael Richards, with reference to another context, has written that in order to establish a new theology of state power in the wake of civil war it was necessary to create "an

¹⁴⁷ Johnson's desire for personal political redemption were achieved two years later when the State Assembly appointed him U.S. Senator, though it is unlikely that Johnson would have won a

ideological community coalesced around a state narration of triumph, aiming to inoculate society against forgetting or deviations.”¹⁴⁸ The Republicans, whilst in power, recognized the need to press the advantage won on the battlefield against the proponents of slavery and secession. In alliance with Radicals in Congress a new political vision for American society began to be articulated in contradistinction to the discredited rationale of the Confederates. But the Republican alliance in Tennessee failed to build an ideological community around a narrative of emancipation and Union triumph.

The pummeling rhetoric and punitive restrictions aimed against former Confederates by the Brownlow regime needed to be matched by an equally vigorous commitment to sustain the rights and aspirations of the liberated. But the commitment to the Freedmen’s cause, and the active remembering of his struggle for American citizenship, was not part of the passionate beliefs for many white Republican leaders. While their rhetoric antagonized white conservatives, their commitments to the freedmen, always hesitant and half-hearted, soon fell away in the face of violent resistance. In short order the Republican Party played midwife to the return to power of the white conservative leadership supposedly vanquished by the war. This was their legacy.

The Conservative triumph of 1870 underscored the fact that while supporters of the Confederacy may have lost the Battle of Nashville, they had certainly not conceded the fight over the future political destiny of the State. The return to power of a white patrician class, the re-subjugation of blacks, the reassertion of the prerogatives of home rule—all of this would be achieved by the redeemers of Tennessee. In time they would prove themselves to be more

state-wide election campaign.

skilled that Republicans in fashioning a state theology. Republicans were losing the battle for the memory of the war, as Frederick Douglass realized only too well when he addressed the Tennessee Colored Agricultural and Mechanical Association's annual fair at Nashville on 18 September 1873. "No man of anti-slavery instincts can now look out upon the moral and political situation," Douglass said, "without seeing danger to the results obtained by . . . long years of agitation and of war and bloodshed." "Every effort," he urged the audience, "should now be made to save the results of this stupendous moral and physical contest."¹⁴⁹ Yet Douglass knew only too well that the battle was being lost and that the power to shape the meaning of his "stupendous contest" was increasingly in the hands of Confederates.

¹⁴⁸ Michael Richards, "From War Culture to Civil Society: Francoism, Social Change and Memories of the Spanish Civil War," History & Memory 14 (Fall 2002): 93-120, quotation 97.

¹⁴⁹ "Agriculture and Black Progress: An Address Delivered in Nashville, Tennessee, on 18 September 1873," in John W. Blassingame John R. McKivigan, eds., The Frederick Douglass Papers, Series One: Speeches, Debates, and Interviews. Vol. 4: 1864-80 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 412.

3. Roll Call for Confederate Memory

And while my imagination is like the weaver's shuttle, playing backward and forward through these two decades of time, I ask myself, Are these things real? did they happen? are they being enacted today? or are they the fancies of the imagination in forgetful reverie?

Sam R. Watkins, 1882¹⁵⁰

To harp upon the Confederacy and dwell upon records of Confederate soldiers purely for political effect will be admitted by all impartial minds to be not only untimely but in altogether bad taste. . . . The South made a name for prowess which will last so long as the world lasts, but what did she gain? . . . Where is the man who, with his hand on his heart, can say he is sorry the Confederacy was not established?

Nashville Banner, 4 Sept. 1884

Between the twentieth anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation (1883) and the thirtieth anniversary of Appomattox (1895) a range of voices in Middle Tennessee attempted to provide regional culture with a more fixed relationship to the past. This chapter examines the development of a white Confederate memory in the 1880s and early 1890s—a decade that saw the final elimination of proponents of Reconstruction from positions of authority and a marked deterioration in race relations. Michael Kammen has noted that the 1880s marked the move to a

¹⁵⁰ Sam Watkins, "Company Aytch" or, A Side Show of the Big Show and Other Sketches, ed. and intro. by M. Thomas Inge (1882; rpt. New York: Plume, 1999), 214.

“more comprehensive control of the past by its most passionate partisans.”¹⁵¹ In Middle Tennessee, as conservative whites cemented their control of social and political affairs, witnesses to a Confederate history fashioned memories that provided continuity with the antebellum era, justified the exclusion of minority voices from political affairs, and helped to craft new forms of racial identity. It was also a time when white societies in the North and South moved toward a greater cultural and political reconciliation, a process that attended to the emotional needs of communities keen both to forget the traumatic events of the 1860s and to escape the troubling racial and social anxieties of the present. The totality of their efforts refurbished a historical dimension within an identity of “whiteness” through a reconstruction of the valor of Confederate manhood, an increasingly assertive defense of the Confederate cause, and a refutation or denial of the Civil War experiences of white Unionists and African Americans. This development went hand-in-hand with moves toward an increasingly segregated society in a dialectical process where political change both drew upon and fed into a festival of Confederate heritage. Indeed, a segregated society *required* a segregated history to both ground and legitimate its contradictions.

As whites re-subjugated blacks politically and socially, a Confederate revivalism marked the region’s culture. Communities of white memory—veterans’ groups, newspapers, the Democratic Party, church and memorial organizations—together enacted a cult of remembrance, ensuring that, while the political objects of the Confederacy were disavowed, a Confederate “memory nation” lived on in the hearts, minds, and bodies of local whites.¹⁵² This cult of

¹⁵¹ Michael Kammen, Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991), 111.

¹⁵² The notion of a “memory nation” is best expressed in the work of Pierre Nora, though my understanding of it is also informed by Benedict Anderson’s notion of imagined communities. The Confederate “memory nation” was, of course, an imaginary construction: while it became

remembrance became increasingly transfigured around a mythical central narrative that reduced the actual circumstances of the war into an unchanging narrative of racial identity. Through ritualized reunions and staged enactments of a mythologized Confederate past, the civil war narrative cult became embedded through various forms of reenactment. Ultimately, the most significant form was gestural or bodily reenactment through which local whites became habituated to an unchanging cult of Confederate memory.¹⁵³

‘HOME RULE’

The generation of men who had fought for the Confederacy gained the sort of political prominence in the 1880s that they might have imagined during their formative years before the war, proving that their wartime service had done their careers no disservice. Their relationship to Confederate ideology, however, was complex and ambiguous. While defending their decision to fight when pushed to decide in 1861, most would have agreed with the Nashville Banner’s rhetorical question, who “can say he is sorry the Confederacy was not established?” The Confederacy was dead as dust and slavery along with it, and Middle Tennessee contained virtually no rebels so thoroughly unreconstructed as to regret the failure of the former and the passing of the latter. Yet few would have agreed with the Banner that it was “in altogether bad taste” to “dwell upon records of Confederate soldiers” since many political leaders in the Democratic Party parlayed their wartime service into successful political careers. Moreover, with the political battles over Reconstruction falling away Middle Tennessee’s Confederate

attached to southern state governments it did not reside there; nor were state officials its main architects or sponsors.

¹⁵³ My analysis of bodily memory is indebted to Paul Connerton, How Societies Remember (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), esp. chapters 2 & 3.

generation was discovering that the causes for which they had fought—regional political autonomy and racial supremacy—were not lost at all.

Unlike the Confederate dream of separate nationhood, ‘home rule’ was a battle that could be won; moreover it was a cause that would give the Confederate generation of white men the prominence and power they believed was their birthright and that they had sought to secure in the defense of slavery. It was a lengthy and contested process that had begun with the defeat of Republican rule in 1869. But the main contests occurred in the 1880s. While a full account of political developments falls outside the scope of this work, it is necessary to recount in brief the main contours of political life in the 1880s in order to situate the emergence of a Confederate social memory.

The Civil War era cast a long shadow over the political landscape of the 1880s. Political divisions during the decade, however, were not simply those of Union vs. Confederate or black vs. white. A number of scholars have argued that antebellum political loyalties among whites provided powerful undercurrents and that both Republicans and Democrats muted the race card in political campaigns in part to appeal to African American voters.¹⁵⁴ Both parties drew upon memories of the war when it suited their interests. For example, on debates over the state debt issue—which dominated state politics in the 1870s and early 1880s—Democrats often cast proposals for adjustment in terms of legitimacy, arguing that the debt could be attributed to the malfeasance of the illegitimate Brownlow government during Reconstruction. By contrast Republicans often portrayed the debt as an honorable burden. “There never was a debt more

¹⁵⁴ See, for example, Roger L. Hart, Redeemers, Bourbons & Populists: Tennessee, 1870-1896 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1975), xvi.

sacred,” one Republican candidate told a black audience in Memphis, “it is a part of the sacred price paid for the purchase of freedom.”¹⁵⁵

In 1880, ten years after the end of Reconstruction in Tennessee, state politics enjoyed a healthy two-party competition that was far removed from the whites-only, one-party rule that already existed in other southern states and would prevail in Tennessee by 1892. The Civil War had increased the loyalties of male voters to either the Republican or the Democratic Party, and the competitive environment of the 1880s echoed the divisions of the war years. Because of its support in East Tennessee and among black voters, the Republican Party remained strong and continued to field a competitive alliance of former Whigs and blacks in the middle and western sections of the state from its base of support in East Tennessee. In fact in 1881, Republicans had perhaps greater strength than at any time since 1870: the party held the governorship, forty percent of the seats in the State Senate, and held parity with the Democrats in the House.¹⁵⁶ In addition to drawing an overwhelming majority of the black vote, Republicans benefited from divisions among Democrats who continued to split largely along class lines over the state debt issue.

But beginning with the 1882 election of former Confederate General W. B. Bate, the Democratic Party regrouped, settled the debt issue, and won control of the state assembly in 1888. Thereafter the political situation changed rapidly: by 1890 the electoral turnout of eligible voters—seventy-eight percent in 1888—dropped to fifty percent, and the long exclusion of

¹⁵⁵ Quoted in Joseph H. Cartwright, The Triumph of Jim Crow: Tennessee Race Relations in the 1880s, (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1976), 74.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 75-76.

blacks from political life had begun.¹⁵⁷ African American politicians contested the Confederate domination of state affairs every step of the way (see a fuller discussion of their efforts in Chapter 4). Although black men never completely lost the right to vote in Tennessee, by 1892 control of the state's political life was firmly in the hands of conservative Democrats who used their power to impose an increasingly segregated social order along racial lines.

After the election of former Confederate General William B. Bate in 1882, the Democrats reorganized under Senator Isham Harris' leadership. This represented a stunning turnaround in fortune for the former Governor who had led his State out of the Union in 1861 and been forced to flee from office in 1862 following the Union invasion of Middle Tennessee. The resurgence of former Confederate leadership in state government posed a serious challenge to the fragile gains that black Tennesseans had won since 1865. Tennessee became the first state to enact a secret ballot law in 1889, a measure that took control of the electoral process away from the parties and imposed state-printed ballots that required a level of literacy that many black (54.2%) and poor white (17.8%) voters did not have.¹⁵⁸ Making the racist intent of the legislation clear, the law exempted all rural areas from the law's provision and applied it only to urban counties—such as Davidson Co. (Nashville) and Shelby Co. (Memphis)—and, later, to all towns with populations above 2,500. In 1890 a new Poll Tax imposed a financial burden upon the electorate, which had a devastating effect upon the African American vote, wiping out black majorities in Nashville wards and districts.

Democrats were jubilant at the effects of the new suffrage laws. Edward Ward Carmack, the racist editor of the Nashville American, wrote that the laws had “dignified and rendered

¹⁵⁷ Edward L. Ayers, *The Promise of the New South: Life After Reconstruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 52-53.

decent” the electoral process in Tennessee, “which could not be said of it when the old crowd of Negroes and ruffians were permitted to gather about the polls with their reeking smells and coarse profanity.”¹⁵⁹ Although only nine of the 33 members in the 1889 Tennessee legislature that enacted the restrictive voting laws had fought for the Confederacy in the Civil War, the prejudices and passions of the Confederate generation was behind the ‘reform’. Apologists claimed that the reforms were modern and moderate; but to African American leaders the legal disfranchisement represented a cruel betrayal of the promise of Reconstruction. It was as if the Confederacy was being re-born.¹⁶⁰

LIVE IN THE LIVING PRESENT

While the Democratic Party made political gains in the 1880s, a Confederate folk memory was emerging and gaining social and collective force. In the spring of 1880, however, during the city of Nashville’s centennial celebrations, a foreign observer may not have realized that a bitter war had been concluded as recently as 1865. Celebrations of the Confederacy and its foot soldiers were conspicuously absent as the patrician guardians of Tennessee’s past in the Tennessee Historical Society reached farther back to claim a heritage of pioneer heroes and national political figures. At a custom-built exhibition building on Broad Street, the portraits and personal effects of former presidents Andrew Jackson and James K. Polk shared prime position with those of pioneers such as James Robertson and Davie Crockett, obscuring the few artifacts

¹⁵⁸ Figures from 1890 census, quoted in Cartwright, Triumph of Jim Crow, 225.

¹⁵⁹ Quoted in Cartwright, Triumph of Jim Crow, 243.

relating to what was dispassionately described as ‘the late war.’ Assertive references to Nashville’s pre-Civil War past, however, played a soft yet assertive counterpoint to what was essentially a brash industrial exposition celebrating the economic virtues of a future-looking New South ethos. Inside the exhibition building the din of huge machines dominated the show as a spirit of industrial adventurism and a forward-looking entrepreneurialism broadcast the message that Nashville was looking to the future. As Don H. Doyle has remarked, the Nashville centennial celebration “sought to show northerners that the Lost Cause was forgotten” that Tennesseans “were reconciled to defeat in the recent war and anxious to join the national march toward industrial progress.” Most historical speeches dwelt on the early history of the city and pointed to the bravery and sacrifice of pioneers as models to admire and emulate. It is notable, however, that while Confederate veterans were absent from the military drill and civic parade conducted during the Centennial, they amassed at the unveiling of a statue of Andrew Jackson at the State Capitol where General Joseph E. Johnston, a local hero, performed the remarkable feat of connecting the career of a president who had opposed sectionalism with the patriotism of Confederates. His remarks featured the imprecise and emotional claims to the cloak of virtue and honor that Confederates had wrapped around their wounds in the years since the war. Mere allusions to the war, a reporter noted, “seemed to revive memories that spoke with no need of interpretation in the glowing faces and beaming eyes of the ex-Confederates in the audience.”¹⁶¹ Perceptively this observer captured the intensity of feeling with which many veterans regarded

¹⁶⁰ Ayers, Promise of the New South, 53; see also Patrick Sewell Vidaver, “The Pioneers of Disfranchisement: Suffrage Restriction in Gilded Age Tennessee” (undergraduate honors thesis, University of Virginia, 1989), 61, quoted in Ayers, Promise of the New South, 463 n.24.

¹⁶¹ Don H. Doyle, Nashville in the New South, 1880-1930 (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1985), 3-11, 12-18, quotation from p.10; Nashville American, 19 & 20 May, 1880.

the war and the enjoyment they found in coming together to share and sustain their memories of the struggles of the 1860s.

This grassroots interest, however, had yet to be taken up by the public organs of the second and third estate. Beyond the Centennial celebrations, newspapers and local histories shaped a public amnesia toward the war and promoted wide acceptance of its result. “The rank passions and prejudices engendered upon either side in that terrible conflict,” the Nashville Banner observed in 1884, “are rapidly passing away.”¹⁶² Historical publications, commissioned by the Nashville Centennial committee, reinforced a similar theme. Charles Edwin Robert’s City Guide (1880), for example, featured a lengthy historical sketch of the city yet spent a single paragraph describing the war. Woodford Clayton’s History of Davidson County (1880) similarly gave short shrift to the “great Civil War” focusing on military operations rather than the ideological divisions and political legacies of the war.¹⁶³ As the Banner put it, “the sectional issues which fanned the flames of hate in 1860 have been relegated to history.” But more often the conflict of the 1860s did not make it into the history books of the 1880s. Personal histories were, to be sure, a different matter, though few sources exist to give the historian a sense of the furious anger and the distraught sense of loss that many Middle Tennesseans continued to experience as a consequence of the defeat of the Confederate cause.

Fiction comes closest to unveiling the private emotions of the generation who had failed to secure a separate nationhood for the South. Murfreesboro’s Charles Egbert Craddock, the pseudonym of Mary Noailles Murfree (b.1850) puts us close to the continuing anguish about the

¹⁶² “The War and Politics”, Nashville Banner 1 Sept. 1884.

¹⁶³ Charles Edwin Robert, ed., Nashville City Guide Book (Nashville, n.p. 1890); W.W.Clayton, History of Davidson County, Tennessee (Philadelphia: J.W. Lewis & Co., 1890)

war years in her 1884 novel, Where the Battle Was Fought. Murfree painted a bleak picture where the lives of the inhabitants of her fictional Chattalla, a town striking in its resemblance to the towns of Middle Tennessee, were lived in the shadows of the cataclysm of the war. Murfree's characters saw little attraction in a future in the New South and had only the shattered remnants and dreams of the past to sustain them. The hopeless inadequacy of the Confederate past stunted the life of General Vayne, the unrepentant and unreconstructed protagonist of Murfree's novel. Vayne's house looks over the broken plain 'where the battle was fought' and from his window he sees the dilapidated ruins of the federal fortress, Fort Despair, where he lost an arm battling the Yankees. Disabled and indigent veterans gathered at the town square where, as Murfree put it, "you would not overhear the discussion of news of the present day, local or foreign—you would catch such phrases as—"The enemy's artillery opened the ball,"—or, "Then we executed a brilliant flank movement." And you would go on realizing that all their interest lay in the past, and that they looked upon the future as only capable of furnishing a series of meager and supplemental episodes."¹⁶⁴

Further glimpses into the private struggle for reconciliation are provided by the applicants made by Middle Tennesseans seeking recompense for war-time losses from the Southern Claims Commission. Garrett D. Voorhies had two horses taken from him by Illinois infantry troops in 1863 as a sixteen year old, and fully sixteen years later was still smarting at the loss. "He took no interest in Politics," a deposition in his favor argued. "He never did anything against the Union cause that I knew of. He was looked upon as a boy, and, as having no interest in the war." His case was dismissed, however, on account of insufficient proof that he had ever favored the

¹⁶⁴ Charles Egbert Craddock, Where the Battle Was Fought (Boston: James R. Osgood & Company, 1884), quotation from p. 174.

Union cause.¹⁶⁵ The attitude of neighbors in Maury Co. toward a claims commissioner also reveal the strength of feelings that lingered 15-20 years after the war. “His immediate neighbors are incensed and prejudiced against him,” an investigator found in 1879, “some on account of business transactions, and others for the reason that Moore has refused to endorse their loyalty to the U.S. during the investigation of their claims.” Here war-related animus became part and parcel of the social mix of the post-war years, with some of William Moore’s neighbors writing under the anonymity of ‘Amicus Justitia.’¹⁶⁶ Most political figures, however, urged that the passions of the 1860s be forgotten – at least in their public pronouncements. Broader political currents nationally were tuned toward this. This was a point increasingly taken on by Nashville’s newspaper establishment. “Live in the living present,” the Nashville Banner urged its readers in 1884, “with its fresh issues and its new aspirations” and “look to the future rather than the past.”¹⁶⁷

ENTIRELY FROM MEMORY

For the veterans, however, the past was inescapable. The remarkable memoir of Private Samuel R. Watkins—serialized in his local newspaper and published as Co. Aytch¹⁶⁸—is a classic

¹⁶⁵ Claim of Garrett D. Voorhies, RG 123, Records of the U.S. Court of Claims Congressional Jurisdiction Case Files, 1884-1943, Box 450, File 3330, NARA.

¹⁶⁶ “Claim of William F. Moore,” RG 123, Records of the U.S. Court of Claims Congressional Jurisdiction Case Files, 1884-1943 Box 230, file 1276 [3 folders], NARA.

¹⁶⁷ “The War and Politics”, Nashville Banner 1 Sept. 1884.

¹⁶⁸ Co. Aytch originated as a series of articles in the author’s hometown newspaper, the Columbia Herald beginning May 13, 1881 and running weekly through 1882. The memoir, which is now available in multiple formats (thanks, in part, to Ken Burns’ use of Watkins as a biographical narrator in his hugely successful PBS documentary for television, The Civil War), has had five significant editions. All subsequent citations are from Thomas Inge’s 1999 edition. Sam R.

example of what Paul Connerton has termed “memory action,” an individual attempt to write a narrative of life experience embedded in the particular narratives and needs of a particular social group.¹⁶⁹ It is also a work that illustrates the psychic trauma that continued to hang over Confederate remembrance of the war.

Watkins had, by any estimation, a hard war. Enlisting in 1861 with other “Maury Co. Braves,” as they were originally called, in Co. H of the First Tennessee Infantry regiment, he served throughout the war fighting at Shiloh, Corinth, Perryville, Murfreesboro, Shelbyville, Chattanooga, Chickamauga, Missionary Ridge, the Hundred Days’ Battles, and the Atlanta, Jonesboro, Franklin, and Nashville campaigns. As noted on his application to join the Confederate Veterans Association, he was wounded five times. Yet Watkins, as he painfully recalls, was one of the lucky ones: he was one of only seven survivors out of the original 120 company enlistees to surrender on April 26, 1865 at Greensboro, North Carolina—the others had either died, returned on a sickness furlough, or deserted.

The soldier’s descendents recall that the author began his memoirs, seventeen years since his surrender, after failing at a grocery store business in Columbia and taking his young family out to a county farm. With what he described as “a house full of young ‘rebels,’ clustering around my knees,” Watkins devoted his early mornings to writing down his reminiscences. He

Watkins, ‘Co. Aytch,’ *Maury Grays, First Tennessee Regiment; or, a Side Show of the Big Show* (Nashville: Cumberland Presbyterian Publishing House, 1882); Sam. R. Watkins, ‘Co. Aytch,’ *Maury Grays, First Tennessee Regiment; or, a Side Show of the Big Show, 2nd Edition* (Chattanooga: Times Printing Company, 1900); Sam. R. Watkins, ‘Co. Aytch,’ *Maury Grays, First Tennessee Regiment; or, a Side Show of the Big Show*, intro. Bell Irvin Wiley (Jackson, Tennessee: McCowat-Mercer Press, 1952); Sam. R. Watkins, ‘Co. Aytch,’ *a Side Show of the Big Show: A Confederate Memoir*, intro. Roy P. Basler (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1962); Sam R. Watkins, *Company Aytch: Or, a Side Show of the Big Show and Other Sketches*, intro. M. Thomas Inge (New York: Plume (New American Library), 1999).

¹⁶⁹ Connerton, How Societies Remember, 21.

did not propose to make this a “connected journal” but rather wrote a series of chronological episodes written “entirely from memory.” “I do not pretend to write the history of the war,” he wrote in his opening installment in the Columbia Herald, “only [to] give a few sketches and incidents that came under the observation of a ‘high private’ [as he called himself or as a “webfoot”] in the rear ranks of the Rebel army.” Watkins asserted that just as any man had “as much right to make a dictionary as Mr. Webster,” he had as much right to write a history of the war as any Confederate general, whom he termed the “big bugs.” He wrote, it seems, for his fellow veterans, for his children, for posterity – but most of all for himself. He seemed to need to write – he never wrote anything else in his life – in order to make sense of his war experiences. “How long, how long will I have to witness these things?” he writes.

Watkins seems conscious of writing for the living as well as for the dead: he dedicated Co. Aytch to “the memory of my dead comrades of the Maury Grays” (Co. H), and “also to my living comrades, nearly all of whom shed their blood in defense of the same cause.” The text of this dedication is set in the shape of a Christian cross. Watkins wrote Co. Aytch from a tragic sensibility of loss, an emotional disfigurement that borders on trauma as the old soldier attempts to grapple with his memories of the war and the meanings they contain. “We were a mere handful of devoted braves,” he reflects toward the end of the memoir, “who had stood by our colors when sometimes it seemed that God himself had forsaken us.”

He writes also as a conscious member of a collective group or groups – his communities of memory expanding outwards from Company H, to the First Tennessee, to all Tennessee’s foot soldiers, and finally toward all former supporters of the Confederate cause. At points in his narrative Watkins evidently draws upon a collective pool of memories. For example, he remarks that “I have heard hundreds of old soldiers tell of the amount of greenback money they saw and

picked up” after the battle at Shiloh. At other places he affirms the truthfulness of his narrative by reference to a group with phrases such as “were you to ask any member of the First Tennessee Regiment . . .” and “I remember this incident, and so does every member of the First Tennessee Regiment.”

Watkins writes, then, as part of and on behalf of a community that we might identify, as a Confederate memory community, c. 1881-1882. The temporal specificity is important, because Watkins’ writings speak to a moment when Confederate memory work was beginning to emerge in coherent and assertive forms from rather ordinary parts of the collapsed Confederacy. In 1880 Middle Tennessee’s Confederate heritage was not as celebrated or memorialized as it would become by 1890 and certainly 1900. The United Confederate Veterans organization was not formed until 1889 and, as Gaines Foster has noted, it was only in the 1890s that “extreme enthusiasm for and extensive participation in Confederate activities” emerged, which ultimately led to the development of Confederate veterans’ homes, state pensions for disabled Confederate soldiers, and the ubiquitous monuments on Southern county court squares.¹⁷⁰ In the early 1880s, however, Confederate memory was in crisis – unmoored temporally from the fixtures of antebellum life that provided the *raison d’être* for the Confederate experiment, and lacking a spiritual and political home (a “memory nation” in Pierre Nora’s term) where the past could be subsumed within the present in an intimate communion between history and memory, between what was present and what was lost. As Peter Fritzsche has usefully argued, however, notions of loss and the distinction between a ‘naturalized’ past and a ‘desacrilized’ present are overly

¹⁷⁰ Gaines M. Foster, Ghosts of the Confederacy: Defeat, the Lost Cause, and the Emergence of the New South (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 6; see also Keith S. Bohannon, “Confederate Army Reunions in Georgia, 1885-95,” in Gary W. Gallagher and Alan T. Nolan, eds., The Myth of the Lost Cause (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 2000).

nostalgic. “It is not loss per se,” Fritzsche argues, “but the sensibility of loss and the history of that sensibility that needs to be examined more closely.”¹⁷¹

Sam Watkins’ memoir permits a close reading of Confederate sensibilities at a time when the cultural movement by white Americans to use a Civil War heritage to celebrate their supremacy within their reconfigured and battle-hardened union was in its infancy. The first regional reunion of the First Tennessee occurred in 1883, the year after the publication of Co. Aytch, when 200 veterans gathered in Kentucky to commemorate the 21st anniversary of the Battle of Perryville.¹⁷² Co. Aytch is also constructed at a time when the memories of Confederate leaders were beginning to get into print. Some of the most notable had turned their hand toward writing memoirs, which by the time Sam Watkins penned Co. Aytch included Joseph E. Johnston’s Narrative of Military Operations, (1874), John B. Hood’s Advance and Retreat (1880), and Jefferson Davis’ The Rise and Fall of the Confederate Government (1881). Watkins has the memoirs of Confederate generals—those first attempts at grand master narratives—on his bookshelf and occasionally draws upon them to situate his experiences in a broader context. But his perspective is that of the subaltern, and he generally dismisses the writings of the “big bugs”, and privileges the perspective of “the old ‘webfoot’”—the ordinary foot soldier.

The 1880s and 1890s saw the monuments to the ordinary Confederate hero move from the well-tended grave to the centerpiece of Southern court squares. In 1882, the year that the Cumberland Presbyterian Church in Nashville published Co. Aytch on the author’s behalf, the

¹⁷¹ Pierre Nora, “Between Memory and History, 7-25; Peter Fritzsche, “The Case of Modern Memory,” Journal of Modern History 73 (March 2001): 87-117, esp. 92-93.

¹⁷² Losson: “The reunion was so pleasant that a committee was formed to ensure that it became an annual event.” Christopher Losson, Tennessee’s Forgotten Warriors: Frank Cheatham and His Confederate Division (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1989), 272; see also Nashville Banner, 8-9 October 1883.

Louisville, Kentucky branch of the Virginia-based Southern Historical Society began publishing the Southern Bivouac, a magazine that preferred the stories of “obscure confederates” (Jubal Early’s criticism) to military analysis from a General’s perspective.¹⁷³ The Bivouac valorized the sacrifices of “the private confederate soldier” and invited all ex-Confederate soldiers to send their “anecdotes or reminiscences”¹⁷⁴ Sam Watkins took the editors at their word and sent along Co. Aytch, inviting them to copy extracts from the book in the pages of their magazine. The editors were delighted and gave Co. Aytch a special editorial calling it “precisely the kind of work we are looking for, viz. a narration of events that happened before the eyes of the ‘fighters.’” “We have never read a book,” they continued with a salesman’s hyperbole, “which came so near placing us again in camp or tramp, tramp, tramping along the dusty roads. . . [it is] told . . . with such truthfulness that we felt like we had met a hundred old comrades and spent hours with them recounting the deeds of war.”¹⁷⁵

The early 1880s was also a time of generational divide, when the children of Civil War veterans were coming of age. Historians have under-appreciated the place of Watkins’ memoir as signifying a memorial moment of the early 1880s and have instead misjudged Co. Aytch as purely battlefield ethnography or as a primary source on the ordinary soldier’s life. The editors of modern scholarly editions of Co. Aytch (Bell Wiley and Roy Baselar) have hailed the

¹⁷³ Foster, Ghosts of the Confederacy 90-91. The Bivouac had a stormy life, passing through many owners, until bought by the Century in 1886. Watkins attempted to sell stories to the Century but was unsuccessful, see Sam R. Watkins to The Century Press Co., 30 July 1896, Century Collection, Box 108, New York Public Library.

¹⁷⁴ The Southern Bivouac (Louisville, Ky.: Southern Historical Association of Louisville, 1887), Vol. 1, 36, 127.

¹⁷⁵ Southern Bivouac 1, 174-75. Over the next two years Watkins became an occasional contributor to the Bivouac.

memoir's unique perspective but qualified the book's reliability as a historical source by emphasizing its "limitations and deficiencies" (Wiley's phrase) that resulted from the author's "writing solely from memory."¹⁷⁶ But if we make this a memory work rather than a first-hand observation of the 1860s, then Co. Aytch gives a healthy yield.¹⁷⁷

If we look at Co. Aytch as being psychologically situated, we can mark the early 1880s as a moment when a process of grieving memorialization is transforming into a process of *polemical* memorialization. Watkins writes in both registers often in the same paragraph or anecdote, at one point anguishing over the loss of a close and trusted comrade and decrying the horrors of war, and then in the next sentence eulogizing the dead and valorizing the cause for which they fought. Writing about a different war, Graham Dawson coined the term "composure" to describe a process by which autobiographical stories of the past are written down. In one sense, the term composure refers to the cultural references, the symbols and narrative strategies, which an author uses to convey a sense of his experience to others. But at another level, Dawson's term refers to the way an autobiographical author fashions a narrative path through the pool of remembered experience and the narrative options available to him in order both to convey a sense of his experience to others and also – and this is the critical point – to find for himself the point of greatest psychic ease. As Dawson puts it: "The story that is actually told is always the one preferred amongst other possible versions, and involves a striving, not only for a

¹⁷⁶ Wiley, intro. "Co. Aytch," 12; Baseler, intro. "Co. Aytch," 9.

¹⁷⁷ While Watkins' most recent editor, M. Thomas Inge, situates the work in comparison to the fiction of Ambrose Bierce and Stephen Crane, and helpfully explores the literary devices that Watkins adopted to filter his remembered experience of the war, even this 1999 edition fails to explore the socio-psychological moment of the work's production in the early 1880s.

formally satisfying narrative or a coherent version of events, but also for a version of the self that can be lived with in relative psychic comfort – for, that is, subjective composure.”¹⁷⁸

It is helpful to read Co. Aytch as a Confederate veteran’s exercise in psychic composure. On two different levels in this episodic work Watkins seeks to sustain a voice of psychic composure and to convey that sense of reassurance to his intended audience—from other veterans to white Southerners born since the war. First, Watkins uses his memoir to give written form to the terrible images of war in what psychologists today term the therapeutic processing of post-traumatic stress. Watkins’ realist descriptions of battlefields and his biographical accounts of loved comrades are illuminated by the flash-bulb memories of horrific scenes. The retelling of these images usually form a separate, subtitled section in the memoir. For example, in “Good-Bye, Tom Webb,” Watkins recalls the death of his neighborhood friend and soldierly comrade at Missionary Ridge in a passage that is worth quoting at length:

As soon as the order was given to march, we saw poor Tom Webb lying on the battlefield, shot through the head, his blood and brains smearing his face and clothes, and he still alive. He was as brave and noble a man as our Heavenly Father in His infinite wisdom, ever made. Everybody loved him. . . . We did not wish to leave the poor fellow in that condition, and [three comrades] and myself got a litter and carried him on our shoulders through that livelong night back to Chickamauga Station. The next morning [we were told] that it would be useless for us to carry him any further, and that it was utterly impossible for him ever to recover. The Yankees were then advancing and firing upon us. What could we do? We could not carry him any further, and we could not bury him, for he was still alive. To leave him where he was we thought best. We took hold of his hand, bent over him and pressed our lips to his—all four of us. We kissed him good-bye and left him to the tender mercies of the advancing foe . . . No doubt they laughed and jeered at the dying Rebel. It mattered not what they did, for poor Tom Webb’s spirit,

¹⁷⁸ Graham Dawson, Soldier Heroes: British Adventure, Empire and the Imagining of Masculinities (London: Routledge, 1994), 22-23.

before the sun went down, was with God and the holy angels. He had given his all to his country. O, how we missed him.¹⁷⁹

The plot lines of this brief story take a realistic and shocking image of a battlefield casualty and tease from it a tale of comradely duty toward a fallen friend before taking the form of a eulogy for his death. Throughout this and other stories of fallen comrades, Watkins is sure to impress upon his readers his own virtue in doing what he could to assist the fallen. Interestingly, of the dozen or so comrades whose death he comments upon, all were either killed in battle or died of injuries sustained in combat. Not once does Watkins mention death from disease (which claimed far more lives in the Army of Tennessee, as in all Civil War armies); neither does he notice the absence of named comrades through desertion (which became an increasingly common occurrence, especially after Atlanta 1864). Watkins also invariably explains these accounts of his fallen friends with references to the Confederate cause and of Divine purpose. Strangely for a man who writes elsewhere that “I was not a Christian then, and am but little better to-day” this particular story is invested with religious purpose and meaning, indicating the extent to which even among the agnostic the Confederate cause was becoming, in Charles Reagan Wilson’s phrase, a civil religion.¹⁸⁰

In another narrative playing of a “flashbulb” memory, Watkins recalls visiting a hospital in Atlanta. “It was the only field hospital that I saw during the whole war,” he writes, adding that “to-day I have no recollection . . . of ever seeing anything that I remember with more horror than . . . a pile of arms and legs, rotting and decomposing.” “I get sick today,” he wrote in 1882,

¹⁷⁹ Watkins, Co. Aytch, 95.

¹⁸⁰ Charles Reagan Wilson, Baptized in Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause, 1865-1920 (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1980).

“when I think of the agony, and suffering, and sickening stench and odor of dead and dying; of wounds and sloughing sores, caused by the deadly gangrene; of the groaning and wailing.” “I cannot describe it,” he added, but then goes on to give the following description of finding a dying friend, James Galbreath, an old Co. H soldier from a “large” and “very poor” family back home in Columbia, Tennessee. ““Hello, Galbreath, old fellow,” Watkins recalls saying, ““I thought you were in heaven long before this.””

He laughed a sort of dry, cracking laugh, and asked me to hand him a drink of water. I handed it to him. He then began to mumble and tell me something in a rambling and incoherent way, but all I could catch was for me to write to his family . . . I asked him if he was badly wounded. He only pulled down the blanket, that was all. I get sick when I think of it. The lower part of his body was hanging to the upper part by a shred, and all his entrails were lying on the cot with him, the bile and other excrements exuding from them, and they full of maggots. I replaced the blanket as tenderly as I could, and then said, “Galbreath, good-bye.’ I then kissed him on his lips and forehead, and left. As I passed on, he kept trying to tell me something, but I could not make out what he said, and fearing I would cause him to exert himself too much, I left.¹⁸¹

This mourning passage is again built around the memory of a traumatic image – in this case the sight of his friend’s torso, turned inside out, and barely connecting the upper and lower halves of his body. Watkins almost seems lost in grief while describing this incident and accounting for his helplessness to do anything for the dying soldier.¹⁸² But again, Watkins moves quickly from a state of grief to a commemorative memorialization of this ordinary soldier’s sacrifices. “The officers get the glory,” he remarks bitterly, “when the poor private win[s] battles by dint of sweat, hard marches, camp and picket duty, fasting and broken bones.” There is more than a touch of class hostility in the meaning that Watkins gives to James Galbreath’s death. “Men who

¹⁸¹ Watkins, *Co. Aytch*, 173.

never fired a gun,” he continues “nor killed a Yankee during the whole war, are to-day the heroes of the war.” “Those of us who stuck it out to the last, deserve more praise than the General.”

This sentiment was certainly not new to the 1880s, but the fact that it appears in print is – because as Gaines Foster has pointed out, in the early 1880s elites were losing control over Confederate memory, which was becoming much more centered on the ordinary foot soldier and located at camp meetings and reunions of old veterans. Watkins’ memoir appears just before the Southern Bivouac journal gives a subaltern corrective to the top-down view of the war perpetuated by the elite-dominated Southern Historical Society. The Confederate Veteran, which began publication from Nashville in 1893, continued to champion the ordinary soldier’s perspective and after the second edition is published in 1900 adopts Co. Aytch as one of the books offered at a discount to its subscribers.

Watkins strives, then, throughout his narrative to give a degree of composure to the terrible images of war he associates with the loss of his friends. And this leads to a second level of psychic composure: the author’s effort to find a voice that remains committed to the cause for which he fought while claiming a patriotic place for himself and his community of rebels within the postwar re-United States. Watkins is a reconciliationist – but he also writes harshly, at times unforgivably, about the barbarity of Yankees. He is a trenchant critic of Confederate leadership and governmental policies, yet also an unwavering believer in the virtues of “the cause”—which is always defined as defense of homeland, or defense of way of life. The contradictions within these positions appear to be irreconcilable, and they probably are—to the veterans of the 1880s as well as to the sons of the sons of the sons of Confederate veterans today. But what Watkins

¹⁸² The author’s daughter later remembered that her Father would often cry when he wrote some of his memories down early in the morning, and perhaps he cried during the effort to describe the

appears to be doing in Co. Aytch is not reconciling the issues of 1861; neither does he feel the need to assert and defend his claim upon American citizenship. The failure of Reconstruction in Tennessee had removed the relevance of these questions by the early 1880s. What Watkins is most concerned with is the restoration of pride – masculine and racial pride – as a source of identity for himself and his community of veterans. “We were a mere handful of devoted braves,” Watkins concludes in remembering his return to Columbia in the last year of the war. “Are we worthy to be called the sons of old Maury country? Or have we fought in vain?” He answers his own question in a way that gives the greatest sense of psychic composure: “We stood by our colors when sometimes it seemed that God himself had forsaken us” he writes, “. . . We have been true to our promise and our trust. . . . We have never forsaken our colors.”

AN URGENT ENTREATY

The first manufacturers of a Confederate social memory in Tennessee, then, were not the patrician leaders of the Tennessee Historical Society but the ordinary soldiers who told stories of their experiences as part of a struggle for psychic composure. The newspaper serialization of Co Aytch gave Sam Watkins’ memoir a wide regional circulation, but his raw sentiments needed the discipline and drill of a broader coordination. In the mid-1880s, J. Berrien Lindsley, ironically a Unionist supporter during the war, found himself the unlikely orchestrator of a Confederate social memory. Lindsley (1822-1897), educator, physician, Presbyterian minister, was a former chancellor of the University of Nashville. He had opposed secession but nonetheless served as a physician for both sides in Nashville during the war. Holding complex views of the conflict, he

mental images associated with the death of James Galbreath.

had by the 1880s developed stronger sympathies for the Confederate cause since the war. His work reveals to the historian the swirling currents of Confederate memory nearly two decades after the war and the concerted efforts of many to capture and control the past.

On January 8th, 1883, a week after the twentieth anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation, Dr. Lindsley published a prospectus for the Military Annals of Tennessee—a publication that promised to document Tennessee’s veterans from 1768 through 1882, focusing in particular upon the men who had served in the War of 1812, the Mexican War, and the Civil War. In its proposed form, Lindsley had initially announced that the book would consist of a journal of military events, regimental biographies, and a memorial roll of all Tennesseans who had fallen in the line of military duty. Lindsley had been engaged in the project since 1862 and proposed visiting every county in the State to interview veterans and gather local material. In the prospectus for the Military Annals, prominent individuals including former governor James D. Porter and Judge W. F. Cooper of Columbia, focused on the difficulty of retrieving a record of those who served the Confederacy and addressed a letter directly to all ex-Confederate Tennessee captains calling upon them to come forward with personal details and reminiscences. Former General Alexander P. Stewart added his “urgent entreaty to all ex-Confederates to lose no time in placing in Dr. Lindsley’s hands all the information they possess.” “It is in this way,” Stewart added, “that a truthful and reliable history can be prepared.” The prospectus also received endorsements from local educational leaders—including Bishop Quintard, ex-vice-chancellor of the University of the South, and Bishop H. N. McTyeire, president of the board of trust at Vanderbilt University.¹⁸³ Over the next several months Lindsley garnered material for the

¹⁸³ J. Berrien Lindsley, ed., The Military Annals of Tennessee: 1768-1882, prospectus (Nashville: J. M. Lindsley, 1883), copy in Joseph H. Fussell papers, Folder 5, TSLA.

project by speaking at countless public meetings, publicizing his work through newspaper articles, and appealing directly to company captains and other regimental officers for information.

When the first two volumes appeared in 1886—with a line-drawing of a gray-haired Nathan Bedford Forrest as a frontispiece—the War of 1812 and the Mexican War were shorn from the *Military Annals of Tennessee*, which was now exclusively concerned with Tennessee's Confederate experience, providing, in the editor's estimation, "a splendid tribute to the fame and memory of the Confederate soldiery of Tennessee." The project's narrowed focus appeared to be the result of overwhelming public interest in remembering and commemorating the Confederate experience.¹⁸⁴ An opening essay, by John M. Keating, indicated the *Military Annals'* function: to place the valor of Confederate soldiery within the context of Tennessee's reputation as a fighting state.¹⁸⁵ "The traditions of the State were all of them of a military character," argued Keating,

her foundations were laid before the Revolution in a military fort away up in the mountains that form her eastern boundary, and from the day in 1754 when the hardy pioneers had christened Fort Loudon until the close of the Mexican War her citizens had been conspicuous among the soldiery of the republic, and had been so quick to respond to every call for her defense as to win for her the enviable distinction of the 'Volunteer

¹⁸⁴ It was a project Lindsley intended to pursue with subsequent volumes giving "biographical notes of the prominent Confederates" and an index of some eight thousand officers and some sixty thousand soldiers. But no further volumes were ever published in the by-subscription-only series. John Berrien Lindsley, ed., The Military Annals of Tennessee. Confederate. First Series: Embracing a Review of Military Operations, with Regimental Histories and Memorial Rolls, Compiled from Original and Official Sources 2 vols., (Nashville: J. M. Lindsley & Co., Publishers, 1886).

¹⁸⁵ Keating, editor of the *Memphis Appeal*, was an ardent States' Right Democrat associated with Senator Isham G. Harris' political machine in the mid-1880s. See Cartwright, Triumph of Jim Crow, 163-64.

State.' . . . War was the primal condition of the early settler within her borders. His rifle was as essential to him as his plow.¹⁸⁶

By situating the Confederate military experience in the larger context of Tennessee history, Keating breached the dislocation caused by secession, civil war, and emancipation and suggested a powerful source of continuous and distinct identity. Unlike Kentuckians, he argued, who refused “to assume any other than a neutral position,” Tennesseans were “soldiers by blood and breeding, the heirs of a great renown” won for the state at King’s Mountain, New Orleans, during the Mexican War, and at the Alamo—“from which,” he remembered, “only one person—a woman born in Tennessee—was permitted to escape.”¹⁸⁷

The reclamation of Tennessee’s military heritage, Keating argued, was important because the political entity to which the soldiers of the late war had attached themselves “had passed . . . as completely out of existence as if it had never been born.” Keating further admitted that slavery, the “corner-stone” of the old civilization, “had been ground as if in the mills of the gods.”¹⁸⁸ All that remained, in his estimation, was “the memory of a struggle unsurpassed . . . the unparalleled heroism of troops.” This martial record of valor, self-sacrifice and determination

¹⁸⁶ J. M. Keating, “Tennessee for Four Years the Theater of War,” Military Annals of Tennessee, vol. I, 20.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 20-21.

¹⁸⁸ In his choice of language here Keating consciously echoed Alexander Stephens, who as vice president of the Confederate States of America had famously claimed in a 1861 speech that slavery (and by extension white supremacy) was the corner-stone of southern society: “Our new government is founded upon . . . its cornerstone rests, upon the great truth that the negro is not equal to the white man; that slavery . . . is his natural and normal condition.” Quoted in James M. McPherson, Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 244.

“against great odds”—and not the political memory of slavery, secession, and rebellion—was a narrative that could be made to fit into the *Military Annals of Tennessee*.¹⁸⁹

The bulk of the remainder of the edited volume contained regimental histories and memorial rolls of men who had died in service. Written either by former officers or local civic leaders, the ‘histories’ ranged from a single page listing those who had fallen to ten-page descriptions of a regiment’s muster, organization, engagements, and the odd biographical vignette of the distinguished and the dead. Some authors had clearly invested considerable time in assembling all the relevant facts. Alex W. Campbell of Jackson wrote that since the archives of the Thirty-third Tennessee Infantry were lost, he had been obliged to reconstruct a narrative from “fragmentary memoranda and the recollection of its surviving members widely scattered throughout the South and South-west.” Others were overwhelmed by the task set before them. G. H. Baskette of the Eighteenth Tennessee Infantry wrote of the “insuperable” difficulty of “writing a history in which all of the factors which make up the multiple [sic] of fate shall be given proper place and value.”¹⁹⁰ A short letter, published in the Annals from an officer of the Second Tennessee Infantry, gives a flavor of the grassroots gathering of information. “In reply to your postal of the 13th instant, I have to say that I have given you all the information in regard to the Second Tennessee Regiment that I deem worthy of a publication such as you propose. That nine-tenths of the rank and file of the regiment were “wild Irishmen,” you doubtless know, but better soldiers did not fight in the “Lost Cause.” I had a good deal of trouble with them, but they never failed to respond in the hour of danger. Whenever the command “Forward” was given it was replied to with a yell.” Another author (of the Twelfth Tennessee Infantry) wrote

¹⁸⁹ Annals, 19.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., ?, and 359.

that “we regret that the history of a regiment which bore itself so gallantly on so many fields . . . must be written mainly from memory, the only data at hand being an imperfect diary of . . . a private in the regiment.”¹⁹¹ From such fragmentary recollections were the Annals constructed.

Captain Joseph Love provided the history of the 48th Tennessee Infantry, which was largely raised in Maury County. After a short description of the unit’s organization he moved to eulogize the late Captain of Company E, George W. Gordon, “my ideal of a Christian soldier” who “would call the boys around him at the close of day and ask God’s blessing upon those under his command.” This set up a narrative that featured themes of heroism, persistence against overwhelming odds, sacrifice, renewal, loss, and nobility in surrender. The 48th had had a difficult war. Most of the regiment was captured at Ft. Donelson in February 1862, then exchanged in August of that year. After six months service guarding Port Hudson, Louisiana, they attempted to reach Jackson, Mississippi only to find that federal forces already occupied it. Retreating to the Gulf coast the unit was stationed at Mobile, on the Gulf coast, only moving north in May 1864 to check the advance of General Sherman’s troops. At Atlanta, Love recounted, the brigade “lost in killed and wounded over one-half of its men.” While describing the constant encounters with federal troops in 1864, Captain Love avoided recalling the terrors of the battlefield, the fears of the ordinary soldier in the line of fire, the plight of the wounded and dying. Instead he paused to describe “one incident connected with this engagement [at Jonesboro] that I would like to mention”:

When we reached Jonesboro two ladies living near came to our camp and reported that a squad of Federals had that morning plundered their house, and one had stolen various articles they prized very highly. Two rings given to them by a dead soldier brother had been taken from them. Sergt. Jo. Rainey, of Co. E, informed them that a wounded

¹⁹¹ J. A. Smith to J. Berrien Lindsley, November 17, 1882, reprinted in Annals, 173-74; 306-7.

Federal in the car had on rings such as they described. He went with them to the car, and they recognized the man at once and secured their rings. Next morning that poor wretch was dead.

In recounting this episode, Love captured key features of Lost Cause narratives in the early 1880s but also suggested that a reconciliationist vision of the war remained far-off. Yankee soldiers, he implied, were thieves and plunderers—even to the point of robbing grieving sisters of their martyred brother’s gift. “Billy Yank” got what he deserved, a wretched death amid the noxious smells and cries of a makeshift hospital train. By contrast, “Johnny Reb” tracked down the stolen goods and honorably restored symbols of betrothal and fidelity to two Southern ladies.

Upon returning to Tennessee as part of Hood’s invasion, the regiment missed the Battle of Franklin by remaining at their homes in Maury County. But as the Battle of Nashville raged on December 15 and 16, Captain Love “was put in command of a force to complete a fort on Hood’s left, on the Granny White pike.” Attacked by federal troops pursuing Hood’s army south from Nashville, Love’s men “stood heroically, many of them barefooted in the snow, and when overpowered fought with clubbed guns.” Following that incident, the regiment’s story was one of retreat, capture, and surrender. Captain Love chose not to mention the desertion that also depleted the regiments’ ranks at this time.¹⁹²

In constructing his narrative, Captain Love (like all the other regimental historians in this volume) generally stayed away from a discussion of the war’s cause, purpose, and meaning—that, one of them wrote, was the editor’s responsibility. Berrien passed this charge along to Alexander P. Stewart, Confederate Lieutenant General of the Army of Tennessee. Stewart’s lengthy piece was an underdeveloped justification for the war—suggesting that he was still

¹⁹² Joseph Love, “Forty-eight Tennessee Infantry (Voorhees’s), *Annals*, vol. II, 546-549.

grappling with the issues of both cause and consequence.¹⁹³ Declaring that “there can be no greater crime against humanity than a needless or an unjust war,” Stewart presented an apocalyptic vision of the war’s consequences—the overthrow of the Confederate government, the subjugation of the seceded states, the abolition of slavery, black enfranchisement, and the abolition of the right of the minority to secede from a Union in which its interests are not protected. But in narrating the journey from 1789 to 1860 he merely sketched the grievances of southern states over the protective tariff debate of the 1830s and the protection of slavery debates that followed the Mexican war in the 1850s. His argument was undeveloped on both constitutional and political grounds. Whereas in 1881 Jefferson Davis, in a two-volume memoir, had vigorously asserted the South’s constitutional right, defended slavery, and placed blame for the war wholly with the North and the rise of the Republican Party, Stewart’s 1883 brief was much less emphatic, contained no *apologia* for slavery, and captured the divisions of allegiances in Tennessee much more clearly than he defended the righteousness of the South’s cause.¹⁹⁴

The people of Tennessee, Stewart observed, “did not desire war,” they were “not yet ready for secession in January 1861” and eventually supplied volunteer troops to both sides “for her people were divided.” Stewart’s causal analysis behind Tennessee’s tortuous route to secession and war rarely rose above the recitation of facts cribbed from George Bancroft’s History of the United States—except to assert the innocence of Tennessee secessionists in defending their state from the aggression of the North. “They had done every thing possible to them to prevent secession and to avert war,” Stewart asserted. “They were convinced that an

¹⁹³ Alex. P. Stewart, “The Army of Tennessee: A Sketch,” in Lindsley, ed., Annals, vol. 1, 55-112.

¹⁹⁴ Jefferson Davis, The Rise and Fall of the Confederate Government 2 vols. (1881; rpt., New York: Da Capo Press, 1990).

attitude of neutrality was impossible, as soon became evident in the case of Kentucky. They must take sides.” Stewart’s less than robust defense, while perhaps accurately reflecting the confused and overwhelmed political sensibilities of 1861, compared weakly with the cogent and forceful defense of his former commander-in-chief, Jefferson Davis. Not until the late 1880s would formerly Confederate jurists in Tennessee articulate a reasoned and deliberative defense of the constitutional right of secession.¹⁹⁵

Alexander Stewart’s sketch of the war’s consequences was also underdeveloped. Echoing Lincoln’s second inaugural address, Stewart argued that “it is doubtless true that through the overruling providence of God great virtues may be born of war.”¹⁹⁶ But what were these virtues? Stewart apparently did not share Lincoln’s celebration at Gettysburg of a perpetual Union and on the continuance of a democratic government. His emphasis in 1883 was more local and personal. It concerned the men directly under his command. “No portion of the Confederate armies proved more loyal to their cause and the flag which symbolized it than did the soldiers of Tennessee,” Stewart asserted. Moreover, “in perfect keeping with the heroic and martial spirit for which they were famed,” Stewart believed that the course of Tennessee’s Confederates “was as unselfish and magnanimous as any of which history contains a record.” Driven three times from their state, “they never once thought of deserting their flag or giving up the contest.” The “great virtue” of the war for General Stewart was the opportunity it gave

¹⁹⁵ Stewart, “Army of Tennessee,” 55-62.

¹⁹⁶ For a good recent reading of Lincoln’s second inaugural, see David Herbert Donald, Lincoln (London: Jonathan Cape, 1995), 565-68.

Tennesseans to prove their valor, manhood, and loyalty. “The State of Tennessee has no reason to be ashamed of the conduct of her sons who espoused the Southern cause.”¹⁹⁷

In the Military Annals of Tennessee, then, we see the makings of a community memory, a therapeutic exercise in self-justification for Tennessee’s Confederate veterans. Their reputations were secure not so much as for what they fought for as by the manner in which they fought—demonstrating the finest traditions of the “Volunteer State.” But this was a work born of a forgetful consciousness, one that carefully picked out the details of Confederate heroism from the bloody mess of Tennessee’s Civil War past. Where, for example, were the 40,000 or so white Tennesseans, mostly from eastern counties, who had fought for the Union army between 1861 and 1865? And where were the 20,000 black Tennesseans, mostly from western and middle Tennessee, who had served in the regiments of the United States Colored Troops during the last two years of the war? When the U.S. government began publishing its voluminous Official Record of the War of the Rebellion in 1887 the Federal annals of civil war in Tennessee looked remarkably different from the strictly Confederate remembrance of Dr. Lindsley’s volumes. Even within the parameters of Confederate experience, Lindsley’s volume was an astonishingly incomplete record when compared with the Official Record. The OR detailed the evacuation of Nashville by Confederate governor Isham G. Harris and the institution of military rule under Andrew Johnson; it offered glimpses drawn from both Union and Confederate archives of the political divisions and shifting loyalties among Tennesseans; it contained extensive reports on bushwhacking and guerilla activity throughout the Middle Tennessee heartland; the OR also documented the dissolution of slavery, the emergence of contraband camps, and the organization of the U.S.C.T. around Nashville; and it featured commentary from

¹⁹⁷ Stewart, “Army of Tennessee,” quotations from 62-63.

both sides on the collapse of the Army of Tennessee after Hood's disastrous raid on Nashville in 1864. Instead of detailing and defining a *civil* war, the Military Annals of Tennessee presented triumphalistic histories of Confederate regiments, written or sketched by veterans themselves, stressing the heroism and self-sacrifice of the white men involved in the move to secede from the United States. It was an orchestration of a grassroots Confederate social memory, one that excluded the causes, divisions, and consequences of the war by focusing on the features that Confederate veterans wished to stress and share with their kinfolk.

IN SEARCH OF AMUSEMENT

A spirit of reunion was also moving some former Confederates to share and stress aspects of their reading of history with a Northern audience. The enduring peace assured by the post-Reconstruction political settlement of 1877 produced an increasingly depoliticized national context for nostalgia about myths of the Old South and the Confederate cause.

One of the most unlikely stories, however, concerned the Reconstruction-era Ku Klux Klan, a saga born in Tennessee amidst the violence of the early post-war years. Northern journalists had used stories of the Ku Klux as evidence that former Confederates were secretly working to undermine the political results of the war and render the Southern states ungovernable by the new Republican governments. (See discussion in Chapter 2.) The Klan had gone down in Northern memory as a band of outlaws and guerillas, an unacceptable insurgency that had been suppressed only after irreparable damage had been done to Reconstruction.

In the mid-1880s, however, the Northern editors of the Century magazine in New York indicated their willingness to accept a Southern interpretation of the Ku Klux saga when it accepted a 'history' of the original Klan from two residents of Pulaski, Tennessee. The authors

of the piece were in fact associates of the first Klan: John C. Lester, who was one of six founders of the Klan in Pulaski, Tennessee, and Rev. David L. Wilson, a Pulaski minister and close associate of the founding Klansmen. The article featured an account of the ‘origin, growth, and disbandment’ of the Ku Klux, a book which the authors published privately in Nashville. Later that year an abstract of the book appeared under the Rev. Wilson’s byline in the July 1884 issue of the Century magazine, just a few months before that monthly periodical opened up its pages to a three-year series of celebratory Civil War stories.¹⁹⁸ The Ku Klux Klan, Lester and Wilson explained, was founded as a social club by former Confederate veterans seeking “diversion” and “amusement” and both the name and the garb of the order were dreamt up as part of the group’s harmless tomfoolery. Only months later, once conservatives in Tennessee were under a punitive disfranchisement order of William G. Brownlow’s Radical Republican government in Nashville, did the Pulaski Klan change its spots and become an expansive terror group—“a band of ‘Regulators’” in the authors’ phrase—giving voice and effect to a disfranchised and oppressed class of whites antagonized by black freedom and opposed to Republican rule.¹⁹⁹

The Century’s eagerness to publish an account of what it called “the somewhat trivial origin” of the Klan rested on the narrative’s “inherent marks of authenticity” and its novel interest to readers “at the North who remember the name Ku Klux only as the synonym for midnight murder and political infamy.” Ku Klux narratives, popularized and embellished by

¹⁹⁸ D. L. Wilson, “The Ku Klux Klan, Its Origin, Growth, and Disbandment,” Century 28 (July 1884). The Century’s Civil War series ran from November 1884 to November 1887; it was published subsequently as a four-volume set, Robert Underwood Johnson and Clarence Clough Buel, eds., Battles and Leaders of the Civil War (New York: Century Co., 1887-88).

¹⁹⁹ John C. Lester and David L. Wilson, Ku Klux Klan, Its Origin, Growth, and Disbandment intro. & notes by Walter L. Fleming (New York: Neale Publishing Co., 1905; orig. pub. Nashville: Wheeler, Osborn & Duckworth, 1884), quotation from p. 71.

sensationalistic journalism between 1868 and 1872, had provided Northern commentators a means of mapping the endemic violence of the postwar South and framing it with sectarian political purposes. In 1884, with Reconstruction over, Lester and Wilson's account provided a history that could reassuringly date the origins of Ku Klux violence, separating it from slavery, secession, or any nefarious purpose other than a reasoned response to oppression. The Century's role in developing a literature of sectional reconciliation is well known.²⁰⁰ But the memories of Reconstruction were still too fresh in 1884 for a complete acquittal of the Klan. In an editorial accompanying Wilson's piece the Century reiterated the North's "lasting abhorrence of the methods" of the Ku Klux and expressed skepticism on the authors account of its origin. "When we are told," an accompanying editorial argued, "that many members of the Ku Klux were originally in search of amusement, and did not premeditate outrage, terrorism, and murder in giving wide-spread organization to the Klan, we cannot help thinking that they might have stilled the evil power they had raised if their hearts had not been fired by a general purpose to subjugate the blacks." Yet a language of racial hierarchy and sectional reconciliation quickly supplanted both a knowledge of slavery-conditioned racism as well as memories of Northern support for black civil rights. Most readers, the editors assumed, had come to regard the Klan's effect "with lessening disapproval" and with an understanding that "the whites had great provocation." "Men are beginning to accept the success of the Ku Klux revolution as being in the result the inevitable solution of an anomalous political situation," the Century explained.

²⁰⁰ Indeed, the periodical's Civil War series, David W. Blight notes, was "quite purposefully intended to shape a culture of reunion" with the editors avoiding topics of causation, consequence, secession, slavery, and race. David W. Blight, Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 173-81, quotation from p.175.

Here was a state of affairs, it is now plain to see, as perfectly arranged to breed trouble as the juxtaposition of fire and power. No race on the face of the earth would have accepted such moral and political subjugation to another race regarded as of a lower type, and which had just been transported from barbarism, or recently reared out of it.²⁰¹

The Rev. Wilson's narrative was well-crafted to appeal to the editorial opinion of the Century. He criticized the excessive violence of some Ku Klux groups while seeking to explain the intolerable conditions under which whites were living at the time. It was as if the political heat of Reconstruction was being defused with this exchange before the table could be laid with issue after issue of healing stories of Civil War heroism – on both sides.

A key element of white veterans' reconciliation in the 1880s was an acceptance that both sides had fought honorably for principles they believed to have been right. Wilson's account of the innocuous or "trivial" origins of the Klan told a story that kept the honor of his Pulaski neighbors intact while reassuring Northerners that the Klan had not been the rebellion reborn (as so many newspapers at the time had charged) but an understandable reaction to intolerable oppression. "The originators of the Klan were not meditating treason or lawlessness in any form," the Rev. Wilson pleaded. "Their only object "was amusement—'only this, and nothing more.'"²⁰²

NOT IN VAIN

While the Century was prepared to concede some ground to the apologists of the Ku Klux, some Tennessee ex-Confederates felt the time that they needed to get their own analysis of events straight before reconciling with the North. Moreover, they were increasingly dissatisfied by the

²⁰¹ "New Light on the Ku Klux Klan," The Century 28 (July 1884).

tendency of veterans to document mere details in their acts of commemoration and reminiscence and called for a more assertive defense of the Confederacy. One of these critics was C. D. Elliott, the former chaplain of Maney's Brigade and the founding secretary of the Tennessee Confederate Memorial and Historical Association. "In these later days," Elliott argued in 1886, "Confederates have been bold enough in Journals and in Addresses, to tell where these Confederates camped; how they marched, in sunshine and in snow . . . or to speak of any other Military Doings, and even to compare these Doings with similar Acts of the Federal army." Such activities, this author remarked, were the result of a necessary and understandable sentiment to record the sacrifices of the soldier and the cold facts of the past. But what was missing on these "Confederate Occasions" was a spirited explanation and defense of the reasons why Tennesseans fought to secede from the Union. Only by remembering the "Reasons" for the actions of 1860 and 1861 could Tennesseans truly defend the "honor" of their Confederate fathers and the "good name" of their Confederate mothers. To fail in this duty, Elliott argued, meant in effect to say that the war "was in vain, for the good of no one." Moreover, merely sentimental memories ceded control over the meaning of the Civil War to the Republican Party and to northern veterans' associations. Both consequences suggested that the memorialization of Tennessee's Confederate past was insecure and under constant threat from without.²⁰³

To C. D. Elliott, the "one single 'issue'" that made "that war unavoidable" was the fanatical union of moral and civic law, of "ministers meddling with political concerns." Whereas ministers in the South, in Elliott's recollection, would never had presumed to use moral precepts

²⁰² Lester & Wilson, Ku Klux Klan, 67, 59.

²⁰³ Chaplain C. D. Elliott, A Plea for the Tennessee Confederate Memorial and Historical Association (Nashville: C. R. & H. H. Hatch Printers, 1886), copy in TSLA.

to instruct their people on political issues, in the North “Abolition Religionists and Higher Law politics were joined in unholy Wedlock” within the Republican Party.²⁰⁴ Elliott continued his tortured reasoning (in tortured syntax) to give an explanation of the defensive move of secessionists:

Thus you see, confining your thoughts to this one “Issue” in the light of History—the one army invading these States was the army of Fanaticism in Religion seeking to disturb the silence of this valley, and to pollute with things profane “the Certain places” of our prayer and worship. The “other” defending was the army of “Soul-liberty,” the right from God of every member of his Church, the enjoyment of which is secured to the most humble citizen by the Constitution and Laws of these United States.²⁰⁵

Elliott’s plea for a more assertive defense of the war’s causes resonated widely within regional culture. This defense, unlike the remembering of Lindsley’s Military Annals, came not from the grassroots but was imposed by elites, generally lawyers and political leaders, onto an emerging network of veterans’ organizations. Though a culture of sectional reconciliation had advanced considerably by the late 1880s, national affairs every now and then kicked up an issue that partisans could use for their own benefit. In 1887, for example, a dispute occurred over President Grover Cleveland’s inclination to return captured battle flags to southern communities. Spokesmen for the Grand Army of the Republic, the northern veterans’ association, voiced strong disapproval in terms that suggested to white southerners that the North did not consider their fight to have been for an honorable and just cause. A 25th anniversary reunion at Gettysburg the following year (1888) failed to attract sufficient numbers of Confederate veterans

²⁰⁴ Elliott recalled the occasion before the war when the pastor of the Second Presbyterian Church in Nashville was hounded from the city when he had declared that “it is a sin to own, buy, or sell slaves, or in any way to uphold slavery, and it is my duty, in Christ’s name, to preach again all sin.” Ibid., 7.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 12-13.

and generated anxiety among northern vets that their own reputations were at stake if too much honor was given to the fighting men of the South.²⁰⁶

Charges that the war-time acts of Confederate were less than honorable and that their cause was unconstitutional or unjust touched a raw nerve for Tennessee's elite Confederates and ordinary veterans alike. For C.D. Elliott, it would be better to cease all fraternal exchanges with Federal veterans "until we can learn . . . to give the 'whys,' the 'Reasons,'" for Southern actions. A full justification for Confederate actions, Elliott argued, had "not been given discussed as [it] might have been, and as the Truth of history demanded."²⁰⁷ Within two years of Elliott's plea, two notable veterans spoke directly to these anxieties and attempted to provide a full justification of Confederate actions.. "I am not willing that my children . . . shall look back upon my memory as though I were a base-hearted traitor," argued Ed Baxter before an October 1889 meeting of the Tennessee Association of Confederate Soldiers in Nashville. "Nor am I willing that my children . . . shall hang their heads in humiliation, and acknowledge that they are the descendants of a conquered race." The South, Baxter asserted, had a lawful property right in her slaves and that the North was refusing to abide by its constitutional obligations and instead practiced a "war upon the institution of slavery."²⁰⁸

The year before, Peter Turney, a former Confederate colonel and the Chief Justice of the Tennessee Supreme Court, had delivered an even fuller justification for secession in a speech to the Frank Cheatham Bivouac of the same Association. "We cannot and must not in anywise in

²⁰⁶ For a discussion of these developments, see Blight, Race and Reunion, 202-203.

²⁰⁷ Elliott, A Plea for the Tennessee Confederate Memorial, 5.

²⁰⁸ The True Status of the Confederate Soldier, Address of Ed. Baxter, before the Tennessee Association of Confederate Soldiers at Nashville, October 3, 1889 (Nashville: Oster & Webb, 1883), copy in TSLA.

the least sympathize with that spirit of seeming apology we sometimes meet . . . otherwise it would be unlawful and immoral to attempt to keep alive and perpetuate the memories of those who fell, or to preserve for history the records of their deeds of heroism.”²⁰⁹ Both Baxter and Turney (a future governor) provided a more coherent legal defense of secession than Alexander Stewart had been able to give in his 1883 essay for the Military Annals. Turney’s legal defense connected with the constitutional defense of secession by figures such as Alexander H. Stephens, Jefferson Davis, Robert L. Dabney, and Jubal A. Early.²¹⁰ It rested upon a compact theory of Union, positing that the Constitution of 1787 was merely a compact between sovereign states that were free to surrender their support of the Union at any time. Although leading political figures like Davis and Stephens had been making these points since the war’s conclusion, senior political and legal figures in Tennessee only began to articulate the constitutional defense of secession in the mid to late 1880s. It was simultaneously an effort to direct the thinking about the Confederacy at veterans’ reunions and to provide historical justification for the resurgence in states’ rights thinking after the Civil Rights Act of 1875. At reunions and memorial day parades, speakers from the mid-1880s onwards expanded their traditional eulogies to Confederate dead into elaborate legal defenses of the cause they had been fighting for.

²⁰⁹ The South Justified, an address delivered before Frank Cheatham Bivouac No. 1, of the Association of Confederate Soldiers, Tennessee Division, August 18th, 1888 (Nashville: Albert B. Tavel, 1888), copy in TSLA. This speech was reprinted by the Southern Historical Society (SHS) as “They Wore the Gray—The Southern Cause Vindicated,” SHS Papers 16 (1888), 319-339.

²¹⁰ See Thomas J. Pressly, Americans Interpret Their Civil War (New York: The Free Press, 1962), Ch. 2, esp. 110-126.

FALL IN!

Newspapers played a crucial role in ensuring that the commemorative instincts of a few were communicated to the many. In 1891, for example, the Columbia Herald regarded it as the “plain duty” of local whites as “southern people” to contribute to the Jefferson Davis monument fund following the former Confederate president’s death. “Let us not bring reproach upon ourselves in failing to honor his memory. Let not his fate be lamented of having fallen among a people insensible to his sacrifices and a nation unworthy of his services.”²¹¹ Such pleas, repeated countless times across the heartland demonstrate the power of print culture to sustain an imagined community of Confederate nationalists decades after the nation’s destruction.²¹² Although the former Confederate president had never returned to public life (unlike Tennessee’s secessionist governor, Senator Isham G. Harris) his reputation among southern whites had improved drastically in the 1870s and early 1880s. By the time of his death, as David Blight has argued, Davis had emerged “as a hero, a symbol of the South’s ‘suffering’ both during the war and through Reconstruction.”²¹³ His celebrated tour of the South in 1886 in the company of his daughter, Winnie, capped a rehabilitation that was one of the most remarkable political comebacks in American history. His death in December 1889 was mourned by whites across the

²¹¹ “The Davis Monument,” Columbia Herald, May 29, 1891. For celebrations of Davis after his death

²¹² In a review of regional newspapers in Middle Tennessee, Joseph C. Kiger noted that Davis was seen “as the master spirit of the Lost Cause. Kiger counted at least five editorial eulogies to Davis in the Maury Democrat after his death. Kiger, “Social Thought as Expressed in Rural Newspapers of Middle Tennessee, 1878-1898,” unpub. Ph.D. diss (Vanderbilt University, 1950).

²¹³ Blight, Race and Reunion, 266.

former Confederate states, and no less so in Tennessee than in South Carolina or in Mississippi, Davis' home state. The fundraising event for Davis' memorial would be headed by Sumner A. Cunningham, a Middle Tennessee veteran and newspaperman who in the 1890s became one of the leading architects of a mature Lost Cause ideology.

Davis' rehabilitation was part of a broader movement among veterans of an open celebration of their Confederate heritage during the 1880s. As a generation of white southerners born after the war came of age, veterans were especially concerned that their secessionist efforts of the 1860s be properly understood and contextualized. Debates surrounding the passage of segregation and disfranchisement statutes were conducted at a time, during the late 1880s and early 1890s, when Confederate memory was entering a new and mature phase of expression. A cult of grieving remembrance and anguished loss, which had been felt by all Confederate communities and championed in particular by cultural figures in Virginia, was giving way to a more assertive and celebratory form of memory within a national culture of reconciliation. As Gaines Foster has noted, an increased openness to Northern veterans and an "emphasis on the experience and camaraderie of battle replaced the Virginians' militant sectionalism and obsession with the war's issues and outcome."²¹⁴ This neo-confederatism had its genesis in the local reunions of veterans that grew in number and organization throughout the 1880s. The function of these events was, on one level, to revisit the camaraderie of service. But on a deeper level they served to restore and reassert a sense of white, masculine superiority largely through commemoration of the ordinary Confederate soldier's service and sacrifice.

Confederate veterans in Middle Tennessee had been gathering in reunions since the 1860s. Since companies were often raised in the same neighborhood, the vets had plenty of

opportunity to get together and talk about their experiences—at the courthouse, on market days, at church, or in fraternal groups and societies. The postwar ku klux groups had grown out of wartime friendships and alliances – but even if veterans eschewed politics at gatherings during Reconstruction their gatherings came under the critical eye of a vigilant Republican and northern press. In 1865 veterans of the neighborhood around Rome, Wilson County, gathered for a picnic, but as a sympathetic local historian noted, “partisans of the North determined to break up the merrymaking.”²¹⁵ Most of these early events were extensions of neighborhood social rounds – but interest in Confederate reunions was sufficient by the early 1870s to attract thousands. Our Wilson Co. chronicler gives us a flavor of these early events:

On a quiet evening in 1871 or 1872, Capt. F.S. Harris and W.M. McCorkle were chatting, in front of a Lebanon store. As a result of the chat 7,000 people attended a reunion of the old 7th. It created quite a sensation over the country. Northern newspapers proclaiming in flaming headlines, “An Uprising of the Rebels at Lebanon, Tennessee.”²¹⁶

The first recurring organized reunion by Confederate veterans in Middle Tennessee was affiliated with the 20th Tennessee Confederate Infantry. On 18 October 1877 a reunion in Williamson County of the 20th extended invitations to prominent Union veterans. Gen. Gates P. Thurston could not attend but was pleased “to note your disposition to give ‘our side’ a friendly greeting, which we cordially reciprocate.” Former Union Gen. James P. Brownlow, son of divisive Reconstruction Gov. Brownlow, did attend.²¹⁷ The following month, November 1877, three thousand person gathered at a reunion of Eleventh and Forty-Ninth Confederate Infantry

²¹⁴ Foster, Ghosts of the Confederacy, 89.

²¹⁵ Dixon Merritt, ed., The History of Wilson County: Its Land and Its Life (Nashville: Benseon Printing Company, 1961), 355.

²¹⁶ Ibid., 356.

regiments near Dickson Station. Their former regimental commander, Gen. Gordon, addressed the throng:

From my heart I am glad to meet you, after a separation of twelve weary and eventful years. On seeing you again many endearing though melancholy recollections rush upon me. They are not all here. Where are they? . . . The first thought that occurs to us at these reunions, is that of our sacred dead—our loved, our buried, our unforgotten. I say unforgotten, for we never can forget them. They are dead, but not lost; gone, but not forgotten. . . .

After reminding the men formerly under his command of the battles they had fought together, Gordon concluded that “I do not remember that I ever gave an order, no matter how dangerous or desperate, that was not obeyed.” Then the most dramatic moment of the proceedings occurred:

And here is a visible testimony of the fact. [The speaker here drew from his bosom the black’ened and tattered fragments of a Confederate battle-flag and held it up to the view of his old comrades, who were much affected.] There is your history epitomized, Do you recognize this shattered relic’ [Cries of “Yes, Yes”] You have seen it before, you have seen it in camp on the march, in the field and amid the clash of arms and the carnage of battle. You have seen it float and you have seen it fall. I thought it would be an object of interest to you to see it again to-day, and so I have brought it with me. . . . It passed through twelve terrific battles and many minor engagements. . . . Here is still seen upon it the blood of the gallant Dan, the ensign, who fell and died upon it at the battle of Franklin, where so many of our comrades fought their last battle. . . . It floats no more; but the glorious, though mournful, memories that cluster round it still make it clear to our eyes and hearts. It was brought home by Capt. Ed. Clark, noble soldier, who is since dead, and confided to me in the fall of 1865. For twelve years I have sacredly kept it, and, God willing, I shall keep it til life’s little scene with me shall close. . . .²¹⁸

The tattered flag, like the empty sleeves and pant legs that hid the disfigurement of many veterans, symbolized at once the valor, sacrifice, and endurance of the Confederate warrior.

Whereas the grave and the headstone had provided the object of Confederate memorialization in

²¹⁷ “The Twentieth in Tennessee,” Nashville Daily American 20 October 1877.

²¹⁸ “Comrade in Arms,” Nashville Daily American 2 November 1877. Editorial insertions in the original.

the early postwar years, the tattered battle flag now became imbued with the meaning and significance of the Confederate cause. Gen. Gordon had begun his remarks with a grieving nod toward those absent friends “dead on the field of honor,” but his speech did not climax with the standard eulogies for the dead but with a reinforced sense of a righteous cause not lost. “In war we did our best,” Gordon concluded in rousing tones, “and what we believed was right, and we have no apologies [sic] to make. Now, let us do our best in peace, and *win the victories in that field that we lost in the other.*”²¹⁹

Gordon’s rallying cry was a rhetorical ploy used by the organizers of the Association of Confederate Soldiers, founded in 1887, which eventually became the United Confederate Veterans in 1889. The “malignity and hatred” of northern critics, argued John P. Hickman, one of the main organizers of Tennessee’s Confederate veterans, brought the men into line once more. The “false and unjust history” of the “partisans of the North”, Hickman suggested in a 1893 account of the movement’s origins, had “drove them from under cover, and forced them in defense of their own names and the reputation of their descendants.”²²⁰ The fact was, however, that veterans had started to come together in the 1880s not because of outside provocation but on account of social and psychological compulsion. Whether they chatted at the country store or wrote columns for the local newspaper, veterans such as Sam Watkins felt compelled to revisit the events of the Confederate service and tell stories in a way that provided the greatest amount of emotional comfort and psychic ease. Moreover, the rapid social and economic change brought about by emancipation and by a renewed commercial ethos produced uneasy feelings in veterans more comfortable with the settled patrician world of their antebellum youth. At the end

²¹⁹ Ibid., emphasis added.

²²⁰ John P. Hickman, The American 14 May 1893.

of the 1880s, as historian Gaines Foster has noted, an “extreme enthusiasm for and extensive participation in Confederate activities” developed. “For the next twenty years or so,” Foster writes in Ghosts of the Confederacy, “southerners celebrated the Confederacy as never before or since.”²²¹ Middle Tennessee’s Confederate veterans participated so strongly in this revivalism that it is plausible to claim that effective leadership of the Lost Cause passed from Virginia to Tennessee in the 1890s. As well as developing strong networks of veterans, the Confederate Veteran magazine, founded in 1893, was published in Nashville and in 1897 the city hosted the largest Confederate reunion of the decade (see Chapter 5).

Reunions provided an occasion to walk the line in what Watkins called “a forgetful reverie” of the Confederate cause, to situate oneself back in the grooves of war-time experiences and to feel through bodily reenactment the emotional force of the years of struggle and sacrifice. As Gary Gallagher has noted, “Reunions combined social, political, and memorial dimensions, providing an excellent forum for communities to fabricate a collective memory of the past and teach younger people about the sacrifices and accomplishments of the Confederate generation.” The reunions were what Paul Connerton has described as “sites of commemoration” where the past folded into the present. It was at such sites, Connerton writes, that “temporal differences was denied and the existence of the same, the ‘true’ and ‘authentic’ reality, was annually disclosed.” As veterans pulled on the old grey tunic and recalled through reenactment the experiences of the 1860s, their pasts were transfigured into fixed and immutable form. Historical

²²¹ Foster, Ghosts, 6.

contingency and agency were expunged. Human suffering and sacrifice became ever glorious and honorable.²²² .

First in line was the Frank Cheatham Bivouac of Nashville veterans, which had been formed in 1887. Meeting in Pythian Hall, the monthly assembly swelled from fifty attendees to over 300 by 1900 as some of Nashville's most prominent ex-Confederates saw the benefits of membership. "Great good" had been achieved, a commentator observed in 1890, by "relieving the necessities of its members, burying their dead, collecting important war material, etc."²²³ Members of the Cheatham Bivouac had previously formed in 1885 the Tennessee Confederate Memorial and Historical Association. Originally the goal was to fund a commemorative monument to Confederate valor and included plans to care for Confederate graves, but the Association also hoped to encourage the preparation of historical records. The Association of Confederate Soldiers was formed to meet the wider goals. Insight into the tenor of the association is provided by the account of an address in 1889 at one of their monthly meetings where the speaker, G. H. Baskette, expounded on the subject of 'Johnny Reb', the ordinary foot soldier, and observed that "nearly twenty-eight years have passed since the first gun of the great conflict was fired." He continued:

Of those who have survived, the men who were in middle life then are three score and ten or over, white haired and infirm. Even the boys who had not reached their majority are now in the prime of middle age. When twenty-eight more years have rolled by there will be but one here and there to tell the story of actual experience in that mighty struggle. A few more years added and there will be left none who took a part in one of the most

²²² Gallagher & Nolan, eds., The Myth of the Lost Cause, 5; Paul Connerton, How Societies Remember (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), ch. 2, quotation from p.43

²²³ J. Wooldridge, ed., History of Nashville, Tenn. . . . (Nashville: H. W. Crew, 1890).

memorable and bloody dramas in the annals of the world. Let us see to it before we pass away, that those who come after us may have the truth of history.²²⁴

Beginning in 1888—i.e. a year before the foundation of the UCV—the Cheatham Bivouac held annual reunions under the banner of the Association of Confederate Soldiers. At the second annual reunion in 1889 a feast of “barbecued shoat and lamb, bread, pickles, cakes, fruits etc.” left a crowd of five thousand, including 500 veterans, “fully satisfied.” A note of reconciliation was struck by the Nashville Evening Herald in remarking editorially that “even those who did not believe in the cause for which they fought owe them a debt of gratitude for the noble examples of heroism and unimpeachable courage that they leave as the common heritage of Americans.”²²⁵ In remarks made by Gen. W. H. Jackson, Chair of the Committee on Arrangements, the prospects of the Confederate cause had never looked so good. “The ultimate and as yet undeveloped effects of our late war upon the future of the South are not likely to prove such an unmixed or unmitigated evil as we, in the bitterness and woe of defeat, at first seemed to think, and will yet, under the providence of God, prove a blessing in disguise.” No longer were whites responsible for the care of slaves, and having been tried by war have come out of it “purified as by fire” and were now entering “upon an era in the South to be marked by the highest spiritual, intellectual and financial growth of any section of this country.”²²⁶

The United Confederate Veterans (UCV) was formed in 1889 following a meeting in New Orleans of former Confederate cavalrymen from Tennessee, Mississippi, and Louisiana.

²²⁴ “Johnny Reb,” Nashville Banner 12 January 1889.

²²⁵ Nashville Evening Herald, 3 October 31889.

²²⁶ Second Annual Reunion of the Association Confederate Soldiers, Tennessee Division, held at Nashville, Tenn., October 3, 1889 (Nashville: Foster & Webb, 1889). Copy in Hickman Papers, TSLA.

Grassroots support for the UCV was never as strong in the South as northern support for the Grand Army of the Republic, but then the latter organization served a political purpose above and beyond the “strictly social, literary, historical, and benevolent” objectives of the UCV.²²⁷ The Tennessee UCV disavowed any political purposes, but their social and political power was evident in their successful lobbying for the State of Tennessee to appropriate funds for Confederate veterans in 1891. Confederates, of course, were excluded from the provisions of the Federal pension acts. By the early 1890s a number of former Confederate states were considering their obligation to those who, as Tennessee governor John P. Buchanan put it, “bravely laid down all for the Lost Cause” in “obedience to the commands of the State.” The Federal government, Buchanan noted, “has spent millions in pensions, in monuments, and in ornamenting the graves of its soldiers.” The inference was that Tennessee alone would have to take care of its sick and needy Confederate veterans.²²⁸ The result was that in two years 1,107 pension applications had been reviewed by a Board that included three ex-Confederate soldiers recommended by the Tennessee Division of Confederate Veterans, though only 50% were approved. The State appropriation increased to \$75k a year in 1893. Technically both Federal and Confederate veterans were eligible – but in reality only Confederates applied since Union veterans were eligible for the more generous federal pension provision. Applicants had to satisfy two conditions – were they incapable of ‘making a support’ for themselves, and was their service

²²⁷ Ayers, Promise, 334. The GAR drew half of all veterans into its camps, whereas the UCV fell far short of that. Quotation on UCV objectives from Wooldridge, History of Nashville, Tenn.

²²⁸ Governor Buchanan’s message of February 11, 1891 reprinted in Robert H. White, Messages of the Governors of Tennessee 1883-1899 vol. 7 (Nashville: Tennessee Historical Commission, 1967), 380-381.

honorable? The burden of proof rested with the veteran.²²⁹ Special enmity was reserved for deserters, who were excluded from the Pensions provision as well as from membership in the UCV. As John P. Hickman, one of the veterans on the Pension Board, remarked, “too many panegyrics cannot be bestowed upon the true Confederate soldiers, nor can too many anathemas be hurled at the heads of the deserters. I love the true Confederate soldier; I respect the true Federal soldier, but I detest and abhor the deserters from both armies.”²³⁰

LYNCHING GREEN WELLS

The abuse of deserters, however, was largely a rhetorical device, since in truth many pensioners hid an AWOL within their record of service. But the real ‘other’ upon whom both physical abuse and slander was brought to bear were African American men. The same newspapers that contributed so forcefully to the debates about political moves to disenfranchise blacks and curtail their civil rights in the courts were also littered with headlines that both revealed and reveled in the violence against African American bodies that lay at the heart of the system of segregation. The main import of these messages, sunk at the bottom of newspaper columns about society affairs and national politics, was that blacks used the freedom and autonomy of the post-war world to rob, rape, and defraud whites—and often members of their own community. Whites warned each other of the need for vigilance and a swift retribution against black crime, and if they had to go outside the judicial system to get it then that was justifiable as an expression of

²²⁹ Pensions for soldiers’ widows added in 1905. Blacks could apply after 1921. For “those colored men who served as servants and cooks in the Confederate Army in the War Between the States” (1921 Public Acts, Ch. 129).

²³⁰ “Our Confederate Dead, Address of Capt. John P. Hickman on Decoration Day at Farmington,” undated newspaper clipping, Hickman Papers, TSLA. N.b address noted on clipping as 16 May 1893.

the will of the people in a *Herrenvolk* democracy. In the late 1880s and early 1890s the emergence of Confederate heritage festivals and reunions was accompanied by the public staging of violent retribution against black transgressors.

As we have seen in earlier chapters, white-on-black violence, while no longer sanctioned by white ownership of the black body, had remained a mainstay of post-war social life. Though after the war local blacks had created autonomous spaces in which to live, work, and socialize; they also knew that to step outside the boundary of a segregated freedom and offend white sensibilities invited a violent response. The Pale Faces, one of the groups of returned Confederate veterans who comprised the Ku Klux movement of the late 1860s, had made clear that whites would not tolerate black assertiveness—especially if it threatened white control of politics or the sanctity of white womanhood. White violence in Maury County had severely curtailed black political activity, led to the migration of many local blacks, and effected a one-party domination of local affairs twenty years before the nadir of black prospects in state politics in the 1890s.

The mob killing in May 1891 of Green Wells in Columbia, Tennessee, represents a broader transformation of acts of vigilantism from the private pursuit of bloody revenge into grotesque public spectacles. Mob killings of local blacks were a constant feature of the postwar landscape—but most were the result of squads of white men tracking down a black suspect and killing him quietly. For example, a few weeks before Green Wells was murdered, Grub Mayberry, a black man under indictment in neighboring Marshall County for what a white newspaper editor called “notorious lewdness,” was abducted from his home by masked men and lynched near Bryant Station in Maury County. A placard pinned to the corpse bore the

inscription “We did this to protect our wives and daughters.”²³¹ Such “lynchings in the night,” as historian Grace Hale calls them, claimed an untold number of victims in Middle Tennessee.²³²

But a new pattern of lynching was emerging by 1890—at once more public and righteous, more of a street festival than a furtive lynching in the night. Green Wells was imprisoned in Columbia on a murder charge when a mob abducted him. He was taken the short distance from the jail to the Duck River and hung from a bridge in broad daylight—at a site where another African American man had been murdered by a mob twelve months before. One reporter noted that Green Wells’ mother and other blacks watched and wailed powerlessly from across the river banks as the unfortunate man was murdered.²³³ Newspapers roundly criticized the Sheriff for not exerting force and protecting his charge, though the Nashville American conceded “that he probably did not want to shed blood for such a wretch as Green.” White critics of the lynching cared nothing for Green’s civil rights and focused on the disruption to social order. “Nobody cares anything for the fate of the Negro,” argued the editor of the Columbia Herald. “He was not fit to live; he had doomed himself to death.”²³⁴

What is interesting about this incident, however, is that those who condoned the violence used a memory of the War to shield the perpetrators from justice. In the days after the lynching, a meeting of leading white citizens at the Maury County court house rejected by 47 to 25 a motion to condemn the lynching. Congressman W. J. Whithorne, a Confederate general and a leader in regional veterans groups, led the opposition and drew liberally upon his Confederate

²³¹ “Mysterious Lynching near Bryant Station,” Columbia Herald, 10 April 1891.

²³² Grace Elizabeth Hale, Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940 (New York: Random House, 1998), 199-240.

²³³ “Columbia’s Disgrace,” Columbia Herald, 29 May 1891.

heritage in persuading others to join him.²³⁵ A local reporter noted that “after reminding the people of his great services to them during the dark and bloody four years of the rebellion” Whitthorne proceeded to argue for “the inherent rights of the people, who were all powerful and from whom all law sprung.” The Congressmen also was sure to remind attendees of his donation of one thousand dollars to the local home for Confederate veterans.²³⁶ Lynching Green Wells, Whitthorne implied, was not only justified on moral and legal grounds. It was a public duty and one that veterans prideful of their service to the Confederacy should not shy away from. Whitthorne’s role in this incident brings a sharp clarity to the relationship between a Confederate heritage, the politics of white supremacy, and white-on-black violence.

²³⁴ Nashville American, quoted in Columbia Herald, 5 June 1891.

²³⁵ Whitthorne died late that year on September 21. See tributes to him in the Columbia Herald, 11 September 1891 and 2 October 1891.

²³⁶ “The Mass Meeting,” Columbia Herald, 5 June 1891

4. The Disembodied Cause

No one finds fault with the Southern people for loving the deeds of their heroic dead. They may build monuments to their fallen heroes, ad libitum, but if all admit that the North was right and that the South was wrong, why in name of candor and moral honesty do they not come out and say so? . . . The world has long ago decided that slavery was wrong and that the South, in building up a state, the corner stone of which should be American Slavery, was wrong. In defending old institutions, the South has been kicking against the pricks.

Fisk Herald (Nashville), March 1885

The Southern white people insist that they are “neither rebels nor traitors,” and rejoice that they are not now referred to as such, but that, on the contrary, the tendency of present times is to forget the disagreeable things of the past. While they are enjoying this tendency toward reconciliation and fraternalization they should cease to celebrate a lost cause; reviving thereby the issues of the dead and buried past, and cease also to maltreat the Negro because he passed out of their kind (?) care and protection during this period, which they insist was a brave, masterly struggle for principle. If they desire to bury the past, it would be a nice thing to bury it all.

National Baptist Union (Nashville), June 1902¹

In Chapter 3 we have seen how the conservative push to eliminate blacks from the political equation went hand-in-hand with a more assertive and coordinated Confederate commemoration. But as the Fisk University Herald's trenchant 1885 critique of Confederate memory (quoted in the epigram above) exemplifies, throughout the 1880s and 1890s narratives rooted in the experiences of African American and other Union constituencies throughout Middle Tennessee consistently challenged the consolidation of a Lost Cause memory cult. In rituals and

commemorative ceremonies, at educational institutions and churches, as well as in their political behavior, many African Americans (and some white Unionists) struggled to keep an emancipationist vision of the war alive. J. Berrien Lindsley had ignored the service of black soldiers in his 1883 Military Annals of Tennessee but the testimonies of veterans from the U.S. Colored Troop regiments can be culled from pension application records, which demonstrate both the importance of the war years in the transformation of individual lives and the tremendous obstacles facing those who either chose or needed to testify about their experiences in the 1860s.

Yet the battle to keep alive an emancipationist vision of the war was an increasingly hard fight. Black communities lacked the social and political power to keep their memories of the 1860s in the forefront of the region's consciousness. Black Union veterans, moreover, held painful memories of the beatings many received from the Ku Klux gangs during Reconstruction and were careful about keeping a low profile lest public gatherings and street demonstrations invite more violence. Within the local chapters of the Union veterans association, the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR), black veterans were segregated from white veterans many of whom had by the 1880s become attuned to southern social mores and avoided social and fraternal contact with blacks. It was a similar story in political life where the Republican Party leadership did just enough to ensure the support of black electors while refusing to allow black political leaders to play a full role in state politics. Consequently both the Republican Party and the GAR failed to become vehicles for an inter-racial and emancipationist account of the war.

Historian David Blight has detailed several strains of black Civil War memory, or what he terms "attitudes toward the past." They ranged from a celebratory-accommodationist mode, exemplified by Booker T. Washington's social philosophy, to a patriotic-constitutional mode

¹ National Baptist Union (Nashville) vol. 3, no. 42, 21 June 1902. SBHLA.

exemplified in the writings and activism of Frederick Douglass. Other modes outlined by Blight included a sense of the past as a void or even as a paralytic burden; a sense of black millennialism or Pan-Africanism; and, for some, tragic vision of the 1860s as “a fated but unfinished passage.”² Though surviving testimony is often thin on the ground, evidence for all these varied chords of memory can be found in the actions and representations of African Americans in Middle Tennessee in the 1880s and 1890s.³ Yet during this time, a patriotic-constitutional mode lost significant ground to the celebratory-accommodationist mode articulated by local followers of Booker T. Washington. Increasingly the 1860s became a source of detached rhetoric for speeches on special commemorative days subsumed beneath exhortations to economic uplift and social refinement. By the early 1890s, the majority of local African American leaders, increasingly shut out of the political process, turned away from 1860s-inspired demands for civil equality and articulated strategies of economic uplift as the means of moral and material advancement. Class and political divisions within African American constituencies, and an absence of patronage from middle-class whites, meant that no single historical narrative emerged to challenge effectively the hegemonic claims of Confederate historical memory. Consequently, while individual veterans nurtured a sense of pride at their

² David W. Blight, Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001), 300-301.

³ Most blacks were, of course, illiterate or had at best a smattering of education; and the illiterate left no written record or empirical impression, save that of the statistical accounting of election or census returns. Even among the educated class of African Americans, qualitative sources are scant and although some church records and periodicals have survived, most of the newspapers produced by black editors have perished. The historian can quickly learn that almost all communities had access to locally edited African American newspapers in the 1880s and 1890, but most were short-lived and their preservation was a luxury the African American community could ill-afford. The preservation of black community newspapers was, until very recently, a low priority for public centers of memory.

past service, within black communities a social memory of the Civil War Era fell away in the context of a resurgent white supremacy and black disempowerment. Black middle-class spokesmen increasingly came to emphasize a race-progress rhetoric—stressing achievement over sacrifice, duties over rights—that further diminished the significance of a historical memory rooted in mythical accounts of the struggles for emancipation and national renewal of the 1860s.⁴

WE WERE COMRADES

In 1883, twenty years after the Emancipation Proclamation, Eli Akin lost his position as a waiter at the W. J. Lincks Hotel in Nashville on account of his inability to perform the duties of the job. Rheumatism dating back to his service in the Union army affected both of his shoulders and his knees and often paralyzed his right side. Following his dismissal from the hotel, Akin would find intermittent work as an “Expressman,” ferrying messages and packages around the downtown area of Nashville. By September 1890, the Union veteran’s disability had become so severe that he filed for a federal pension, claiming that “when I do a hard day’s work I am laid up for a week or more.” In 1886, Akin had joined a veterans’ association, the local Grand Army of the Republic post for colored veterans, and now two of his regimental comrades joined with him and his wife, Adelia, in assembling the details of his life for the pension examiners.

Before the war, Akin testified in his 1891 affidavit, “I was born and raised at Columbia, Tenn. in the family of Pleas Akin. I was owned by him and worked as a farm laborer until my enlistment.” To prove his Union service Akin named his company sergeants and in a joint

⁴ My discussion of the black middle-class and race-progress rhetoric draws upon Kevin K. Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

affidavit, Oliver White and Peyton Parker swore that “we were comrades of his being in the same Regt. and have lived since our discharge in Nashville . . . and not very far apart and know the claimant intimately.” They also corroborated the applicant’s contention that his condition was the result of illness contracted “while in the service” of the United States and that “every year since his Discharge from the Army he has suffered severely with Diarrhea and Rheumatism.” Akin himself testified that his disabilities “first incurred in the Spring of the year 1864” and that “at one time during my time of service for 8 months I was not able to do any service.”

Pension officials consulted Eli Akin’s service records and found the evidence persuasive – as indeed they should have since the muster rolls for Akin’s regiment do indeed show him to be absent sick for months at a time. Private Akin was granted a pension of \$8 a month, which was raised to \$12 a month just before his death in Chicago from typhoid fever in February 1903. After his death, pension officials investigated a widow’s claim from Adelia Akin for continuation of the pension. The point of the investigation was to establish the fact of Adelia’s marriage to the soldier. She faced investigation because no public or church record existed of their marriage, and the minister who performed the ceremony was now deceased. A number of witnesses in Columbia, Nashville, and Chicago came forward to testify that Eli married Adelia shortly after his discharge from the army on July 4th 1866. Richard Kane, formerly of Columbia, testified from Chicago that he remembered the marriage “very distinctly” from “the peculiar date”—Independence Day. Adelia would eventually receive payment on her husband’s pension, which she apparently drew for another quarter century until her own death in 1930.⁵

⁵ Civil War pension file for Eli Akin, Co. A., 15th USCT, RG 15, NARA.

Eli Akin's story—recoverable from historical records maintained in Washington D.C., and yet not stored, as are so many records of local Confederate soldiers, in facsimile in Tennessee—tells us something about the persistence of a collective Civil War memory in the interior worlds of black veterans, their family and friends. We learn that veterans were prideful enough of their service to the Union to feel a sense of entitlement in their old age and infirmity, so much so that they were prepared to invest the time and resources in navigating the tortuous bureaucratic path that led to federal pensions. We see that Union service provided the catalyst—in a real and remembered sense—of the transition from bondage to freedom. We learn also that Union service created new networks of friends and associations that former slaves utilized in transformative ways, creating synergies that could lead, for some, to regional migration—or for others it might cement their allegiance to the neighborhoods and towns of their enslaved youth. We also realize that the federal pension scheme of the late 19th century was one of the few institutions that did not discriminate on the grounds of racial difference, which is not to say that all social groups were provided equal access because black veterans were often handicapped in the pension application process by poor literacy, an absence of documentation, and through a lack of resources.

Finally, while we realize that black veterans sustained connections with comrades into the twentieth century, were it not for Federal pension procedures it would be almost impossible today to know anything about the contours of their post-war lives. Though their service was occasionally celebrated at the events of black churches and colleges, the voices and memories of black veterans went unheard and unrecorded by the larger society. In the final analysis, pension records on Middle Tennessee's black veterans for 1883-1895 reveal that memories and fraternal ties were losing their cohesion and forcefulness and lacking the rituals and symbols that public

space could provide to sustain and transmit their memories of the journey from slavery to freedom. The memories of black Union veterans, of course, could never be extinguished, despite the absence of the political power required to make social memories into master narratives. Eli Akin's memories of the 1860s were literally sedimented in his body, in the ailments he suffered for the last forty years of his life, and they were sustained to some extent also by his participation in the local colored post of the Grand Army of the Republic. Moreover, his widow would continue to receive a check from Uncle Sam until 1930 – a transaction that continued to demonstrate the persistence of the patriotic-constitutional mode albeit in obscurity and, following the Akins' migration to Chicago, in exile.

LIVES OF DIFFERENCE

Twenty years after Emancipation, African Americans in Middle Tennessee still lived in the heavy shadows of slavery despite a range of impressive achievements in community development. A rising yet stunted middle-class—centered in Nashville but also to be found at African American schools, churches, and newspapers in the towns and cities of the heartland—directed and framed the community's needs and civic identity. A doctrine of “racial progress,” focusing on the emulation of white middle-class society through economic and educational development, came easily from the lips of the region's black civic leaders, many of whom fought valiantly within the ranks of the Republican Party in defense of the rights won in the 1860s and continued to hope that the 1880s would be a time of significant advancement. By 1880, three black educational institutions—Fisk University, Central Tennessee College, and the Nashville Normal and Theological Institute—each offered teacher training schools that spawned a class of

black educators motivated to improve the standing of the black community through education.⁶ Together with Meharry Medical College, founded in 1876, and Roger Williams University, the black colleges were part of the New South image of Nashville as an “Athens of the South.” A visitor in 1902 remarked that Nashville could boast of “a larger number of colored business and professional men than any other Southern city.”⁷ The development of a black bourgeoisie that could speak up in defense of community interests and the rights of black citizens was a major byproduct of Nashville’s black educational institutions.

Developments since the Civil War had led to the development of a sizable middle-class community of educated Blacks. By 1890, six percent of black male workers were in professional, business, and clerical jobs. They lived in new black suburban neighborhoods around Fisk and Meharry to the west of downtown Nashville. This highly visible class catered to an almost exclusively black clientele, patronizing African American newspapers, fraternal organizations, and civic and political clubs.⁸ This black middle-class, however, was not a homogenous group; it contained individuals of varying backgrounds who often disagreed about the meaning that African Americans should give to their past, present, and future. Self-identified leaders or spokespersons for African Americans in Middle Tennessee themselves had different histories. Some were northern born; others had been free and were educated before the war; and a third group consisted of freedmen who had made a success of themselves in business, the

⁶ Faye Wellborn Robbins, “A World-Within-a-World: Black Nashville, 1880-1915,” unpublished Ph.D. diss. (University of Arkansas, 1980), 12.

⁷ G. F. Richings, Evidences of Progress Among Colored People Eighth Edition (Philadelphia: Geo. S. Ferguson Co., 1902), 265.

⁸ Doyle has a useful description of black occupational categories and the black bourgeoisie drawn from the 1890 census. Don H. Doyle, Nashville in the New South, 1880-1930 (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1985), 108-13.

church, or political life since their emancipation. Differences in politics, education, religious identity, and material circumstances informed the differences of opinion among black leaders. Furthermore, a generational divide had emerged by the late 1880s to separate blacks of the pre-Civil War generation from those who had been born since the war.⁹

The rapid growth of Black educational institutions, however, changed the lives of only the fortunate few. The overwhelming majority of African Americans in Middle Tennessee worked as laborers or farm tenants. Between 1860 and 1900 Nashville's black population increased from 3,945 to 30,044, and throughout the late nineteenth century African Americans constituted close to forty percent of the city's population.¹⁰ Within Nashville, however, opportunities were generally limited to unskilled labor or domestic service – African Americans comprised nearly 80 per cent of the city's unskilled labor force and over 90 per cent of its domestic servants. About 45 per cent of black women worked outside the home, and virtually all worked in the homes of whites as maids, cooks, nurses, and laundresses. Black men found employment wherever they could in mills, foundries, and industrial plants.¹¹ Most African Americans, however, continued to live outside the city and worked as tenant farmers or agricultural laborers.

The leading spokesman for Nashville blacks in the late nineteenth century was James C. Napier, who came to personify the new ideology of racial progress through education, economic

⁹ I have learned from Kathleen Clark's discussion of the heterogeneity of black leaders. See Kathleen Ann Clark, " 'History is No Fossil Remains': Race, Gender, and the Politics of Memory in the American South, 1863-1913," unpub. Ph.D. dissertation (Yale University, 1999), 11-14.

¹⁰ See Appendix A in Doyle, Nashville in the New South, 235.

¹¹ Ibid., 109.

development, and a political defense of civil rights. Born in 1845 and freed at the death of his slave owner (and grandfather) three years later, Napier learned the business of community development from his father, who ran a livery stable near the Capitol Square in Nashville and organized a school for black children during the war years. Napier was sent away to study at Oberlin College, Ohio, and then began his public career in 1867 as a page to the Tennessee State Senate during Reconstruction. He then clerked for the Freedmen's Bureau while a law student at Howard University in Washington D.C. Returning to Tennessee the young lawyer worked for the internal revenue, became active in Republican Party politics, served on the Nashville City Council (1878-1884), and became a successful lawyer and real estate developer. His first campaign for city office centered on a platform of hiring black teachers in the city's black schools, a promise he fulfilled in office and continued to advocate throughout his career. In the late nineteenth century Napier often served as the only African American on the state executive committee of the Republican Party and occasionally represented Tennessee in national Republican conventions; he was also an unsuccessful candidate for Congress from the 5th Congressional District (1898). In the early twentieth century he served briefly in the Treasury Department under William Howard Taft, resigning when Woodrow Wilson took office and ordered segregated facilities for the civil service. The son-in-law of educator John M. Langston, a congressman from Virginia, Napier became by the 1890s a supporter and confidant of Booker T. Washington and an exponent of his philosophy of self-help and industrial education. A quiet, dignified and light-skinned patriarch, Napier never moved easily among the masses but was unquestionably the most visible African American in Middle Tennessee at this time.¹²

¹² "Biographical notes," James C. Napier papers, Fisk University Archives. Rayford W. Logan and Michael R. Winston, eds., Dictionary of American Negro Biography (New York: W. W.

Other prominent black leaders in Nashville, while of a similar socio-economic cast to Napier, occupied different positions on the political spectrum. They included Preston Taylor, a pastor in the Christian Church, who founded Greenwood Cemetery for blacks. Taylor, unusually for Middle Tennessee's black bourgeoisie, was a Union veteran and one of the few professional blacks to join the Nashville GAR post in the mid-1880s. W. H. Young, a minister and emigration advocate, briefly edited in the 1880s a black newspaper, The Herald and Pilot which was "devoted to emigration, agriculture, education, religion, politics, and general news."¹³ Other prominent black civic leaders included Dr. Robert Fulton Boyd, a native of Giles County and graduate of Fisk, who taught at Meharry and had a large medical practice in Nashville; and Richard Henry Boyd, the founder of the National Baptist Publishing Board, the first black publishing house in the United States.¹⁴ Nashville possessed the two most successful black merchants in America: Lewis Winter, a wholesale merchant, and Henry Harding, a realtor with a second-hand furniture business. Both were former slaves.¹⁵ Despite their disparate origins and political differences, however, in Nashville, as in other Southern cities, the leading figures were a

Norton, 1982), 470-71; Eric Foner, Freedom's Lawmakers: A Directory of Black Office holders during Reconstruction (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 158. Howard N. Rabinowitz has the best and most extensive discussion of Napier's public career in Race Relations in the Urban South, 1865-1890 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1980), esp. 86, 91, 241-42, 295-97. See also Cordell Hull Williams, "The Life of James Carroll Napier from 1845 to 1940," unpub. M.A. thesis (Tennessee State University, 1954), and for extensive references on Napier's later years, Lester C. Lamon, Black Tennesseans, 1900-1930 (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1977). Obituaries of Napier appeared in the Journal of Negro History (July 1940), 400-401, and the Nashville Banner, 23 April 1940.

¹³ One copy of this paper (issue 25, 24 January, 1880) exists in the Tennessee State Library and Archives.

¹⁴ Doyle, Nashville in the New South, 110.

small group of interlocking friends and associates. Napier and Young, for example, led the committee of arrangements in 1879 after abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison's death and also served together with Henry Harding on committees urging the appointment of black teachers and protesting the 1886 massacre of blacks at Carrollton, Mississippi. At an 1884 state convention of Colored men, the delegates for Davidson County included Young, Napier, and Harding.¹⁶

By the mid-1880s, then, clear class divisions had emerged among African Americans that gave sub-groups different orientations toward the past, present, and future. The most successful blacks increasingly concentrated on economic activities and espoused a doctrine of racial uplift to attack the "race problem," part of which lay with the racism of whites and another part, they believed, with the inability or reluctance of the black masses to improve themselves. Their worldview was framed by a relatively easy transition from bondage to freedom, intact families, access to education and economic opportunity, and by a political ethos rooted in the civil rights of the 1860s and 1870s. But the lives of prosperous blacks were conducted in a different realm from the experiences of the majority of African Americans, especially those who continued to labor in the unskilled city jobs or on the farms of their former owners. Within this group, illiteracy and poverty kept many in a form of semi-bondage, and though for many Middle Tennessee blacks the 1880s held much promise for social and economic improvement (especially for those successful in business or caught up in the westward emigration craze) the dark shadows of slavery continued to shut out the light from many lives.

¹⁵ James T. Haley, Afro-American Encyclopaedia; Or, the Thoughts, Doings, and Sayings of the Race . . . (Nashville: Haley & Florida, 1895), 205-6; Rabinowitz, Race Relations in the Urban South, 88.

¹⁶ Rabinowitz, Race Relations in the Urban South, 241, 401n.37; "Colored Convention," Nashville Banner 28 Feb. 1884.

ACTS OF REMEMBRANCE

Throughout the 1880s and 1890s Middle Tennessee blacks continued to mark a calendar of commemorative occasions that had been set in the late 1860s and early 1870s. Emancipation Day (January 1), Independence Day (July 4), and Jubilee Day (October 6th, the date on which the Fisk Jubilee Singers set out in 1871 on their first national tour), were the three main commemorative occasions. Although towns and cities had the largest commemorations, no community, however small, seemed indifferent to these occasions – ceremonies occurred in small hamlets throughout the heartland and many blacks traveled to Nashville, Columbia, Murfreesboro, or to one of the other Middle Tennessee towns on January 1st or July 4th. Wherever they occurred, African American commemorative ceremonies provided a powerful source of corporate identity, of a shared history and struggle, while advancing and enacting a version of history that competed with the Lost Cause mythology and white accounts of a slave society's past. Led by civic or church leaders, commemorative ceremonies by the mid-1880s, while not univocal, had achieved a ritualized form and lacked the spontaneity and creativity of celebrations during Reconstruction. Commemorations by this time had also lost any sense of the interracial participation that Freedmen's Bureau agents, academic missionaries, and white Union veterans had brought to these events in the late 1860s. But the events had also become an accepted part of a segregated social calendar and were no longer at risk of violent disruption from the Ku Klux groups that had intervened in the late 1860s to disrupt public celebrations by blacks. White newspapers generally commented respectfully on these events. And celebrations in Nashville often took place in the citadels of regional power – in the downtown business streets and within the chamber of the state House of Representatives.

Emancipation Day was the largest and most significant commemorative occasion on the calendar, one that marked the birth of freedom for most Middle Tennessee blacks. On these occasions, black civic leaders in Nashville organized street parades and grand ceremonies, and often invited a national civil rights figure to address the assembled citizens. In December 1885, a “Colored Exposition,” with James C. Napier as president, opened a week before Emancipation Day in the basement of the new St. John’s African Methodist Episcopal church. Napier, the most conspicuous Middle Tennessee black of the era was usually to the fore on such occasions. A local reporter found “a very creditable display of handiwork” on display. Visitors from as far away as Shelbyville visited the exposition.¹⁷ On 1 January Napier’s father-in-law, John M. Langston, addressed a large audience. Langston was one of the most distinguished black leaders of the day. A former dean of the Howard University Law School and an ambassador to Haiti in the Hayes administration, Langston in 1886 was president of the Virginia Normal and Collegiate Institute.¹⁸

Langston began his remarks optimistically by stating that “the time for making invidious distinctions in citizenship on account of color has passed.” Both the Democratic and Republican parties, he argued, believed that the civil rights as well as the freedom and enfranchisement” of blacks “must be respected and sustained.” Consequently, Langston continued, “the negro is coming to understand that he has reached the second stage of his social condition since the time of reconstruction,” namely careful study of the political questions of the day and a willingness to engage in alliance with Democrats. Southern blacks, Langston urged, must bring themselves

¹⁷ “The Colored Exposition,” Nashville Banner 1 January 1886.

¹⁸ See biographical sketch of Langston in Haley, Afro-American Encyclopaedia, 40-42. Langston was much in demand throughout the country as an orator on commemorate occasions. See Clark, “Race, Gender, and the Politics of Memory in the American South,” 174.

“into such relationship with the people of the south . . . so as to blunt the edge of their past enmities towards him.” Only this course of action could bring economic and educational aid and “secure peace through reconciliation” with southern whites. The “negro problem,” Langston lectured his audience, “is to be solved by himself in his cultivation of intelligence, virtue and wealth with good understanding, in a wise community of interests with those who to-day are the masters of knowledge, power, and wealth in the main in the south, formerly the old master class.” Finding his remarks congenial, the Conservative Nashville Banner published the entire transcript of Langston’s “eloquent address.”¹⁹

Langston’s conservatism in 1886 was less apparent five years later when he returned to Nashville—again at the invitation of Napier—to speak before an Emancipation Day audience in St. Paul’s A.M.E. Church. Now a Republican Congressman from Virginia, Langston emphasized that while the Republican Party “had all along the way been giving the negro rights,” the Democrats “had stood across their path.” Protection of the franchise, now under open assault, was Langston’s main concern and he used a memory of the war to defend the enfranchisement of black men. “He said God brought on the war,” a horrified reporter for the Nashville Banner noted, “and the war abolished slavery. The negro, he said, was an American, baptized through slavery and incorporated thereby into the body politic to stand forever.” In a series of resolutions adopted at the meeting, those assembled pledged themselves “to the intelligent, earnest cultivation of all those things which pertain to dignified American life.”²⁰ Langston’s rhetoric, it seems, was modulated for the occasion, and whereas his 1885 remarks at

¹⁹ “Emancipation Day,” Nashville Banner 2 January 1886.

²⁰ “Hon. John M. Langston,” Nashville Banner 1 January 1891.

the Exposition were agreeable to the New South instincts of the Nashville Banner, his radical account of the coming of Emancipation clearly was not.

Emancipation Day celebrations also show that while conservative and accommodationist positions predominated, a spectrum of opinions were often heard from within the black community. At an elaborate Emancipation Day celebration in 1892, a street parade ended at the State Capitol in the chamber of the House of Representatives. At the speaker's stand, the clerks' desks were decorated with U.S. flags, flowers, and portraits of Lincoln, Sumner and other prominent men. A singer from the Chicago Conservatory of Music sang "John Brown's Body Lies Mouldering in the Ground," the congregation joining in the choruses. Then Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation was read by a young woman. In response to this, the next speaker, the Rev. C. S. Smith, put aside his prepared remarks and, as a reporter noted:

He did not join in [the applause] because he did not see anything special in it to invoke applause. He doubted whether the people had stopped to analyze this proclamation. He said it contained two special features. First, it recites that the act of its issuance was a war measure based upon military necessity. It extends a welcome to able-bodied men freed thereby to take up arms in defense of the government. It was not an act of choice, but when the government's destiny hung in the scales of possible defeat and dissolution and that the scales might be borne down on one side, and the unity of the republic might be sustained by the negroes not in the cotton fields, but on the gory fields of battle, the proclamation was issued.

The Rev. Smith's reading was not inaccurate: the Emancipation Proclamation had not immediately freed a single slave and the state of Tennessee, which was not under Confederate control at the time of its issuance, was explicitly exempted from its provisions.²¹ His criticism

²¹ Smith's argument provides an interesting antecedent to the contemporary scholarly debate on the question of volition and leadership in the emancipation proclamation. See Ira Berlin, "Who Freed the Slaves? Emancipation and Its Meaning," in David W. Blight & Brooks D. Simpson, eds., Union & Emancipation: Essays on Politics and Race in the Civil War Era (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1997), 105-22.

also was accurate in stressing the volitional service of slaves in the Union army and the purposes that this served in ending slavery and acquiring for African Americans the rights of citizenship. In speaking to the service of black Union soldiers, the Rev. Smith pointedly remarked that their services were overlooked and that society seemed to have space only for celebrating the services of white soldiers. “They seem to think that only qualities of greatness reside in the white man,” he concluded.²²

How did African American commemorations differ from those of white Unionists in Middle Tennessee? A study of the commemorative activities of black and white Union constituencies show the contrasting meanings that each group gave to the Civil War era, though these divisions should not be drawn too strongly. A significant amount of common ground united the memories of white and black constituencies. Both groups celebrated the salvation and restoration of the Union as a major achievement of the 1860s; both black and white unionists condemned the doctrine of secession as treasonous; and each group marked the 1860s as a watershed moment in the life of the nation in general and African Americans in particular. For example, at a Decoration Day commemoration of Union dead at Fort Donelson, 30 May 1885, U.S. Marshall G. N. Tillman emphasized in his eulogy to the Union dead that the principle they fought and died for was the “preservation of our unity as a people for the individual liberty where with all are blessed, both black and white.”²³ A few weeks later, in a comparable demonstration of the common ground between white and black Unionists, the Fisk Herald characterized patriotism and asserted that “the dusky sons of Ham” were motivated during the war by more than self-interest and “flung [themselves] upon the altar of the white man’s

²² “At the State Capitol,” Nashville Banner 2 January 1892.

²³ Tillman’s speech is reprinted in “The American Union,” Nashville Banner 1 June 1885.

country” with “the same feelings that impelled Washington to come to the rescue of his country.”²⁴ Thus significant common ground connected white Union and black Union communities together around ideas of the Union’s salvation and rebirth.

Over time, however, as the Republican Party’s commitment to civil rights waned, a marked difference in emphasis increasingly divided the meanings that white and black constituents attributed to the 1860s. By 1885, while the rhetoric of civil rights persisted, it was already evident that white Unionists emphasized the salvation of the Union as the war’s major cause and consequence and that a process of reconciliation with old Confederates, as if all the issues of the conflict had been settled, was well under way. At the Decoration Day commemoration of Union dead at Fort Donelson quoted above, U.S. Marshall Tillman emphasized that the point of such exercises was not to “keep alive the animosities of the past.” Pointing out that his own brother had fought on the Confederate side at Fort Donelson, Tillman said that it was “natural” for him “to entertain the most affectionate feelings for the Confederate soldiers . . . they being my kith and kin.”²⁵ The principle Tillman emphasized in his eulogy to the Union dead was the “preservation of our unity as a people for the individual liberty where with all are blessed, both black and white.” In the rest of his remarks, Tillman raised the specter of disunion and the great evils that would have resulted from sectional division. Over time, he emphasized, disunion would not simply have stopped with two governments: “in the course of years there would have been also an eastern confederacy, a western confederacy, and a northwestern confederacy, until this last grand effort to establish a free government would have

²⁴ “Patriotism,” Fisk Herald (October 1885) vol. 3 no. 2.

²⁵ In a lighthearted gesture, Tillman repeated the mantra of Confederate memorialists in saying that he was glad that his brother had been safely captured, “being, of course, ‘overwhelmed by superior force.’”

ended in dismal failure in anarchy and finally in monarchy.” At no point did Tillman raise the specter of slavery within either the ideology of Confederate separatism or the cause of the Union.

Writers at the Fisk Herald, however, explicitly identified the lost cause of separatism with slavery and took issue with the continued defense of slavery as an institution. The South, the Herald asserted, “in building up a state, the corner stone of which should be American Slavery, was wrong.” In 1885 the Herald editorialized strongly in defense of George W. Cable’s pronouncement that the North was right on the issues of the war and that the new nation owed full and equal rights to African Americans.²⁶ The maverick Southern author quickly became a *cause célèbre* in Nashville’s black community after his pronouncements published in the January and September issues of the Century Magazine in 1885, the year in which the New Orleans native and Confederate veteran relocated to Northampton, Massachusetts.²⁷ In “The Silent South,” Cable reached out to his critics and urged Southern whites to undo the injustices of slavery—“the greatest moral mistake made by the whole American nation”—and recognize the civil rights of the Freedmen. Instead, Cable saw Southerners erroneously equating civil rights with social equality and resisting change.²⁸ As David Blight has argued, however, Cable’s views were “irreconcilable . . . with the racial vision of Lost Cause tradition” and served merely as a

²⁶ “George W. Cable and his Critics,” Fisk Herald (March 1885) vol. 2 no. 7. See also “Geo. W. Cable as the Champion of the Negro,” Fisk Herald (February 1885) vol. 2 no. 6.

²⁷ George W. Cable, “The Freedman’s Case in Equity,” Century Magazine 29 (January 1885): 409-18; “The Silent South,” Century Magazine 30 (September 1885): 674-91. See also George Washington Cable, The Negro Question: A Selection of Writings on Civil Rights in the South, Arlin Turner, ed. (1889; rpt. New York: Norton, 1958), 77-90, 116-118. For a useful brief discussion on Cable, see Blight, Race and Reunion, 294-95.

²⁸ Cable, “The Silent South,” quotation from 691.

foil for his opponents to repeat their fears of miscegenation and race mixing.²⁹ Even those white critics who claimed to be sympathetic to Black civil rights, objected to the impropriety of Cable, a Southerner and Confederate veteran, writing such opinions in a Northern journal. Rep. Phelan of Memphis (the author of a widely adopted Tennessee history school textbook) argued that Cable was “in eager haste to reap the rewards of a specious liberal mindedness.” In noting Phelan’s objections, the Fisk Herald judged that “the only sin that Mr. Cable can have committed against which the South can complain is that he uttered a prevailing sentiment too soon.” Safely predicting that “fealty to the lost cause in the South will grow fainter and fainter as the new generation comes on” the Herald urged all southerners to “adopt George W. Cable as hers, be proud of his fame, accept his declarations, and . . . go forth looking forward to the brightness of the coming day.”³⁰ When Cable visited Fisk in the fall of 1889, students gathered and sang both the “Battle Hymn of the Republic” and “America.” Cable followed with a eulogy that recognized the “patriotism [that] survives in the hearts of those who have been so cabined, confined and bribed.”³¹

Cable’s argument was attractive to the emerging black middle class centered at Fisk University because of the author’s recognition not only of the injustices suffered by the freedmen but also his emphasis upon the fact that traditional notions of race and class no longer applied to

²⁹ Blight, Race and Reunion, 295.

³⁰ “Cable and his Critics,” Fisk Herald (March 1885), vol. 2 no. 7.

³¹ “George W. Cable,” Fisk Herald (December 1889), vol. 7 no. 4. White newspapers in Nashville did not comment on Cable’s remarks at Fisk.

the post-war South.³² “You who are favored” Cable argued in his 1889 remarks at Fisk “should see that your people are trained into the largest love of liberty.” At the heart of Cable’s criticism of the rigidified color line in southern society was a concern that segregation made no distinction on questions of character, intelligence, and property. Segregation, Cable argued, lumped white people of all classes together and obliged well-educated, well-to-do African Americans to slum it with all other blacks. Some of his audience at Fisk evidently felt similarly. Throughout this period, educated African Americans argued against discriminatory statutes but an accommodationist stance was also beginning to emerge. “Lines of social distinction based on color are unreasonable and unjust,” commencement speaker Rev. J. J. Dughain remarked at Fisk University in 1885. But he added “we do not demand social equality. That has never existed and never will. . . . We make no demand for social equality, but we demand for him the enjoyments of social rights.”³³

DISILLUSIONED BLACK REPUBLICANS

If the historical sensibilities and narratives of African Americans were to have any influence upon white heartlanders, then it was likely to occur through the state’s Republican Party. The party of Abraham Lincoln had mobilized black voters in the Reconstruction period and continued beyond Reconstruction to cast itself in the role of national savior waving the ‘bloody shirt’ of sacrifice in the face of the Democrats. Black voters had played a founding role in the establishment of the Tennessee Republican Party in the late 1860s and continued to vote overwhelmingly for Republican candidates through the 1880s. Tennessee politics remained

³² This point draws upon Grace Elizabeth Hale’s perceptive reading of Cable’s writings, see Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940 (New York: Vintage, 1999), 44-49.

competitive until the passage of poll tax legislation restricted the franchise in a way that was devastating to the fortunes of Republicans. But long before the electoral demise of the Republicans, the state party had effectively abandoned civil rights as a cause to champion, which made it improbable that a biracial memory of the war would be sustained.

Tennessee's Republicans, as discussed in Chapter Two, had always been lukewarm on black political rights, but blacks continued to vote overwhelmingly Republican into the 1880s and continued to hope that demonstrations of partisan loyalty would strengthen their position within the party. After helping to secure the Tennessee Governorship for the Republicans, and also contributing to Civil War General James A. Garfield's presidential win in 1880, a mass meeting of black voters in the Nashville County Court room passed resolutions demanding a share of the spoils of office. The resolutions are notable because the claim to Republican largesse was based not only on electoral support but also, as a reporter observed, on behalf of the Colored Troops. It was a strongly worded and historically situated plea:

At the very dawn of their enfranchisement they [the Freedmen] seemed to grasp the spirit of our republican institutions, and have at every opportunity demonstrated their willingness to sustain and uphold our system of government. . . . Their peculiar situation in this country entitles them to the favorable consideration of the party, both State and National, which they have at all times and with so great sacrifices used all their power and influence to uphold and sustain. . . . In whatever station the colored man has been called he has shown himself fully capable of doing his entire duty, and with this record we believe that he ought to be given representation in every department of our complex government, from the President's Cabinet to the lowest place at the disposal of any portion of the people of the United States.³⁴

³³ "Fisk University," Nashville Banner 28 May 1885.

³⁴ "The Spoils of Office," undated newspaper clipping [c.1880], James C. Napier papers, Box 3, folder 10, Fisk University Archives.

The plea fell on deaf ears, but it provides an example of how blacks used their historical association with Republicanism to argue for political rights. The African American petitioners clearly felt they had a claim upon the Republican Party as a political community conditioned by historical circumstances in which black actors had played a central part. But, in truth, the Republican alliance had always been more complex and fractured than Lincoln's Gettysburg Address and the language of the 14th Amendment might suggest. Republicanism meshed three types of political identity – an ethnic nationalism, a universal liberalism, and a constitutional patriotism – in ways that provided various points of entry for constituent groups, making it a poor vehicle for the advancement of African American civil rights.³⁵ Nonetheless, in the opinion of James Napier and other African American leaders in Middle Tennessee, the Republican Party held the potential to bind black veterans and voters into the community of memory, interweaving the story of their struggle into the resurgent sense of American nationalism that came from the war. Black voters constituted nearly one-fourth of the voting-age population in Tennessee in 1880. Napier and his colleagues were making reasonable claims from a position of some strength.

The state Republican Party, however, did as little as possible to appease its African American voting base. In response, some black politicians started calling for an end to a blind allegiance to Republicans and urging blacks to follow a more independent and self-interested course. Consequently, the 1880s saw a discernable shift toward the Democratic Party. The underlying cause for this was the retreat of the Republican Party on the national level from the cause of black civil rights and the continued refusal of white Republicans in Tennessee to

³⁵ W. James Booth, "Communities of Memory: On Identity, Memory, and Debt," American Political Science Review (June 1999): 249-263.

support black candidates. During the 1860s and 1870s, Tennessee blacks, despite their numerical strength, had never been at the heart of Republican Party power and black political leaders agitated constantly for greater influence within the party. Edward Shaw of Memphis attempted in the early 1880s to merge with the low-tax Democrats and form a fusionist movement similar to the Readjuster movement in Virginia. The Civil War had not been waged for “Negro freedom,” Shaw argued, “but for northern self-interest.” The next Democratic administration, he argued, would bring a “second emancipation” for black Tennesseans.³⁶ In Davidson County, one black politician wrote despairingly of the “political prosperity” of the “Africo-American of Tennessee.” “For ten years he has been made the political tool of that [Republican] Party without being recognized by it as fit for anything but to vote.”³⁷

After the return of Confederates to the leadership positions in the state, following the election of former Confederate General William B. Bate in 1882, it became clear that blacks faced a serious challenge to the fragile gains that had been won since 1865. But national developments in the early 1880s also kept black disillusionment with the Republican Party alive. The year 1883 marked not only the twentieth anniversary of emancipation, it was also the year in which a Republican-dominated U.S. Supreme Court issued a series of rulings ending any federal oversight of the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. These developments, mixing what David Blight has described as “proud remembrance and embittered betrayal,” seriously eroded the partisan alignment of Tennessee blacks to the Republican Party.³⁸ In 1884 the state Republican convention and campaign strategy further strained the party loyalty of black

³⁶ Memphis Appeal, Oct. 5, 1882. Quoted in *Ibid.*, 30.

³⁷ Nashville Daily American, Oct. 9, 1882, quoted in Robert E. Corlew, “The Negro in Tennessee, 1870-1900,” unpublished Ph.D. diss. (University of Alabama, 1954), 129.

³⁸ Blight, Race and Reunion, 308.

voters. Despite calls for federal aid to local education and open criticism of the convict-lease system, the Republican Party platform was silent on the issue of black civil rights and adopted economic policies—protective tariffs and payment of state debt at full value—that went against economic interests in black communities. Furthermore, only one-quarter of the delegates were black and representation was even lower on key platform committees. Finally the convention endorsed an ex-Confederate soldier, Judge Frank T. Reid, as its candidate for governor. One of the black delegates, the editor of Knights of Wise Men, a journal published by a Nashville black fraternal organization, was enraged and called upon his readers to reject the convention as the work of “a set of ‘machine’ Negro hating white Republicans, alias ‘sheep in wolf’s clothing.’”³⁹ Reid only narrowly lost the 1884 election, but by 1886 black voters registered larger support for the Democrats than ever before, especially in Nashville, Memphis, and some West Tennessee counties.⁴⁰ Republicans countered this move by trying to open up the party to black politicians. But when blacks claimed control of the district nominating convention in 1888 and nominated an African American candidate (William H. Young) for Middle Tennessee’s sixth congressional district, whites bolted the convention and reorganized as the “lily white” Republicans. Young lost the election three-to-two but ran well in the black community, winning every predominantly black ward in Nashville.⁴¹

³⁹ Quoted in Joseph H. Cartwright, The Triumph of Jim Crow: Tennessee Race Relations in the 1880s, (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1976), 81.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 59.

⁴¹ Ibid., 93-95.

BLACK LEGISLATORS

The performance of African American legislators in the state assembly suggests the type of agenda either party might have adopted if they had been genuinely solicitous of black interests. Twelve legislators—none from Middle Tennessee—were elected to public office in the 1880s, mostly from Memphis and the black-majority counties in West Tennessee. They were a distinguished group and included four lawyers, one minister and six with business experience. At least half had university educations and seven of the twelve had prior public service. Although their influence was not strong they consistently challenged racial segregations in public accommodations, pushed for greater educational funding, and called for an end to racial discrimination in juries. In reaction to growing mob violence, Tennessee's black legislators urged the Assembly to take action. Although limited steps were taken—for example, the Assembly passed in 1881 legislation calling for steps against law officers who failed to protect prisoners—wholesale anti-lynching legislation calling for compensation for victims and prosecutions of assailants always failed to get sufficient support.⁴² Taken together, the measures proposed by black legislators in the 1880s attempted to shore up and protect the civil liberties and equal justice legacies of Reconstruction. But their efforts met steady opposition and eventually collapsed as race relations throughout the state took a decided turn for the worse after Democrats assumed two-thirds control of the Assembly in 1888.

While black legislators fought a rearguard action to preserve gains of the 1860s, the Democrats, divided by factionalism, turned in 1886 to an East Tennessean, Robert Taylor. Too young to have fought in the war, and closer to the New South rhetoricians than the Confederate Bourbons, Taylor's two-term governorship (1887-1891) gave reason, in the estimation of one

newspaper editor, “to hope that war nostalgia was fading enough to let young men move up in politics.”⁴³ But this commentator—himself a young candidate for Congress in 1886—overlooked the fact that political campaigns in the late 1880s were infused with the politics of Civil War remembrance. In Taylor’s mouth, these appeals to veterans had a bipartisan appeal (his family had divided in the Civil War) and he championed veterans of all stripes for having built “the grand structure of the New South.” Once the “debris and wreckage of the war’s destruction [were] cleared away,” Taylor argued, new “foundations [were] built upon the enduring principles of free thought, free action, free labor, a free ballot, justice, law, order, the education of the masses, the autonomy of the States, constitutional government, one flag and a reunited republic.”⁴⁴ Such carefully worded bipartisan appeals, however, were not matched by Taylor’s performance in office. Although Taylor’s New South rhetoric irked many Bourbon Democrats, they continued to give him their support because in office he endorsed legislation to restrict African American voting power.⁴⁵

As black legislators at the municipal, county, and state level struggled to preserve the civil rights achievements of Reconstruction, a counter-move among white politicians developed to exclude blacks from political life and enact legal statutes of segregation. Historian Jim Cartwright describes this process as gravitation away from white paternalism in race relations toward the fictional principle of “separate but equal.” The “transitional” nature of race relations,

⁴² Ibid., 101-118.

⁴³ Memphis Avalanche, quoted in Roger L. Hart, Redeemers, Bourbons & Populists: Tennessee, 1870-1896 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1975), 89.

⁴⁴ Nashville American, Sept. 10, 1886, quoted in Hart, Redeemers, 95.

⁴⁵ Paul H. Bergeron, Stephen V. Ash, & Jeanette Keith, Tennesseans and Their History (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1999), 207.

as Cartwright describes it, could be seen not only in the flexibility with which courts dealt with challenges to segregated facilities but also in the reactions of African Americans. While most “blacks acquiesced, at least publicly, to white prescriptions concerning interracial etiquette,” others challenged the entrenchment of Jim Crow segregation. In the early 1880s, for example, civil rights demonstrations erupted against the policy of railroads serving Nashville to require all blacks (except attendants to white patrons) to ride in second-class smoking cars—even if the passenger had a first-class ticket. At the height of the protests, a correspondent to the Nashville American (William A. Sinclair, a black minister) appealed to conceptions of civil rights from the Reconstruction era, calling the actions of the railroads immoral and illegal.⁴⁶ But as judicial thinking moved toward an acceptance of a separate but equal doctrine of social rights, Sinclair and other black protestors were left only with an appeal to whites’ sense of paternalism and chivalry. In Cartwright’s estimation, such protests by the end of the 1880s were so far outside of prevailing political sentiments that they spurred “the formulation of a sweeping legal and practical code of racial segregation.”⁴⁷ By the end of the 1880s, then, race relations in Tennessee had undergone a profound change.

The silencing and marginalization of black political voices, then, was a lengthy and contested process. The Republican Party, because of its support in East Tennessee and among black voters, remained competitive in state electoral politics into the early 1890s. Moreover, African American politicians contested the Confederate domination of state affairs every step of the way. Although black men never completely lost the right to vote in Tennessee, by 1892

⁴⁶ Nashville American, Oct. 4, 1881, quoted in Cartwright, Triumph of Jim Crow, 186.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 161-98, quotation from page 192.

control of the state's political life was firmly in the hands of conservative Democrats who used their power to impose an increasingly segregated social order along racial lines.

NO AXES TO GRIND

In the mid-1880s, before Middle Tennessee witnessed a revival of Confederate sentiment and before Nashville became a publishing center for Lost Cause mythology, former Union officers in Nashville reorganized the Tennessee department of the Grand Army of the Republic. Here potentially was an opportunity for Middle Tennessee veterans, both black and white, to connect with a powerful national community that championed on constitutional-patriotic grounds the civil rights of African Americans – especially the black men who had fought in blue. But it was an opportunity that passed by local organizers from the beginning. The cause of the war, the Nashville organizers of the Tennessee GAR believed, was the doctrine of secession and not the institution of slavery; the war's great meaning was not emancipation and the reconstruction of American society but rather salvation for the nation and forgiveness for those who sought to tear it down. “We have no axes to grind,” the editors of the Grand Army Sentinel wrote from Nashville in setting out a creed for their mission. “We do not believe that it is humane, or [C]hristian-like, to continually flaunt in their [i.e. the Confederates'] faces, the sins of those who have once been freely forgiven.”⁴⁸ In a call for contributions, the Sentinel exhibited an editorial purpose almost identical to its Confederate counterpart in the upper-mid South, the Southern Bivouac (published in Louisville): “Communications from soldiers wanted,” the editors announced, “War reminiscences. Perilous adventures. Funny scenes. Jokes. Repartees.” In a significant gesture of reconciliation, ex-Confederates were also invited to submit articles for

⁴⁸ “Our Creed,” Grand Army Sentinel (Nashville, July 5, 1885) vol. 2, no. 1.

review. “The war is over,” the call-for-submissions proclaimed, “We are all citizens of a common country. The love-feast is in order.”⁴⁹

First organized in 1866, the Tennessee GAR—widely perceived by white conservatives at the time to be a Radical front organization—had included many black veterans before disappearing in the late 1860s with the collapse of Reconstruction.⁵⁰ On 27 February 1882, in the midst of a revival of the veterans’ organization throughout the North, Edward S. Jones and James Chamberlain (both Pennsylvania natives) reorganized in Nashville the George H. Thomas post of the GAR, named after the victorious Union general at the Battle of Nashville. Only two of the 34 charter members of the Thomas post were Tennessee natives; 13 were foreign born, eight from Germany.⁵¹ It was a fraternity of professionals—merchants, physicians, editors, attorneys, preachers, and engineers—who had chosen to make their homes in Nashville after the war. The charter 1882 group contained an even mix between privates and officers in regiments raised in Ohio, Indiana, Pennsylvania, and Kentucky.⁵²

Two other Tennessee posts—in Chattanooga and Memphis—quickly formed and then black veterans organized a fourth chapter, named “Lincoln Post,” in Nashville on 27 June 1882.⁵³

⁴⁹ Grand Army Sentinel (Nashville Dec. 5, 1885) vol. 2 no. 11

⁵⁰ Prospective members of the Pulaski Ku Klux Klan, for example, were required to swear that they had never been in the GAR. John C. Lester and David L. Wilson, Ku Klux Klan, Its Origin, Growth, and Disbandment intro. & notes by Walter L. Fleming (New York; Neale Publishing Co., 1905; orig. pub. Nashville: Wheeler, Osborn & Duckworth, 1884), 71.

⁵¹ By the mid-1990s, 191 men had joined the Thomas Post; only 24 of them were Tennessee natives.

⁵² Descriptive Records Post No. 1 (George H. Thomas), Department of Tennessee G.A.R., Volume I, Posts 1-44, McClung Historical Collection, East Tennessee Historical Center, Knoxville.

⁵³ Robert B. Beath, History of the Grand Army of the Republic (New York: Bryan, Taylor 1889), 633-37. Beath, a former adjutant general of the GAR, does not report the organization of

The twenty-one charter members of this post were almost all native Tennesseans from the counties of the heartland. Most had served over two years in the Union army, but surprisingly no two members served in the same company and regiment. In fact, the 21 charter members had served in 10 different regiments of the United States Colored Infantry. Most all, however, had seen action at the Battle of Nashville, which together with their former servitude in the rural counties of Middle Tennessee appeared to be the glue holding them together. The occupations of this charter group are not known, but over the next fourteen years, 132 black veterans joined the Lincoln Post and from the occasional listing of occupation, we see that while the majority were laborers, farmers, or porters, a few were tradesmen (a blacksmith, saddler, tinsmith, carpenter) and a couple were ministers. No educators from Nashville's black educational institutions appear to have joined the colored post of the G.A.R., though some white administrators, such as Fisk president, Erastus M. Cravath, joined the local white posts.⁵⁴

The GAR provided Union veterans across the United States the opportunity to honor their fallen comrades, reassert the principles for which the war was fought, and re-live the camaraderie of their war-time service in staged encampments and reenactments that provided an opportunity to ritualize the meaning of the war in physical forms. Organized into neighborhood posts and state encampments, the GAR functioned simultaneously as a fraternal lodge, philanthropic society, special-interest lobby, and political club—though at the local level the posts seemed to

the Lincoln Post; this I found mention of in the Nashville press as indicated in citations below. Membership rosters for the Lincoln Post are among the Descriptive Records, Department of Tennessee G.A.R. in the McClung Collection, East Tennessee Historical Center.

⁵⁴ Descriptive Records Post No. 4 (Lincoln Post), Department of Tennessee G.A.R., Volume I, Posts 1-44, McClung Historical Collection, East Tennessee Historical Center, Knoxville.

be more fraternal lodge than anything else.⁵⁵ GAR posts were active politically during the early years of Reconstruction, but after Grant's reelection to the presidency in 1872 the organization's political activities focused upon special-interest lobbying for federal pensions—an effort that scored a spectacular success with the 1890 Pensions Act. The organization was also active at the national level in the work of erecting monuments, securing battlefield sites, and making sure that a pro-Union history of the war was taught in schools and colleges across the country.⁵⁶ Within Tennessee, the state GAR was concerned mainly with Memorial Day activities and evidently stayed away from politically-charged battles over educational curricula, especially in the heartland where Confederate sentiment remained predominant.

White Union veterans, to be sure, were acutely aware of the sensitivities surrounding the issue of commemorating the Union cause. It was one thing to honor their fallen comrades in the Nashville Cemetery on Memorial Day. But to march with black veterans and encourage the social fraternization of blacks and whites would have brought the condemnation of the local white press. As it was, public prejudice against the GAR already ran strong and members remembered that during Reconstruction former Confederates had boycotted businessmen suspected of membership, forcing at least one member to conceal his affiliation “as it if were a

⁵⁵ Ibid., xiv. See the issues of the Grand Army Sentinel (Nashville) 1885-1886, copies in the McClung Collection, East Tennessee Historical Center, Knoxville.

⁵⁶ The Best recent history of the GAR is Stuart McConnell, Glorious Contentment: The Grand Army of the Republic, 1865-1900 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992). But see also Mary R. Dearing, Veterans in Politics: The Story of the G.A.R. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1952), which is useful because the author consulted the published proceedings of Southern state encampments collected by the Library of Congress.

capital crime.”⁵⁷ Though enmities had died down by the mid-1880s, the GAR’s reorganization failed to garner much comment in the press and an inaugural state encampment held in Nashville in February 1884 did not elicit comment in the Nashville Banner.⁵⁸ Indeed, the Nashville Union veterans briefly published their own journal, the Grand Army Sentinel, to circulate news of their activities.⁵⁹ A similar indifference to the GAR prevailed in the African American community. Although Tennessee’s black leaders gathered in a convention at the State Capitol in the same week as the GAR encampment, no mention was made in press coverage of their proceedings to indicate that the GAR and black veterans were discussed or honored in any way.⁶⁰ In fact, the African American presence in the Tennessee GAR was very small and undoubtedly represented a social class that the neither black nor white middle-class politicians and other civic leaders wished to be associated with. In 1885, when the department of Tennessee and Georgia had less than fifty posts (the overwhelming majority of them in Tennessee) only eighty-eight veterans from a total membership of 1,233 were African American.⁶¹

In Nashville, ethnic hostilities and suspicions accompanied the founding of the Thomas (‘white’) and Lincoln (‘colored’) posts. The white Union veterans in the Thomas Post publicly floated the idea of launching a companion Confederate post with the idea, as the Banner

⁵⁷ Dearing notes that in the late 1860s “angry southerners gave Tennessee members [of the GAR] the choice of leaving the State or of disavowing membership; in Kentucky they whipped a post commander and assassinated another member.” Veterans in Politics, 190.

⁵⁸ The Banner has no coverage of the GAR state encampment for 1884 through 1888, which are the only years I consulted.

⁵⁹ Dearing, Veterans in Politics, 412n.21.

⁶⁰ See the news reports on the Colored Convention in the Nashville Banner, 28 Feb. – 3 March 1884.

⁶¹ Dearing, Veterans in Politics, 412-13; Journal of the Twenty-first Annual Session, 54.

reported, that “the two organizations could exchange courtesies and materially aid each other.” This does not appear to have happened (at least initially), but the following year the George H. Thomas Post moved quickly to assume control of local Memorial Day celebrations and appointed committees that contained many of the most prominent white Unionists in Nashville.⁶² The Sentinel, an African American newspaper, objected to the exclusion of blacks from the arrangements. Because the Sentinel has not survived it is not possible to discern from the brief abstract quoted in the white press whether the paper objected to the creation of segregated posts for colored veterans or whether they merely objected to being excluded from the Memorial Day ceremonies in Nashville. It was probably the latter, though, since the colored troops had fought in separate regiments at the Battle of Nashville and elsewhere and may have preferred to have control of their own veterans’ post. A spokesman for the Thomas post responded to the Sentinel’s charge, saying he did not want to associate with the “class of colored people who usually attend these ceremonies.” “They regarded an affair of this sort as a picnic,” the spokesman was reported to say, “and practiced the most disgusting vices while on the grounds.” Besides, he added, “it was understood that the colored people were to take charge of the decoration at the Murfreesboro Cemetery.” Meanwhile, the post commander issued an invitation to all honorably discharged soldiers to attend the Nashville ceremonies, including “the heroes of the Mexican and Florida wars, and those who wore the grey.”⁶³

Although Nashville would become a center of Confederate nostalgia by the 1890s, efforts to reorganize the Tennessee department of the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR) in the mid-1880s demonstrate the contested nature of Civil War memory in the heartland and reveal the

⁶² “Decoration Day,” Nashville Banner 1 May 1883.

⁶³ “Memorial Day,” Nashville Banner 30 May 1883.

difficulties of sustaining a biracial Union memory of the war. The GAR was one of the few fraternal organizations in late nineteenth century America that welcomed African American participation. Many northern white veterans saw veterans of the colored regiments as comrades-in-arms; African American GAR posts were welcomed at many state and national encampments; and the GAR leadership resisted efforts to organize a separate department of colored veterans in the Southern states or to deny membership to any veteran on the basis of skin color. A white veteran from Virginia doubtless spoke for many in expressing feelings of fellowship toward black comrades: “I give my hand to the . . . black men who stood side by side with me,” he announced to the national encampment in 1887.⁶⁴ A Missouri delegate in 1891 recalled his service days in the South and remembered that “if you lay wounded, if you were surrounded by the enemy as thick as a swarm of bees, at any moment you were liable to see a black face crawling up to you, and when he came you knew he was your friend.”⁶⁵ A delegate from West Virginia put it less delicately but nonetheless recognized the black veteran as “a comrade . . . notwithstanding I am a southern man.” “I have plowed many a day beside a nigger boy when I was a boy,” he continued, “and I am willing to meet him upon an equality in” the GAR.⁶⁶

Such sentiments reveal the potential of the GAR to connect white and black veterans in brotherhood and suggest that an opportunity existed to create and sustain forms of memory that celebrated American diversity and commemorated emancipation as a main byproduct of the war.

⁶⁴ Comrade Allen of Virginia, Journal of the Twenty-first Annual Session of the National Encampment, Grand Army of the Republic, St. Louis, Missouri (Milwaukee: Burdick & Armitage, 1887), 252.

⁶⁵ Comrade Warner of Missouri, Journal of the Twenty-fifth National Encampment, Grand Army of the Republic, Detroit, Mich., (Rutland, VT.: The Tuttle Company, 1891), 254-55.

⁶⁶ Comrade Northcott of West Virginia, Journal of the Twenty-fifth National Encampment, 258.

But neither the national organization nor, more particularly, the GAR's revival in Middle Tennessee during the 1880s lived up to this promise. Segregated by color from the start, the Tennessee GAR failed to organize black veterans in any sizable number and did not attract the leadership of a black middle-class (few of whom were veterans) absorbed with the fight to remain viable within Republican Party politics, gain financial resources for black institutions, and resist disfranchisement. The GAR also found Middle Tennessee inhospitable ground for their organizational efforts and within three or four years the state's organization gravitated to the less contested ground of East Tennessee. In addition, although the national organization's commitment to racial inclusiveness remained firmly on its statute, the organization's memorial activities in the 1880s and 1890s focused more upon the cause of national salvation than that of emancipation and civil rights. As a recent historian of the GAR has observed, "the questions of blacks and slavery received scant mention in celebrations of the war's outcome."⁶⁷

NOT IN NASHVILLE

The Nashville community of Union veterans, fractured and unbalanced on ethnic lines, also found itself in an uncomfortable position within the national GAR. Quickly after reorganizing the department of Tennessee, delegates to the national conference in Minneapolis urged their Northern comrades to hold the following year's meeting in Nashville. "We extend to you a hearty soldiers' invitation to visit Nashville," urged S. S. Garrett of the Tennessee delegation. "There are eight thousand soldiers buried within that Department [and] comrade[s will] visit these scenes with great interest. We have a small Department, and by your meeting there you

⁶⁷ McConnell, Glorious Contentment, 181.

can enable us to double our membership.” Garrett’s suggestion drew support from a representative from Michigan who declared himself to be “in favor of going to Nashville, to help our brethren there.” “It didn’t cost us anything to be loyal,” he continued. “It did these men. If we owed them anything in the dark days of the Rebellion, we owe them something now and we should give them encouragement if nothing more.”⁶⁸

But not all the delegates viewed Nashville as favorably. The Delegate from Massachusetts objected to going to Nashville because it required going south of Mason and Dixon’s line. “Simply,” he elaborated, “there are some of us yet who don’t like our blue and our grey too thoroughly mixed in these Grand Army Encampments.” He continued:

We feel that when we meet together here, we do not want to have somebody come on to the platform and tell us that we are forgiven for what we did. That is all right down in Nashville. We love those fellows now. We hope they will be good boys and never behave as they have done, but we want to keep away from any place which is not free from all such entanglements, and be boys in blue and nothing else.⁶⁹

Stung by these remarks, James Chamberlain of Nashville admitted that “there was a time when . . . if you had gone there they would have welcomed you with bloody hands to hospitable graves, but that time has gone.” Chamberlain observed that many Tennesseans contributed to the ending of the Rebellion and that their numbers had been swelled by “large numbers of Northern people” who had settled there since the war. “The people are loyal,” the ex-Pennsylvania military agent asserted, “I want you to see not the old South that met you in arms, but the new South which is

⁶⁸ Journal of the Eighteenth Annual Session of the National Encampment, Grand Army of the Republic, Minneapolis, Minn., July 23, 24 and 25, 1884 (Philadelphia: Town Book and Job Printing House, 1884), 215-17.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 218.

ready to enfold you to her arms.⁷⁰ At the end of the debate Portland, Maine was chosen as the site for the next meeting.

In 1886 the Tennessee delegation tried again to bring the annual encampment to Nashville. Armed with pledges of economic support from “the wealthiest and most prosperous business men of Nashville,” a speaker from the Tennessee organization urged the national delegates to consider the sentiments of the rank and file soldier, “nine-tenths” of whom “want to come to Nashville.” The speaker presented Middle Tennessee almost as holy ground where veterans could “stand on the old battle-fields once more.”

They want to visit the battle-field of Donelson, and stand on the old historic spot where Pap Thomas planted his battle-flag when he shivered Hood’s backbone at the battle of Nashville. They want to go from there to Franklin, to Stone River, where seven thousand of the white marble headstones stand upon the very sod that was watered by their blood.

But again, though Nashville ran a close second in the balloting, the delegates voted to stay out of the South and go to St. Louis.⁷¹ The Tennessee GAR made one further attempt in 1895 to bring the national encampment to Nashville, but it was a feeble effort and garnered only 23 votes out of 745 cast.⁷² Nashville never did host an annual encampment of the Grand Army of the Republic.

Within a few years of reorganization, the locus of organization and authority in the Tennessee GAR had moved from Nashville to Chattanooga. The only Nashvillian to serve as commander in the state organization was Edward S. Jones, the Pennsylvanian who revived the

⁷⁰ Ibid., 220-21.

⁷¹ Journal of the Twentieth Annual Session of the National Encampment, Grand Army of the Republic, San Francisco, California (Washington: Gibson Bros., 1886), 234-35.

Tennessee GAR in 1884-1885. By 1892 only three of fourteen state officers came from Nashville; by 1896, with a new headquarters in Chattanooga, the slate of officers was exclusively from East Tennessee.⁷³ For a time the organization prospered. By the GAR's twenty-fifth anniversary in 1891, Tennessee had 87 posts—more than any other former Confederate state—and 3,719 members.⁷⁴ At least five of these posts were organized for colored veterans, though the extant record does not show how these posts came about. Between 1883 and 1900 none of the state officers were colored and no colored veterans served as delegates to the national encampment.⁷⁵

The Tennessee GAR officers continued to insist on separate posts for colored veterans and bemoaned the fact that the African American posts scarcely could sustain themselves. William J. Ramage of Knoxville, commander-in-chief of the Tennessee and Georgia department, complained to the national encampment in 1887 that “it is utterly impossible in our Department to find comrades of color who have the ability or the knowledge requisite to keep up their posts.” One colored post, Ramage noted, had surrendered its charter; two were suspended; one was “unknown and can not be found”; and the fifth “is being kept alive by the efforts of a certain

⁷² Journal of the Twenty-ninth National Encampment Grand Army of the Republic, Louisville, Kentucky (Rockford, Ill.: Frank S. Horner Printing Co., 1895), 263, 270.

⁷³ Journal of the Twenty-sixth National Encampment, Grand Army of the Republic, Washington D.C. (Albany, N.Y.: S. H. Wentworth, 1892), 38; Journal of the Thirtieth National Encampment, Grand Army of the Republic, St. Paul, Minn., (n.p., 1896), 49.

⁷⁴ Figures for posts and members in other Southern states were Alabama (11 posts, 334 members); Arkansas (77, 2200); Florida (10, 471); Georgia (10, 455); Louisiana and Mississippi (17, 1093); Texas (48, 1305); and Virginia (44, 1422). Journal of the Twenty-fifth National Encampment, 66.

⁷⁵ Beath, Grand Army of the Republic; misc. Journals (1883-1893).

comrade belonging to one of the white posts.”⁷⁶ This situation had improved by the end of the decade, however, when in 1890 and again in 1891 the “Lincoln Post No. 4, colored” assisted the “George H. Thomas Post No. 1, white” at the Memorial Day ceremonies in the Nashville National Cemetery. In 1890 the Mozart Society of Fisk University provided the singing.⁷⁷ But the number and size of the colored posts seems paltry when one considers that black Union veterans, according to the 1890 census, slightly outnumbered white Union veterans in Nashville by 355 to 348 and overwhelmingly outnumbered whites in the rural heartland. In each county, hundreds of former slaves had served in the Union army; though many had migrated out of the region after the war, the majority had remained.⁷⁸

The colored posts of the Tennessee GAR labored not only under the second-class citizenship imposed by white Union veterans, they also appear to have attracted little support from the middle-class leadership within the African American community. Black Nashville did not commemorate its veterans as much as it vaunted antebellum abolitionists and the white Republican leadership of the 1860s. For example, at the 1884 State Colored Convention, held in Nashville, special eulogies and resolutions of respect were delivered to the memory of Wendell Phillips and Sojourner Truth. Then at an Emancipation Day ceremony in 1891, the occasion

⁷⁶ Journal of the Twenty-first Annual Session, 251.

⁷⁷ “Sleeping Soldiers,” Nashville Daily American 31 May 1890; “The Federal Dead,” Nashville Banner 25 May 1891, “Decoration of Graves,” Nashville Banner 30 May 1891.

⁷⁸ In Tennessee as a whole, Colored veterans constituted 20.6% of the total number of Union veterans. Department of the Interior, The Eleventh Census: 1890, Part III. The 1890 Census schedules do give the number of black Union veterans by county or region. But for Maury County I have estimated that perhaps as many as one in ten black men of military age, 1861-1865, had served in the Union army during the Civil War. See copy of my remarks to the African American History Council at the Maury County Archives, 16 March 2002, reprinted as “Freedom’s Soldiers: What Do We Know about the Black Civil War Soldiers of Maury County?” in Historic Maury 38 (June 2002), 58-71.

included eulogies to William L. Garrison and Abraham Lincoln.⁷⁹ Churches, Masonic lodges, and educational institutions—not veterans’ camps—attracted the patronage of the black middle-class. Only occasionally do we see glimpses of the leadership or participation of black veterans at African American civic events—for example, a colored GAR post initiated the 1891 Emancipation Day celebrations in Nashville and were duly thanked “for their untiring efforts to make it a grand success.”⁸⁰

By the mid-1890s, the Tennessee GAR was not in robust health. An 1894 inspection revealed that only 40 percent of the 3,270 members exhibited “interest in the Post.” In only 50 percent of posts did the inspector find rituals “committed to memory and properly performed.” Only five posts reported maintaining a relief fund for charitable purposes, and together they spent a mere \$316 on relief. Less than a third of the posts were in a “good” condition, and most of them were in East Tennessee.⁸¹ In Nashville, active membership was down to 23 in the Lincoln Post and 71 in the Thomas Post.⁸² The organization limped along until the early 1920s,

⁷⁹ “Colored Convention,” Nashville Banner 29 Feb. and 1 March 1882; “Emancipation Day,” Nashville Banner 1 Jan. 1891.

⁸⁰ “Hon. John M. Langston,” Nashville Banner 2 January 1891.

⁸¹ “Report of the Inspector,” Eleventh Encampment, Department of Tennessee, Grand Army of the Republic. Greenville, March 21, 1894. Records 1893-'94 and The Journal of Proceedings. (Knoeville, Tennessee: Tribune Job Office, n.d.) McClung Collection Folder 18-10a.

⁸² The exception can be found in Columbia where colored veterans reorganized for the first in a GAR post in 1896. Within a year 37 vets had joined the post. Descriptive Records Post No. 102 (Columbia), Department of Tennessee G.A.R., Volume I, Posts 1-44, McClung Historical Collection, East Tennessee Historical Center, Knoxville.

but by 1912 only two Nashville-based members made the journey to attend the 29th annual encampment at Greeneville, East Tennessee.⁸³

Though the journals of state encampments acknowledged the deaths of black members in the same columns as white veterans and without a racial designation, the interracial promise of the GAR never took off in Middle Tennessee. By the early 1890s white Union veterans were more likely to appear with white Confederate veterans than with their African American comrades in the GAR—something that would have been unthinkable in the late 1860s. As early as the Memorial Day celebrations in 1886, for example, the Nashville Banner looked forward to “a large attendance . . . not only of the ex-union soldiers, but of the boys in grey. The brave soldiers who met each other on the bloody field are among the first always to accord a just tribute to the bravery and gallantry of their former foes.”⁸⁴ That is, the editor’s unspoken assumption had it, so long as the veterans were white. The great African American historian, George Washington Williams, who was active in the GAR in Ohio, serving as an officer of that state’s organization, believed in the potential to sustain within the GAR’s circle of memory an emancipatory record of the 1860s and to keep this memory before the American people.⁸⁵ Similarly, Frederick Douglass, an occasional speaker at GAR encampments in the North, took pains to keep before Union veterans the centrality of emancipation to the war’s legacy.⁸⁶ But in

⁸³ Journal of the Twenty-Ninth Encampment at National Soldiers’ Home, Tennessee, May 16th and 17th, 1912 (Greeneville, Tenn.: J. R. Self & Co., 1912). McClung Collection, Folder 18-10Bb.

⁸⁴ “Decoration Day,” Nashville Banner 29 May 1886.

⁸⁵ John Hope Franklin, George Washington Williams: A Biography (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 97, 169-171.

⁸⁶ McConnell, Glorious Contentment, 213.

Middle Tennessee the high promise of an integrated community of memory within the revived GAR of the mid-1880s was the still-born child of Reconstruction.

BLACK VETERANS

The maturation of a national cult of reconciliation between white soldiers of the blue and of the gray left little space for the stories of black soldiers. In fact, as a racial politics of white supremacy emerged from the turned-to-ashes rhetoric of a color-blind civil rights, the cult of sectional reconciliation among whites actually required a forgetting of the Civil War services of black soldiers. Sectional reconciliation could not be sustained if the issue of slavery and the cause of African American freedom remained central to a national collective memory of the war. But though white reconciliation marginalized and de-legitimized an Emancipationist memory of the war, the testimonies of individual black Union veterans and their families and fraternal networks, while often silent and imperceptible, could not be extinguished by white indifference and condescension.

Federal pension records of black veterans contain fascinating glimpses into the character and performance of black Civil War memories. The trace lines of evidence left on a pension application form or in a supporting deposition are practically all the historian has to work with in getting at the performance of memory, identity, and action within post-war African American communities. Established by the U.S. Congress in 1862, federal pensions provided relief irrespective of race, providing (at least in principle) equal benefits to white and black veterans

and their families.⁸⁷ By the 1880s and 1890s, as black political leaders in Tennessee fought to keep alive the Republican Party's commitment to civil rights and racial equality, federal pensions became one of the more powerful legacies of Reconstruction, continuing an egalitarian entitlement program (dubbed by Theda Skocpol "America's first social security system") into the Twentieth Century.⁸⁸ For a time during the 1890s more than forty percent of the federal budget was taken up by Union pensions.⁸⁹ Principled neutrality on race, however, did not mean equality in practice: as Don Shaffer has argued, African American soldiers faced many disadvantages in the pension application process and were less likely than white Union soldiers to gain a federal pension.⁹⁰ Nonetheless, by 1890 over four thousand Tennessee blacks (including almost five hundred in the city of Nashville) were federal "pensioners."⁹¹ The Dependent Pension Act (1890) led to a large expansion in the pension system by admitting claims from the descendants of deceased veterans and in allowing disability claims from veterans on the basis of age and not

⁸⁷ Donald R. Shaffer, " 'I Do Not Suppose That Uncle Sam Looks at the Skin': African Americans and the Civil War Pension System, 1865-1934," Civil War History 46 (June 2000): 132-147, quotation 132.

⁸⁸ Theda Skocpol, "America's First Social Security System: The Expansion of Benefits for Civil War Veterans," Political Science Quarterly 108 (Spring 1993).

⁸⁹ Maris Vinovskis, "Have Social Historians Lost the Civil War? Some Preliminary Demographic Speculations," Journal of American History 76 (June 1989), Fig. 5.

⁹⁰ Shaffer, "African Americans and the Civil War Pension System," estimates that 75.4 percent of black Union veterans and 92.6 percent of white Union veterans received pensions from the federal government.

⁹¹ Department of the Interior, Census Office, Compendium of the Eleventh Census: 1890 Part III (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1897), 576, 583. Census agents in 1890 found 355 black Union veterans in Nashville and 124 widows of black veterans. These figures, however, are approximate and based upon self-identification only; no cross-checking with pension or service records occurred.

just on injuries received while in Union service.⁹² While access to pension remained unequal, as Don Shaffer notes, African Americans took the law's promise of equality seriously and "grasped at [the] pledge in an era that held little other hope of fair treatment."⁹³

Middle Tennessee's black veterans had not been invited to contribute to J. Berrien Lindsley's Military Annals of Tennessee, but they were determined to record and capitalize upon their services to the Union. Throughout the 1880s and 1890s local blacks from towns, cities, and hamlets across the heartland petitioned the federal government for relief. They faced an arduous task—strewn with hurdles ranging from the expense and bureaucracy of the system to the prejudices (in some cases criminality) of claim agents. Black pension applicants were also often handicapped by poor literacy and by lack of documentation about the vital statistics of their lives. Consequently, their applications were often subject to delay and special investigation.⁹⁴

Unquestionably black communities felt entitled as corporate entities to the financial benefits of Union service. Former comrades, to be sure, shared information among each other, often working with the same legal counsel, visiting the same doctor, and witnessing and corroborating each other's applications. Civic leaders also took a role in broadcasting information about the pension system and urging veterans to pursue their rights. In January 1880, the Nashville Herald and Pilot, an African American newspaper, advised its readers that "any soldier or sailor who, without fault on his part, was disabled to any extent . . . is entitled to a pension [beginning] from the date of his discharge from the service, and continues as long as the

⁹² A useful review of federal pension law for Civil War veterans can be found in McConnell, Glorious Contentment, 143-153.

⁹³ Shaffer, "African Americans and the Civil War Pension System," 147.

⁹⁴ Shaffer estimates that examiners investigated 40% of the black southern union veterans' cases and only 26% of white southern cases. "African Americans and the Civil War Pension System."

disability exists.” The paper urged all disabled veterans to apply for pensions during the coming year, noting that “next January, the law required it [the pension] to begin only from the date of making the application.” The average difference, the editor noted, could be “over \$1,000.” The article carefully spelled out the extent and conditions of the entitlement, concluding with a listing of the “Colored Regiments, who are a part of our population and subscribers,” which included those regiments “who attacked Gen. Hood’s forces in the entrenched camp in two miles of Nashville, Dec. 16 1864, and repulsed him with great loss of yourselves.”⁹⁵ In speaking directly to community self-interest, the Herald and Pilot memorialized the sacrifices of Nashville blacks in order to galvanize local interest in claiming the earned entitlements of pension benefits.

While elites often took the lead in urging Middle Tennessee veterans to apply for pensions, it was the ordinary circumstances and individual motivation of particular veterans—each with their own story of want and travail—that brought a pension application to life. Many went to great lengths to overcome bureaucratic and logistical hurdles to prove their entitlement to Federal aid. It often required a Herculean effort for many applicants who were obliged to seek their own counsel, finance the preliminary medical investigation, provide supporting documentation and solicit other evidence in support of their claim. Such efforts were driven by need, to be sure, but also by a personal sense of entitlement rooted in a memory of the Civil War services of particular soldiers. William Alexander, for example, a Giles County veteran of the 111st United States Colored Infantry, applied twice for a pension before his death in 1901. He was unsuccessful on both occasions, though this did not deter his widow from successfully

⁹⁵ “Late War Pensions,” The Herald and Pilot January 24th, 1880 (No. 25), TSLA.

pursuing her own claim in the early twentieth century.⁹⁶ A special investigator visited the county and having interviewed “all of the comrades” of the deceased soldier (as well as court clerks, city officials, and letter carriers) determined that the claim was meritorious. Although the company corporal Decatur Dawson, a blacksmith in Mt. Pleasant, had not seen Alexander since their discharge in Nashville in 1866, he recalled him in 1903 as “a little black fellow; very young and quite small . . . and stuttered when he tried to talk.”⁹⁷ This speaking defect was the most prominent feature remembered by Alexander’s comrades and appears to have been the detail that convinced the pension investigator, almost forty years after the initial pension application, of the soldier’s identity.

In another case, Patience Meredith, the wife of a soldier who died December, 1864, while a prisoner of war in Mobile, Alabama, applied for a pension thirty-four years later, declaring herself to be “the remarried widow of Henry Eason . . . who enlisted as a soldier in Pulaski.” Despite the difficulty of establishing her slave marriage to Eason, in 1898 Patience pursued a pension claim after her second husband’s death and provided testimony from her former owners, her deceased husband’s owners, the soldier’s comrades, and neighbors to prove successfully the merits of her case.⁹⁸

The characterization of the war by pension applicants revealed the 1860s to be a watershed decade in temporal consciousness with Union service often serving as a catalyst opening up new opportunities for the changed circumstances of postwar lives. Whereas white

⁹⁶ Civil War pension File of William Alexander (alias Malone), 111st U.S. Colored Infantry, RG 15, NARA.

⁹⁷ Affidavit of Decatur Dawson, 10 March 1903, Civil War pension file of William Alexander (alias Malone), 111st U.S. Colored Infantry, RG 15, NARA.

⁹⁸ Civil War pension File of Henry Eason, 111st U. S. Colored Infantry, RG 15, NARA.

deponents in pension cases characterized events in the spring of 1865 as the end of an era, as a narrative coming to an end, black voices narrated the end of the war in terms that suggested a new beginning. For example, Mary Tarpley testified that her former slave woman, Patience, left her farm “I believe about the close of the war,” but Patience described herself as moving into Pulaski “shortly after the war.”⁹⁹ In other testimonies, the arrival of Union soldiers or knowledge of emancipation provided the narrative catalyst of autobiographical sketches. Emily Ridley’s deposition in her mother’s application for a widow’s pension described the applicant’s antebellum condition before moving to an account of her postwar life with the transitional phrase “as soon as the colored people were made free.”¹⁰⁰ Other deponents in this case dated events back to 1865. For example, “Doctor” Palmer, who had served as a cook in Co. A of the 13th U.S. Colored Infantry, remembered at the age of 75 in 1898 that a former comrade’s wife had died “about Christmas the second year after Lee surrendered.”¹⁰¹

Though their language was mediated by pension examiners, claimants and deponents often gave a clear sense of agency in establishing their own freedom during the war. “As a slave, I belonged to James Thomas of [Maury] county,” declared Sarah Walker in 1890. “I left him when the Yankee Army first came to Columbia, went to that town, and then to Nashville.”¹⁰²

⁹⁹ Deposition of Mrs. Mary N. Tarpley, 6th Dec. 1899, and affidavit of Patience Meredith, 20th June 1898, Civil War pension File of Henry Eason, Co. E 111st U.S. Colored Infantry, RG 15, NARA.

¹⁰⁰ Deposition of Emily Ridley, 8 March 1898, Civil War pension file of Harvey Martin, Co. A 13th U.S. Colored Infantry, RG 15, NARA.

¹⁰¹ Deposition of Doctor Palmer, 7 March 1898, Civil War pension file of Harvey Martin, Co. A 13th U.S. Colored Infantry, RG 15, NARA.

¹⁰² Deposition of Sarah Walker, 12 March 1890, Civil War pension file of James Thomas, Co. B 13th U.S. Colored Infantry, RG 15, NARA.

Easter Wright remembered that her son “ran away to enlist.”¹⁰³ Patience Meredith recalled that her husband “enlisted” in the army voluntarily and, as a neighbor recalled, “went off to the army.”¹⁰⁴ Others, however, pointed to a more ambiguous memory and characterized the departure of loved ones almost as an abduction. Julia Holden Benjamin recalled in 1880 that she lived with her husband until the Spring of 1864 “when he went or was taken off from this neighborhood and was enlisted.”¹⁰⁵ The testimony of whites were much more likely to characterize the departure of a black soldier as an abduction. “Henry Eason,” Patience Meredith’s husband, “was carried off into the Union Army” declared her former owner, Mary Tarpley, in a flat contradiction of Patience’s memory of the same event.¹⁰⁶

Federal investigators—in an age when government largesse was penurious and thrifty—looked hard at the applications of African Americans, especially where (as was so often was the case) the documentation necessary to establish the kinship ties and biographical details upon which the merits of the application rested, was nonexistent. One Pension Bureau investigator argued in his adjudication of “a troublesome case” that he considered to be fraudulent that the “claims of colored claimants . . . as a rule [are] made up to fit the case.” “As a class,” he reasoned,

¹⁰³ Deposition of Easter Wright, 4th October 1892, Civil War pension file of Rash Cook, Co. I 12th U.S. Colored Infantry, RG 15, NARA.

¹⁰⁴ Affidavit of Patience Meredith, 14th June 1898, & Deposition of Mary Kimbro, 6th Dec. 1899, Civil War pension file of Henry Eason, Co. E 111st U.S. Colored Infantry, RG 15, NARA.

¹⁰⁵ Deposition of Julia Holden Benjamin, 25th March 1880, Civil War pension file of George Benjamin, Co. E 111st U.S. Colored Infantry, RG 15, NARA.

¹⁰⁶ Deposition of Mrs. Mary N. Tarpley, 6th Dec. 1899, Civil War pension file of Henry Eason, Co. E. 111st U.S. Colored Infantry, RG 15, NARA.

I think they mean to be honest in their statements if properly questioned, but their affidavits are taken in a careless and irresponsible manner, being an imposition on their illiteracy and bad recollection.¹⁰⁷

While, it is true, most depositions given by African Americans were attested to by sign rather than signature, it does not follow that the poor recollection of dates equaled an amnesia about the past. In case after case Middle Tennessee's black pension applicants revealed a clear memory of the main contours of their lives. Illiterate applicants provided detail and definition not through dates but through phases of residence, ownership, and by the narrative prophecy of eventual liberation developed from Old Testament stories of the Jewish people. The testimonials from blacks that provided the details and stories of war-time service are similar in character to the published testimonies of Confederate veterans. With two exceptions—first, the power that whites had to contest and refute the testimonials of blacks formerly under their ownership; and second, the absence of any broad context (which the Confederate Military Annals had provided) to position black memory within regional history.

The pension application file for James Thomas, a Columbia slave and Union soldier killed December 16, 1864 at the Battle of Nashville, is but one example of local whites refuting the remembered experience of blacks formerly in their charge. When the soldier's daughter, Amy Robertson, applied for a pension as his dependent in 1890 (nearly a quarter century after the soldier's death) she faced two hurdles: establishing the fact of her parent's antebellum marriage and proving that she was their only child. These challenges were compounded by the fact that her mother, Cynthia Pillow, had died shortly after the war, Amy then being raised in Columbia by an aunt. To verify the applicant's claims, the Pension Bureau sent an investigator

¹⁰⁷ C. W. Taylor to Commissioner of Pension, March 21, 1890, Civil War pension file for James Thomas, Co. B. 13 USCT, RG 15, NARA.

to Columbia. Between March 8-21 1890, Investigator C. W. Taylor took depositions from black and white residents—and strikingly different accounts emerged.

As slaves, Amy testified, her parents had separate owners. Jim Thomas, her father, was owned by James Thomas; her mother, Cynthia Pillow, by Granville Pillow. “My understanding is,” she continued “that my parents were married on the Pillow place . . . by Alford Wilson, a black Methodist preacher.”¹⁰⁸ Wilson, still living at 76 years (and making a living hawking eggs, butter, and chickens on the Pulaski pike) confirmed the details of Amy’s parents’ wedding.¹⁰⁹ Other testimonials corroborated this account, including one veteran who recalled Cynthia visiting James in army camp.¹¹⁰ Sarah Walker, Amy’s aunt and surrogate mother:

I was present when my brother and Cynthia married, they had no regular ceremony, but they just passed the cake, or something to eat, around, and called it a wedding. They went together with permission of their owners. . . . After the wedding Mr. Pillow hired James and from that time on until James went into the Army, they lived together as husband and wife under the same roof on the Pillow farm . . . They were known and recognized as husband and wife by the Whites and Blacks and they recognized each other as such.¹¹¹

But this was not the memory of James W. B. Thomas, Sr. The soldier’s former owner, 73 years old in 1890, testified that “Jim” was indeed his “Negro boy.” “Jim remained with me until he went to the Yankee Army in the Spring of 1862, at the time Gen’l Negley had his Hd Qrs. in that

¹⁰⁸ Deposition of Amy Robertson, March 8, 1890, Civil War pension file for James Thomas, RG 15, NARA.

¹⁰⁹ Deposition of Alfred Wilson, March 19, 1890, Civil War pension file for James Thomas, RG 15, NARA.

¹¹⁰ Deposition of William Rawkin, March 19, 1890, Civil War pension file for James Thomas, RG 15, NARA.

¹¹¹ Deposition of Sarah Walker, March 12, 1890, Civil War pension file for James Thomas, RG 15, NARA.

town.” When asked about Jim’s marriage to Cynthia and the veracity of the testimony given by local blacks, James Thomas had this to say:

There is not a word of truth in that whole story, and so far as Grenville Pillow is concerned he never hired a negro of me in his life; furthermore, I would not have allowed Jim to have a wife on somebody else’s farm. It is true that Sarah is his sister. I owned them both. I never heard a word about this business until about 4 or 5 months ago. . . . Granville Pillow never would have allowed one of my negroes marry one of his slaves without a written consent from me, and Jim did not have that, I am sure.¹¹²

Partly on the strength of Thomas’ testimony, Amy Robertson never did receive a pension for her father’s service in the Union army. Perhaps it was the painful reminder of young Jim’s desertion that continued to anger his former owner in 1890. Whereas in other pension cases local whites would contradict black testimony that young men had “left to enlist” by insisting that they were rather “carried off by the Yankees,” James Thomas admitted that Jim had willfully left him once Union forces arrived in the neighborhood. Whatever the case, this application demonstrates the continued power that local whites had to refute the lived experience of blacks.

BURY THE PAST

Upon the death of Frederick Douglass in 1895, James C. Napier, speaking to an assembly of Nashville blacks, eulogized the elder statesman as having lived a patriotic life, “one of the most illustrious and useful voyages ever accomplished by an American citizen.” For Napier, Douglass was a great American, a great southerner, and a great African American. But Napier saw the greatness of Douglass not in his dogged critique of the racism at the heart of American culture, nor in the elder statesman’s efforts to keep alive an emancipationist vision of the Civil War. On

this occasion Napier emphasized Douglass' ability to overcome "all the disadvantages and hardship of his environments." Douglass, Napier went on,

was honest, honorable and upright in all his walks of life[.] [W]hether in the performance of duty he was called to high or low estate the same sense of honor, courage and uprightness characterized his every act and movement.¹¹³

At the heart of Napier's eulogy was a "race progress" rhetoric that emphasized the great example of Douglass' life to the African American readers of the Nashville Citizen. To be sure, Napier recognized Douglass as having been anti-slavery "as soon as he arrived at the age of discretion" and had devoted his "entire life to securing [the] freedom and elevation" of his people. But Napier gave no sense of Douglass' disillusion toward the end of his life with the state of civil rights; nor did he speak of the 1860s as Douglass always did as a mythical time, the progressive achievements of which were central to the regeneration of American democracy. As befit a devoted follower of Booker T. Washington, who in the same year of Douglass' passing would deliver his famous Atlanta Compromise address, Napier's appreciation of Douglass was framed by the accommodationist politics of the 1890s and not the revolutionary visions of the 1860s. Historian David Blight has argued that Douglass' pledge to "never forget" the civil war came from his belief that the Civil War was an ideological conflict over the nature of American freedom and from a deeply held patriotic sense of an American nationalism in which all African Americans would find a secure identity. Douglass also saw the rise of Lost Cause mentality as part of a piece with the resurgent racism of the late nineteenth century and symptomatic of a

¹¹² Deposition of James W. B. Thomas, Sr., March 18, 1890, Civil War pension file for James Thomas, RG 15, NARA.

¹¹³ "Hon. J. C. Napier's Eulogy, in 'Nashville Citizen,'" in James T. Haley, Afro-American Encyclopaedia . . . (Nashville: Haley & Florida, 1895), 402-3.

American cultural tendency toward historical amnesia.¹¹⁴ Napier's political tendencies prompted him to hold up Douglass' life as a virtuous example to other African Americans, suggesting that a biography of Douglass held a present-day usefulness while the saga of his past held little meaning beyond a story of overcoming great odds.

Douglass' belief that the 14th and 15th amendments to the constitution provided a bedrock for equal rights was shared by local politicians such as Napier who, like Douglass, remained faithful to the Republican Party throughout his life. But Douglass' insistence upon the need to mythologize the 1860s and enshrine enduring historical myths about the African American freedom struggle in the nation's cultural memory found few disciples in Middle Tennessee by the 1890s. Faced with a resurgent racism from local whites, exclusion from political and social life, and persistent poverty and illiteracy within their own community, most African American civic leaders articulated an individualist ideology of racial progress based on programs of industrial training and moral improvement.

Two examples will serve to illustrate the state of black memory at the turn of the century. The first condition was that of historical protest, of refuting the claims of Lost Cause history and pointing out its contradictions. In 1902 the National Baptist Union, published in Nashville, issued a stinging critique of Southern memory and bemoaned the fact that "the tendency of present times is to forget the disagreeable things of the past." White Southerners, the periodical noted, were "enjoying [the] tendency toward reconciliation and fraternalization" with northern veterans. But in desiring to bury past differences, the Union argued, "it would be a nice thing to bury it all." Whereas the Fisk Herald in 1885 chastised the South for defending "old

¹¹⁴ David Blight, Frederick Douglass' Civil War: Keeping Faith in Jubilee (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989), 225-39.

institutions” and “kicking against the pricks” of history, the National Baptist Union in 1902 was left to decry the fraternization of white veterans, north and south, and call for the internment of all aspects of the past. In truth, the wish to bury the past had been evident as a strain in black historical consciousness since the war. As the Fisk Herald observed in 1885, the fate of the freedmen since the war had not been “a smooth and pleasant road” and suggested “burying the past in the sea of forgetfulness and spreading the mantle of charity and good will over it.” By the turn of the century, however, the notion of the past as a burden best forgotten had gained greater prominence.¹¹⁵

A second example comes from James Haley’s Afro-American Encyclopaedia (1895), a selection of profiles, sayings, and speeches compiled and published in Nashville, which exemplified this emphasis on self-improvement and institutional growth. The book, the editor conceded, was “one of reference rather than one of criticism, an accumulation of facts rather than of opinions.” Still the volume was a purposeful and opinionated adage for racial progress, designed “to meet the wants of the negro, who is desirous of knowing more of the history of his race, and the achievements of its great men and women.”¹¹⁶ Profiles of leading businessmen, church leaders, and politicians accompanied portraits of educational institutions and churches. The Civil War Era, while providing a faint backdrop to some of the portraits, had very few entries devoted to it. The single mention of black Union soldiers came in a reprinted speech by T. T. Fortune in Waco, Texas, in which the speaker reminded his audience that “200,000 black troops fought in the union army—fought like tigers.” But quickly he moved on to discuss the

¹¹⁵ National Baptist Union (Nashville) vol. 3, no. 42, June 21, 1902. SBHLA; Fisk Herald 3 (November 1885).

¹¹⁶ Haley, Afro-American Encyclopaedia, preface.

“200,000 of them [slaves] in the fields of the South” who remained dutiful and loyal “and made the supplies that kept the Confederate armies in the field, and protected the wives and children of those in the field.” He continued,

Did not these sable children wear the uniform of gray in a double sense? We fought on both sides of the question. We did so knowing that the success of one side meant freedom to us, and that the success of the other meant continued servitude. . . . How shall we account for it? It is worth the pains to seek for cause of result so paradoxical and unusual in the history of mankind. I think not. . . . The 200,000 who fought on the Union side received their reward, the gratitude of a reunited people in which a small annual pension reminds them; they received the emancipation of 4,500,000 of their brethren from the bonds of chattel slavery; and they received the right to vote, to take part in all high and holy functions of citizenship, of mankind. And what have they received who fought on the side of the gray? This is a question upon which there is much difference of opinion.¹¹⁷

The speaker, without offering further opinion, then proceeded to recall a funeral of a black veteran of one of the Confederate Mississippi regiments. “When he breathed his last,” Fortune noted, “he was drawing a pension from the treasury of Mississippi. The hearse that bore his remains to their final resting place was followed by a long line of veterans of the lost cause, battle-scarred veterans of high and low degree, who regarded the dead black as one of them. They laid him to rest in the sod of his fellows.” This scene caused the observer much emotion and he “forgot that the man honored had fought on the lost side of a great cause.” The speaker explained the incongruity by adding that despite the need to criticize the racist actions of white Southerners, “in every State, and city, and hamlet, and plantation in the South, there has always been, and there is to-day a helpful sympathy and interest which sustains the weak, which cares for the sick, and in a measure respects the strong.” This unnamed black Confederate, buried by white veterans of the Lost Cause, was the only Civil War soldier to receive a eulogy in James

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 538-40.

Haley's Encyclopaedia. It is a striking example of the extent to which an emancipationist memory of the war had disassembled within the Union community of Middle Tennessee and become submerged beneath the triumphant tenets of Lost Cause nostalgia.

5. The Long Shadow of the Lost Cause

“We do well by this yearly recurring service to hold before our children and our children’s children that past which their fathers and mothers took such worthy part. . . . For out of that past must spring whatsoever shall be great or worthy in our future. No higher purpose can move our children, than to live worthy of their traditions, and to do no dishonour to the noble race to which they belong.”

Rev. J. H. McNeilly, Memorial Day address, 1894, Franklin, Tenn.¹

“We will attend their sacred graves and will cherish their memory; we will be the faithful chroniclers of the truth during the remaining years of our lives, and in dying we will endeavour to transmit to the generations that follow such love for them that, while the world shall last, the South be as a home and abiding place for true patriotism.”

Mrs. John Overton, President, Nashville Chapter, United Daughters of the Confederacy, 11 November 1896.²

In June of 1897 Henry Clay Yeatman, a local lawyer and former Confederate Colonel, joined in Nashville an estimated 16,000 veterans for the eighth annual convention of the United Confederate Veterans. The Confederates were greater in number than Gen. Hood’s army had been in attempting to reclaim Nashville in December 1864, and this time no Yankees stood in their way. Nashville, like many southern cities, competed hard to host the annual reunion events of the United Confederate Veterans, and the triumphant 1897 reunion, held to coincide with

¹Confederate Veteran II (Sept. 94), 264

²Confederate Veteran 1V (Dec. 96), 405.

Tennessee's Centennial Exposition, provided evidence of the commercial value of the Confederate tradition as well as its central place in the continuum of Tennessee history. For Yeatman, however, the feelings were personal, and he reveled in what he called the "complete fraternization" of the occasion. "Everybody talked to everybody wherever they met on the street," he reported to his daughters, while "some harmless treason was talked but greeted as much with good natured laughter as cheers." At the Union Gospel Tabernacle (now the Ryman Auditorium) Yeatman crowded with hundreds of others to hear Governor Robert Love Taylor eulogize the antebellum world as a "brilliant civilization" that cradled a nobility of character that now fired the economic development of Nashville. It was with such celebratory appreciation of the sacrifices of the Confederate generation that the ghosts of slavery and secession waltzed unspeaking through the political precincts of the New South providing quasi-religious apparitions of the glories of a past civilization. Like the Holy Spirit, the Southern cause remained among them silently unifying the proceedings with memories of struggles long past yet not forgotten. As the veterans marched through the rain-drenched streets of Nashville, drawing rapturous applause from onlookers, Henry Yeatman's thoughts turned nostalgic and sentimental. "I think some of the heart muscles which had become flaccid from long disuse," he wrote two days later, "had new blood and vitality."³

Participation in the 1897 reunion gave Henry Clay Yeatman the opportunity to dwell once again amidst the feelings of comradeship he had felt as a younger man in the 1860s. Where once this might have triggered memories fired with emotion at the hardships and losses born

³ Henry Clay Yeatman to 'My Dear Girls,' 27 June 1897, and to 'My Dear Jenny,' 29 June 1897, in Yeatman-Polk Papers, 1785-1970, TSLA; for a colorful account of the Confederate reunion at Nashville in 1897 see Don H. Doyle, Nashville in the New South, 1880-1930 (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1985), 154-55.

during the struggle against the Yankees, increasingly the sentiments of men like Yeatman were cast entirely in a nostalgic frame. Nostalgia—unlike traumatic stress—was a pattern of thinking that was warmly embraced by Tennessee’s Civil War veterans. Sam Watkins captured the essence of contemporary understanding when writing about the ‘forgetful reverie’ of his imagination, implying that psychic comfort and ease could be achieved through the selective re-remembering of past experience. Invented as a term to describe the malaise suffered by home-lorn Swiss mercenaries of the late seventeenth century, nostalgia had lost its clinical definition by the late nineteenth century and featured in American society largely as a form of soft meditation on the past. A nostalgic frame of memory evokes within an individual a special past where trauma is repressed, where the diversity of experience is denied and subsumed beneath a triumphant appreciation toward what one had been and done in the past. As a frame of reference and self-understanding it was perhaps unequaled in the late-nineteenth century as Americans of all groups sought to hold themselves together during a period of intense social and economic turmoil and political anxiety. It was especially suited, as David Anderson has argued, to those seeking redemption since it was “the very impurities of memory—its fallibility, its fragility, and its proclivity for mythmaking—that proved, paradoxically to be redemptive.”⁴

Redemption arrived for most surviving Confederates in the 1890s, a period described by C. Vann Woodward as a “twilight zone between living memory and written history.” This decade featured the institutionalization of Jim Crow across the South and witnessed, in a parallel process, the maturation of Lost Cause mythology in southern culture and an increasing spirit of

⁴ David Anderson, “Down Memory Lane: Nostalgia for the Old South in Post-Civil War Plantation Reminiscences,” *JSH* (February 2005): 105-36. See also Peter Fritzsche, “How Nostalgia Narrates Modernity,” Alan Confino & Fritzsche, *The Work of Memory: New*

reconciliation between North and South that was based on a nostalgic and sentimental rendition of the past. Nashville played a prominent role in this process with both the Confederate Veteran and the United Daughters of the Confederacy, two of the principal agencies of a nostalgic memorialization to emerge during the decade, being founded in the city. Religious publishing houses based in the city also positioned Nashville as a locus for Confederate remembrance with a steady stream of memoirs and reflections on the 1860s. Proclaiming itself the “Athens of the South” at the 1897 Centennial, Nashville could also claim to have put a classical cast around its Civil War past. Although few aspired toward, and none achieved, the heights of Homer’s epic poetry, Nashville’s memory-makers nonetheless sought to bestow greatness and everlasting virtue upon their heroes. And to a great extent they succeeded, as the Sewanee Review testified in 1911 by reporting that “to the imaginative Southerner the war is what the nine years around sacred Troy were to Homer’s auditors. For that very reason its Iliad has not yet been written.”⁵

Though largely unwritten, the codification of an orthodox history of the war by elites reached a mature phase in the 1890s and early 1900s. The open question as to whether it had all been worth it, posed by many of the veterans’ early memoirs, also gave way in the 1890s to strident self-belief and the bold articles of faith promulgated by its officers. Furthermore, the mournful voice at the heart of Sam Watkins’ memoir, for example, can be contrasted with the sentimental nostalgia to be found in the pages of the Confederate Veteran or at the organized events of the United Confederate Veterans or the United Daughters of the Confederacy. The traumatized voice of Confederate memorialization was not entirely lost on the daughters who

Directions in the Study of German Society and Culture (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 62-85.

⁵ C. Vann Woodward, The Strange Career of Jim Crow (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), xii-xiii; “A Battle-Field Playground,” The Sewanee Review 19 (July 1911): 17

were capable themselves of staging remarkable expressions of anguished loss. But the sense of loss appeared increasingly to be less about the demise of slavery and the way of life that it had sustained than the result of a need to refurbish and reclaim a lost past in order to stave off the destabilizing effects of modernity.

While the passing of generations did not de-stabilize the strong connection between the practices of Confederate celebration and the politics of racial exclusion, the steady urbanization and incorporatization of social and economic life in the South brought about a de-coupling of New South political prophecy and Confederate social memory. By the turn of the 20th century the Lost Cause had become a valorized tradition to honor and, after the Spanish-American War of 1898, while the United Confederate Veterans maintained its membership strength between 1900-1910, with the passing of each veteran the Lost Cause became muted as an ideology of defiance. We can see this, for example, at the Confederate exhibit in the History Building at the Tennessee Centennial Exposition, where visitors “lingered lovingly” over the cases of swords and tattered flags. But the authors of the official account of the commemoration were keen to point out that “the days of peace had come” and “to most [viewers] the war was but an historic memory.”⁶ This did not mean, however, as some historians have claimed, the diminishing significance of the Lost Cause as the most significance ideological reference in regional culture between the present and the past.⁷ The traumatic and nostalgic strains of Civil War memory at the heart of the Lost Cause, together with a conviction that the South had virtue on its side, provided the central ties of identity between the past and the present that all young white men

⁶ Herman Justi, ed., Official History of the Tennessee Centennial Exposition (Nashville: n.p., 1898), 133-34.

⁷ See Gaines Foster, Ghosts of the Confederacy: Defeat, the Lost Cause, and the Emergence of the New South (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), esp. pt. 3.

coming of age in the region's academies and universities had to contend with and think through in the 1910s and 1920s.

By the turn of the century, changes in the Confederate memorial tradition reflected the changes taking place in Tennessee. Commercialization got hold of the Confederate tradition in ways that at least some among the old soldiers found distasteful, but the business advantages presented by the acts of remembering were too good an opportunity for New South businessmen to pass by. The Confederate imprint had acquired a coin of currency by the 1890s that suggested to some that the Confederacy was achieving a greater popularity in death than it had ever achieved during the 1860s. At a local community level, the monument craze attracted commercial agents from across the nation to seek to out-bid each other in the relentless drive to mark every public square across the heartland with a monument to the Confederate foot soldier. By 1910 over 20 monuments had been erected in Middle Tennessee. The increasingly commercial features of the Confederate tradition were a source of growing irritation to purists and to those old enough to remember or recall the spirit of the times.

MOURNFUL BUT GLORIOUS

As the veterans began to slip their mortal coils and depart the scene—just under 32,000, less than half of Tennessee's Confederate survivors, still lived in 1890—their sons and daughters assumed the task of shaping and sustaining the memory of their failed struggle.⁸ The formal narration of

⁸ Figure on Tennessee's surviving Confederates from R.B. Rosenberg, Living Monuments: Confederate Soldiers' Homes in the New South (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), Table 2 p. 162 & 179n.2. Rosenberg bases his figures upon Thomas L. Livermore, Numbers and Losses in the Civil War in America 1861-65 (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin 1901), which estimated the number of three-year Confederates who survived the war at 928,822, and the Bureau of Census' report of 'Soldiers and Widows,' which in 1890 reported 428,747 surviving

the Confederate tradition that had begun with the socialization of veterans' accounts in the 1880s took on a new level of organization and sophistication in the 1890s. Inevitably the character of Confederate memory changed from animated articulations of lived experience toward more formalized enactments of faith and codified statements of belief. Their efforts to mould a usable past from the wreck of their hopes has been variously described by historians as a "civil religion" to succor and guide white society or as a "tradition" to honor and abide by. But in truth the Lost Cause memorialization of the 1890s reached beyond tradition and ideology to fashion what W. Scott Poole has described as an "aesthetic of the Lost Cause," an epic dream world in which whiteness passed as the unquestionable embodiment of virtue and honor, where the Confederate/Republican struggle for self-determination continued to be the dominant reference in political life, and where the antebellum past was viewed nostalgically as the epitome of an ordered and organic society. The very nature of this dream-like ideology, Poole argues, allowed its proponents to deal with the paradoxes and contradictions of the Confederate tradition.⁹

The character of the Confederate aesthetic as it emerged in Middle Tennessee is best seen at one of the grandest events of the Confederate calendar and on its most cherished ground. Men, women and children of the Confederate tradition assembled on Memorial Day at Franklin, scene of the western Confederacy's last hurrah, in 1894 where the Reverend James Hugh McNeilly girded himself for a long speech that would cast the veterans of the Confederacy in heroic terms. To deliver the address at Franklin was the greatest honor of his career. With

Confederate veterans, 46.2 percent of Livermore's 1865 total. Corroboration of sorts is provided by William Best Hesseltine, Confederate Leaders in the New South (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1950) which found that only 48 percent of leaders survived until 1890.

⁹ Charles Reagan Wilson, Baptized in Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause, 1865-1920 (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1980); Foster, Ghosts of the Confederacy; W. Scott

veterans of the cause amassed in front of the podium, the Rev. McNeilly was joined on the stage by the great and the good of local society, all jockeying for prominence and a share of the glory of the occasion. Usually, the keynote speaker on such occasions was a former General or a prominent politician, and the fact that he was neither must only have strengthened McNeilly's sense of pride. A native Tennessean, McNeilly was chaplain of the Forty-ninth Tennessee Regiment during the war, and after the Battle of Franklin, in the opinion of one surgeon, "never failed to be on the firing-line with the assistant surgeon in the infirmary detail."¹⁰ Since the war he had served as pastor of a Presbyterian Church at Nashville. He played a conspicuous role in the organization in 1885 of the Tennessee Confederate Memorial and Historical Association and had remained at the forefront of local events to develop the Confederate aesthetic. Almost thirty years after the event, McNeilly now rose to give a detailed, passionate and unapologetic defense of the Confederacy and of the cause for which his fellow soldiers had fought.¹¹

McNeilly began with a castigation of those who saw the southern cause as 'the worst work that Satan and sin undertook' and its defenders 'not as martyrs in a good cause, but convicts in a bad one.' Such hatred, he argued, was unworthy and unmanly. The Confederate dead were, he asserted 'heroes' who "poured their blood like festal wine, a libation to liberty." He went on:

Poole, Never Surrender: Confederate Memory and Conservatism in the South Carolina Upcountry (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004).

¹⁰ "The Photographic History of the Civil War" Volume IV, article by Deering J. Roberts, M.D., Surgeon, Confederate States Army, viewed on-line at <http://www.civilwarhome.com/fieldhospitals.htm> (last accessed 27 June 2006).

¹¹ The Rev. J. H. McNeilly's Memorial Day address at Franklin was reprinted in the Confederate Veteran II (Sept. 1894), to which all subsequent quotations are referenced.

This beautiful custom of decorating the graves of our dead is with us no fruitless form nor idle ceremony. It has become an institution . . . [where we] come together for a little season to commune with a mournful but glorious past, as we call up in memory the faithfulness, the courage, the nobility of those whose blood sealed their devotion to our cause and country.

The past, McNeilly argued, was prologue to the future – “for out of that past must spring whatsoever shall be great or worthy in our future.” Moreover, the speaker believed passionately that were Tennesseans to be presented again with the situation of 1861, and had they the prophetic vision to “foresee the defeat awaiting us,” he believed that “we would be bound to make the fight, and patiently to endure the disaster.” With such an argument McNeilly revealed the time-warp in which Confederate memory was now suspended and the forgetfulness with which it had abandoned the anguished division that the secession crisis of 1860-61 had caused in the white community. Despite the catastrophic loss of life and property, McNeilly believed that the epic achievements of the dead “may well compensate our losses” and “shall grow in value through the coming years.”

McNeilly then proceeded to give a full-blown account of the Lost Cause, though on the shifting political sands of the 1890s his emphasis was less on the constitutionality of secession as a doctrine (the point that jurists were keen to prove in the 1870s and 1880s) than rather on the virtuous character of those who stood up for the civilization of the Old South. The Confederate dead, McNeilly asserted, achieved four things. First, they “vindicated the character and quality of the civilization in which they were trained.” This was an old argument with the abolitionist literature of the 1850s, which in denouncing slavery had cast Southern men as “effeminate and brutal, haughty in manners and loose in morals.” But it was now cast in a dreamlike reality where thoughts of the “four years of deadly strife” brought “deeds of daring and magnanimity almost unparalleled in history”. The Confederate soldier had demonstrated to “the world” the

enduring characteristics of southern society: endurance over hardship, commitment in crisis, and nobility in the face of danger.

Second, McNeilly argued that the Confederate soldiers had “revealed and developed the latent powers and capacities of the south and its people.” Faced with the enormous challenge of fighting an industrialized foe, the southern people – a term which in McNeilly’s hands referred to whites only—had “manifested marvelous skill in invention” and “by the sudden answer to the call of Providence” had come to a “full realization of the splendid possibility of achievement in their reach.” The successes of the New South were here rooted in the ingenuity of the Confederates. In making this point, McNeilly was keen to valorize the virtues of the antebellum civilization and contrast the virtue of its children, the Confederate soldiers, with that of the “sneering, money-seeking, materialistic apostles” of the New South.

A third achievement of the Confederate soldier was in establishing “a consistent record against mere materialism, in politics or in social life.” This was another swipe at the profit-seekers of the 1890s, who were contrasted with those who sought death rather than dishonor. “In memory of such devotion” McNeilly believed that “the sordid spirit of greed shall stand abashed, blushing at its own unworthiness.” A fourth argument contained another contradistinction with contemporary America – the incorporation of industry and the growth of central government. The Confederate soldier, McNeilly argued in the face of some considerable evidence to the contrary, had “effected a stay in the tide of centralization in our government.” That protest, he believed, would be “more and more heeded as the passions of war pass away” and as time demonstrated the “terrible cost of the attempt to destroy the equality and sovereignty of the States.”

McNeilly's remarks displayed more of a spirit of partisanship than reconciliation, but they captured the character of the Lost Cause aesthetic as it had evolved in Middle Tennessee by the mid-1890s. In stressing achievement through loss, McNeilly had captured the essence of the legalistic defense of secession and refurbished an ideology of defiance into enduring virtues central to the self-image of whites troubled by the rapid pace of social and economic change. "Out of the wreck of their hopes," McNeilly concluded, "their civilization was vindicated, their material capacities and resources were revealed, their testimony to the sacredness and worth of honor and duty was finished and sealed, [and] respect for the sovereign right of the States of the Union was fixed on a firmer basis." Here was a historical identity that white Middle Tennesseans could embrace. Without shame, the war which had brought so much destruction was depicted as a romantic tableau in which virtue was demonstrated and secured for all time. In acting on principle and with fortitude and ingenuity in the face of overwhelming odds, the Confederate soldier had provided a guide to the youth of the 1890s seeking their way in the industrializing cities and towns of the New South.

THE CONFEDERATE GENERATION

That Nashville (together with New Orleans) became a cultural center for the Confederate tradition says more about the individuals behind the movement than it does about the location of their pursuits. To be sure, Nashville had the technologies and techniques that enabled individual actions to flourish, and perhaps something of Nashville's self-proclaimed status as the Athens of the South stimulated organizational and promotional developments. The Rev. McNeilly was, of

course, a member of the Confederate generation, and he was not alone in outlining a historical aesthetic for Middle Tennessee whites.¹²

Two groups predominated – the United Confederate Veterans (UCV) and the United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC). In truth, however, the efforts of the male soldier and the female memorialist were joined; their identity needs were similar and complementary and both gained from a refurbished record of the manliness and honor of the Confederate cause. The UCV began as a loose confederation of veterans camps from the Army of Tennessee that had formed in the mid-1880s. The statewide Association of the Army of Tennessee in 1889 became one of the leading agencies behind the organization of the United Confederate Veterans (UCV). Because UCV membership was only open to veterans, individual camps promoted auxiliary organizations of sons and daughters. Again citizens of Nashville took the lead, with white women forming an auxiliary outfit of the Frank Cheatham Bivouac in 1890 to care for the inmates of the local soldiers' home. In 1892 it reorganized as the Daughters of the Confederacy. Together with groups from Georgia and Virginia, the Nashville daughters organized the a national organization of veterans' daughters at an 1894 meeting in Nashville.¹³ The United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC) was formed as a national organization in Nashville on 10

¹² In a study of Virginia's 'Confederate Generation,' men born between 1831 and 1843, Peter S. Carmichael persuasively argues that Confederate veterans, having abandoned their radicalism in the late 1860s, returned to a spirited and mythical defense of the cause in their later years. Carmichael, The Last Generation: Young Virginians in Peace, War, and Reunion (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005).

¹³ For a fuller account of the origins of these organizations, see Foster, Ghosts of the Confederacy, 88-114.

September 1895.¹⁴ Largely an urban middle-class movement, it grew from congregations of a few hundred women in the towns and cities of the former Confederate South to a national membership of nearly 100,000 by 1918.¹⁵ Within five years of its establishment as a national organization in 1894, the membership of the founding Nashville chapter of the UDC exceeded 200, making it the largest in the state and the most powerful political and social association of women in Tennessee. By the turn of the century the Tennessee Division of the UDC claimed 35 Chapters with a total membership of 1,590.¹⁶

The roots of the UDC in Tennessee, as elsewhere in the South, trace back to the war-time activities of women in the Ladies Memorial Associations and other benevolent organizations of the period. The Nashville chapter contained a core of women who had (as their division historian would later put it) “long been associated together in the work of rehabilitating the soldiers of the Confederacy, in furnishing them with artificial limbs and in providing for their other necessities.”¹⁷ Although most members of the UDC were born after 1850, many had worked together in the Auxiliary to the Confederate Home, the Ladies Hermitage Association, or on the project to erect the monument in Mount Olivet Cemetery. The most prominent individual was Caroline Meriwether Goodlett, a divorcee born in 1833. While not a ‘progressive’, she was a leading reformer in Tennessee and served on the Board of Managers of the Protestant Orphan

¹⁴The Nashville meeting in 1894 formed the organization as the National Association of the Daughters of the Confederacy. The following year, at the first convention in Atlanta, the name was changed to United Daughters of the Confederacy.

¹⁵Karen L. Cox, Dixie’s Daughters: The United Daughters of the Confederacy and the Preservation of Confederate Culture (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2003).

¹⁶Annie E. Cody, History of the Tennessee Division United Daughters of the Confederacy (Nashville: Cullom & Ghertner Co., 1947), 16.

¹⁷Op. cit.

Asylum and Missions Home and as Vice President of the Humane Society of Nashville. Her claim to wartime experience was strong: She had lost a brother in the war and seems to have spent a lot of time carrying medicine and supplies through federal lines from her home in Montgomery County. Following the war she helped organize the Ladies Benevolent Society and was a leader in the effort to establish a home for Confederate soldiers at the Hermitage.¹⁸

In fact the movement in Nashville grew out of a close association with the campaign to care for aging veterans of the war. In 1891 Tennessee had instituted a limited pension system for the care of infirm and indigent veterans; but the system failed to provide for those veterans who could no longer live alone. Such care was dependent upon voluntary assistance and on April 10, 1890 a group of men and women associated with the Frank Cheatham Bivouac of the United Confederate Veterans formed The Auxiliary Association of the Confederate Soldiers Home. Out of this grew a Ladies Auxiliary, and on May 9, 1892 the name was changed to Daughters of the Confederacy. Unaffiliated groups of women styled as ‘daughters of the Confederacy’ emerged across the South in the early 1890s, and in the Spring of 1894 Goodlett of Nashville and Anna Davenport Raines of Savannah, Georgia, conspired to organize a federation of Confederate women’s organizations. Raines and Goodlett invited women from the across the South to meet in Nashville on Sept. 10th, 1894 in the Frank Cheatham Bivouac.¹⁹ By June 1896 there were 10 UDC chapters in Tennessee, including a Maury Co. chapter (formed June 1896 with 45 members) and chapters in Franklin (formed October 1894 with 20 members), Murfreesboro

¹⁸ Biographical data on Goodlett is available at <http://www.hqudc.org/about/founder.html> (last accessed 27 June 2006).

¹⁹ Karen Cox, diss., 46n.21; see also CV (October, 1898), 451-53.

(formed November 1896), and Fayetteville (formed November 1895 with 34 members).²⁰

Goodlett's status as the preeminent local figure was recognized by her appointment to head both the national UDC and the Nashville chapter.

A third organizational vehicle for the mature phase of Confederate remembrance – Sumner Cunningham's Confederate Veteran magazine – also emerged in Nashville. Founded in January, 1893, Cunningham aimed his publication at the ordinary veteran in contrast to the high-brow Southern Historical Society Papers that Virginians had published in the 1870s. A veteran, Cunningham was a suitable architect for a periodical devoted to the sentimental and narcissistic celebration of the Confederate tradition. A native of Middle Tennessee, Cunningham had an undistinguished record of Confederate service. In the opinion of his biographer, he had the distinction “to be absent from the ranks on the eves of impending battles to an extent that approached desertion.” Following defeat at the Battle of Nashville in December 1864, he returned home to Bedford County and effectively deserted Confederate service. After the war, Cunningham struggled to find a calling and worked at various newspaper jobs before becoming the general agent for the Jefferson Davis Memorial Fund after the former Confederate president's death in 1889. He left this position shortly after launching the Veteran in January 1893. The publication struggled financially in its early years, becoming solvent only after its adoption as the official organ of the United Confederate Veterans.²¹

In the inaugural issue, Cunningham styled his magazine “as an organ of communication between Confederate soldiers and those who are interested in them and their affairs.” Holding

²⁰ CV 5 no. 1 (1897), page. 35.

²¹ John A. Simpson, S.A. Cunningham & the Confederate Heritage (University of Georgia Press, 1994).

up veterans and their battle heritage as models of true southern identity, Cunningham's publication touched deeply upon the white southern sense of self. "I heartily and enthusiastically endorse the Veteran," E.T. Hollis wrote from Sharon, Tennessee. "The reading of it makes me both a better man and a better citizen; for the love and sympathy for my old comrades in arms, aroused in my heart by reading it, embraces very largely all mankind."²²

RESCUE FROM OBLIVION

A striking example of Cunningham's ability to manufacture memory and seize the public imagination is provided by his literal resurrection of Sam Davis from that of an almost forgotten Confederate cadet to one of the most famous Tennesseans ever – and only the second Tennessean, after Andrew Jackson, to be honored with a statue on the grounds of the state capitol in Nashville. The memorialization of Sam Davis also shows the deep hue of religiosity with which memorialists, whether evangelical or secular, colored their accounts of the historical significance of the Confederate saga.²³

Executed by the Union army in 1863 for scouting behind enemy lines, Sam Davis became by the end of the nineteenth century a folk hero and the most celebrated Civil War soldier from Tennessee. Depicted as almost Christ-like in his representation of duty, bravery, and honor, Davis came to embody Middle Tennessee's idealized image of itself during the crisis of the 1860s. He became a celebrated instance in the culture of Confederate remembrance and a centerpiece of Lost Cause commemoration shared and sustained by communities of historical

²²CV 3 (Jan., 1895), 9.

memory in Tennessee. Whereas in the 1880s only his family mourned the Confederate scout with a simple obelisk in their back yard, within fifty years representations of the life and death of Sam Davis would mark the historical and geographical landscapes of the Middle Tennessee heartland.

Sam Davis was not always so famous, however, and the story of his “resurrection” by the neo-confederates of the 1890s provides fascinating insight into the workings of the Confederate tradition. Before launching the Confederate Veteran, Cunningham had never heard of Sam Davis. When an early subscriber submitted a school oration about Davis for publication, Cunningham rejected it, “feeling that there were so many equally worthy heroes it would hardly be fair to print this special eulogy.” But at a Blue-Gray reunion in April 1895 on the battlefield at Shiloh, Cunningham again heard the story of Davis’s execution—this time from two federal veterans, witnesses to the execution, who claimed, as Cunningham phrased it, that “the Federal Army was in grief over it.” This account struck a chord and convinced Cunningham of the merits of publicizing the story. The Union veterans’ story of an ordinary soldier’s heroic death, couched in the language of reconciliation, fit perfectly with the spirit of the times and the viewpoint of the Confederate Veteran. Publication would also further Cunningham’s desire to propagate the story of the ordinary common soldier, in part to reach a mass audience. “I resolved to print the story,” Cunningham recalled in 1899, “and [to] reprint it until that typical hero should have as full credit as the Veteran could give him.”²⁴

²³ For a fuller treatment of the memorialization of Sam Davis see my article, “‘The Boys Will Have to Fight the Battles without Me’: The Making of Sam Davis, ‘Boy Hero of the Confederacy’” Southern Cultures (Fall 2006): 29-54.

²⁴ CV 1 (January 1893): 1; S. A. Cunningham, “Sam Davis,” American Historical Magazine 4 (July 1899): 195.

Cunningham ‘rescued’ the memory of Davis, and promoted it through the social groups of which he was a part into a broad collective memory, through a series of extemporizations and promotions. First, he solicited written versions of the federal eyewitness accounts of Davis’s execution that he had heard at the Shiloh reunion and then published them in the Veteran. J. A. M. Collins, veteran of the Second Iowa Volunteer Infantry, recounted the execution and wrote that, although the execution was justified under military law, Davis should have been given a “true soldier[’s]” death by firing squad. Nonetheless, Collins remembered “the glorious manner” in which Davis met his death, citing the “thrice-refused” offer on the scaffold to accept a reprieve in return for information. Calling Davis an example “of the highest type of American manhood,” Collins remembered that the execution was “regretted not alone by Confederates, but by every soldier in our line who was capable of appreciating a noble nature.”²⁵

Next, Cunningham called for Tennesseans to come forward with “such data as may be recalled by all who know anything of the event.” He was swamped by correspondence from interested readers, one of whom wrote, “You can do your state and country no better service than to rescue from oblivion the name of Sam Davis.” The letter writer’s conclusion points to Davis’s growing importance to the Confederate heritage movement: “The thought of him brings back to us . . . the flaming spirit of self-reliance and self-sacrifice which made those years vivid with a glory deathless as man’s love of virtue.” Other comments also revealed the eagerness of Cunningham’s readers to reach back into the past to fashion stories that glorified and commemorated the sacrifices of ordinary soldiers.²⁶

²⁵ “A Union Soldier’s Tribute,” CV 3 (May 1895): 149.

²⁶ “In Memory of Samuel Davis,” CV 3 (May 1895), 149; “About a Monument to Samuel Davis,” CV 3 (September 1895) 258.

Sensing an opportunity to galvanize interest in his fledging publication, Cunningham abandoned his plans to organize a monument to Otho F. Strahl, the Confederate general killed at the Battle of Franklin, and threw his energies into sponsorship of the story. In a series of editorials published in the summer of 1895, Cunningham packaged Davis's sacrifice in Christian terms, insisting that the story had "never been excelled in the history of man." "In faith to principle," he added, "it is almost divine, and recalls even the sacrifice of the Galilean whose hands and feet were nailed to a cross." By summer's end, Cunningham launched a fundraising drive for a monument to Davis's memory to be erected on the Tennessee State Capitol grounds in Nashville and announced that November 27—the thirty-second anniversary of the soldier's death—would be the deadline for a fundraising and subscription drive. In subsequent issues Cunningham printed the name of every subscriber to the fund and kept the story of Sam Davis before his audience, with poems, eyewitness accounts of his execution, and recollections of Sam Davis as a boy and soldier gracing each issue.²⁷

Why was Cunningham so fascinated with Sam Davis's story? Perhaps he found in Davis redemption for his own lackluster military performance, but he also believed that "never was there such an opportunity for Confederates to establish through the press so much in their honor as now." At Shiloh in 1895 Cunningham heard expressions of fraternal greeting that convinced him that the time had arrived to bring Confederate heroism to the fore. Enmities were receding as the years passed, but white northern veterans also shared similar challenges to their racial identities from aliens in their midst. Cunningham, writing in the Veteran, gave an account of one

²⁷ Simpson, Cunningham, 147; "How Shall Samuel Davis Be Honored," CV 3 (August 1895), 240. Charles Reagan Wilson persuasively describes the use of Christian imagery in the development of a "civil religion" among Lost Cause enthusiasts—see his Baptized in Blood; "November 27—Anniversaries," CV 3 (November 1895), 336-37.

soldier's views on this matter: "The race problem is a sore one; that, you people will have to settle yourselves, while we have a worse one in having to deal with the Anarchist element coming in a continuous stream from other lands, and we feel we may have to look to you of the South in the threatened emergency." Cunningham characterized this opinion as "politics without reference to party," but in reality it was about whiteness without reference to race. Cunningham also believed he was referring to reunion without reference to region, but in reality he brought a distinctively southern and Confederate sensibility to his encounters with his old friends, the enemy. As historian Grace Hale has observed of this period, Southern whites developed identities around two juxtapositions: "that of ex-Confederates against ex-slaves, and of the South against the nation." Sam Davis was more virtuous than a Yankee and more loyal than a slave: he was the perfect embodiment of a white southern racial fantasy for the 1890s.²⁸

For Tennesseans, the Sam Davis story filled a need for the neo-Confederates who wanted to memorialize the state's ill-fated and, by any reasonable measure, catastrophic move to secede from the Union. Nathan Bedford Forrest was the closest thing Tennessee had to a genuine Civil War hero, but his image, while powerful, was compromised by his record of trading in slaves before the war, his role in the massacre of colored Union troops at Fort Pillow, and his participation in the Ku Klux movement of the late 1860s. Neo-Confederates such as Albert Virgil Goodpasture, a state official, and William R. Garrett, a historian, whose History of Tennessee was widely adopted in public schools, ran into heated debates with critics about the amount of space devoted to Forrest in their accounts of the Civil War. Forrest continued to be

²⁸ "Federal Veterans at Shiloh," CV 3 (April 1895), 104-5; see also the useful account of Cunningham's role in promoting the Sam Davis myth in Simpson, Confederate Heritage, 146-49; Grace Hale, Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940 (Vintage, 1998), 9.

eulogized as a “military genius” by former cavalry comrades and neo-Confederates alike, but in the 1890s the problem with Forrest was that, from any perspective, his life had served to uphold slavery and prosecute disunion – and few commentators were prepared to laud such objectives. The best Col. D. C. Kelley could do, in an 1890 eulogy of Forrest’s “genius,” was to suggest that his former cavalry commander acted from the “profoundest convictions of duty and the loftiest heroism” while conceding that “I am glad that slavery is gone . . . I thank God that the Union is restored.” The beauty of Sam Davis’ memory was that the boy hero’s sense of duty and heroism was unsullied by an explicit association with slavery or secession. The characterization of Davis as a ‘boy’—even though he was of maturity at his death—served to emphasize the conceit that Davis held no responsibility for slavery nor secession, unlike the slave-trading Forrest. Compared with the imperfect image of Forrest, then, Sam Davis was an unblemished and uncomplicated subject for a white-washed Confederate remembrance.²⁹

The positive response to Cunningham’s appeal came from a number of quarters—some of them from within and others from far outside the inner circle of Confederate memorialization. In a powerful demonstration of the role of the Lost Cause myth as a civil religion, Jefferson Davis’s widow, Varina Howell Davis, agreed that “the dear boy who died for his faith should be forever beloved and held in tender memory by us all.” Other prominent Confederates, including John B. Gordon and J. William Jones, wrote to the Confederate Veteran in support. Although donors to the monument fund were overwhelmingly from the former Confederacy, a number of

²⁹ For an example of the debate over public school textbooks, see the debate between Garrett and an east Tennessean critic in W. R. Garrett, “Controverted Points in Tennessee History,” American Historical Magazine 6 (1901) 118-73; “Gen. N. B. Forrest, Some Extracts From Dr. D.C. Kelley’s Address at Chattanooga,” Nashville Banner April 7, 1890; for further examples of the commemoration of Forrest, see Court Carney, “The Contested Image of Nathan Bedford Forrest,” JSH 67 (August 2001): 601-31.

Union veterans also contributed. Captain H. I. Smith of Mason City, Iowa, sent a contribution in honor of a Yankee comrade killed at Corinth, Mississippi. Astonishingly, the Union officials who superintended the execution of Davis also responded to Cunningham's plea, including General Dodge, who sent Cunningham a copy of Davis's trial transcript as well as a contribution to the monument fund. Dodge wrote in a letter that he had had a number of Union spies executed "who were equally brave in meeting their fate," so he appreciated "fully that the people of the South and Davis's comrades understand his soldierly qualities and propose to honor his memory." The Reverend James Young, the Union chaplain who had tended the condemned man on the eve of the execution and had recited the benediction at the scaffold, sent Cunningham the dyed Union overcoat that Davis was wearing at the time of his arrest; he had been given the overcoat by Davis, he wrote, who requested him "to keep it in remembrance of him." In turning it over to the Veteran, the elderly chaplain considered "the remembrance fairly fulfilled." Unlike the Romans, this gesture implied, the Yankees returned the cloaks of their victims. Cunningham gleefully reported over and over again the messages of reconciliation from General Dodge and The Rev. Young.³⁰

Despite the positive response from correspondents, after several months Cunningham had raised only \$400 toward the erection of a monument, most of it from Tennesseans. In efforts to raise additional funds, Cunningham encouraged readers of his magazine to send spare dimes, and he organized in May 1896 a graveside memorial service at the Davis home in Smyrna, to which

³⁰ Varina Davis quoted in John A. Simpson, "S. A. Simpson and the Confederate Heritage," PhD diss., University of Oregon, 1987, 495 n.299, emphasis added; CV 3 (December 1895): 370; 4 (May 1896): 143; 8 (March 1900): 100; "Union Veteran's Tribute to Davis," CV 3 (December 1895): 373; "Letter from Gen. Dodge," CV 5 (July 1897): 355-58. A copy of the military tribunal transcript is held in the Civil War Collection--Confederate, box 15, folder 8, "Sam Davis", TSLA; "The Sam Davis Overcoat," CV 5 (July 1897): 358-59.

more than one thousand people came. Other supporters were even more enterprising. W. D. Fox of Murfreesboro wrote a stage play about the martyred Confederate and, together with a makeshift drama troupe, performed the drama throughout Middle Tennessee. Another promoter developed a board game, “The Game of Confederate Heroes,” and donated the proceeds to the cause. Upon hearing the story, schoolteachers at public schools sponsored essay contests and, with Cunningham’s encouragement, a few organized Sam Davis clubs and debating teams. For his own efforts, Cunningham sold miniature statues of Davis at the Tennessee Centennial Exposition in 1897, where a “spirited bust of that faithful young hero of the South” featured prominently in the Confederate Exhibit, next to the sword, pistol, and sash of General Forrest.³¹

Cunningham found perhaps the most willing and devoted allies for his cause in the Daughters of the Confederacy, the Nashville-based group who became one of the founders of the United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC) in 1895. A meeting that year between Cunningham and the Nashville UDC suggests the emotional power that collective memories of Davis evoked among sympathetic audiences. Before speaking, Cunningham presented Sam Davis’s overcoat, which he had recently received from the Union chaplain. The minutes of the meeting, as reported by Cunningham in the Veteran, recorded a remarkable performance: “When it was shown every heart was melted to tears, and there we sat in that sacred silence. Not a sound was heard save the sobs that came from aching hearts. It was a time too sacred for words, for we seemed almost face

³¹ These activities are described in Simpson, “S. A. Cunningham,” 348-51; see also “The Drama ‘Sam Davis’” CV 4 (October 1896): 399; “The Sam Davis Drama,” CV 4 (November 1896): 402; “Game of Confederate Heroes,” CV 6 (July 1898): 304; Justi, Official History of the Tennessee Centennial Exposition, 133-34.

to face with that grand and heroic man. . . . With one accord we wept together; and it was some time before we could resume business.”³²

The commemoration of Davis as a Confederate hero provided a useful analog to the historical narrative of Confederate womanhood for the self-styled daughters of the Confederacy. This ordinary soldier’s youth, valor, self-sacrifice, and devotion to cause were virtues that featured prominently in Lost Cause stories about Confederate women during the war. But though the women identified with Davis, his story in the hands of the Daughters became one of “manly virtue” and an exercise in restoring honor to the defeated white men of the South while conveying that honor to their sons. In a remarkably graphic image of the power of print to affect remembered experience, Sally Ivie of Murfreesboro, Tennessee, in the late 1890s took her Civil War diary from the 1860s and transformed it into a scrapbook of Civil War memories for her son—retitling her diary “Confederate Veteran” by pasting a copy of Cunningham’s cover page of the Confederate Veteran onto the cover. The diary entries inside the volume were effaced by newspaper stories from the 1890s, including a feature article on Sam Davis. A commemorative history created out of stories of valor, heroism, and sacrifice was what Sally Ivie wanted her son to read, not her original thoughts and notations from the 1860s, most of which she apparently wished to forget.³³

The effort to commemorate Davis was thus also simultaneously an exercise in forgetting. Davis’s memory eclipsed the deep ambivalence many Tennesseans felt about the Confederacy’s rebellion; it erased the less-than-honorable service of thousands of white men, including

³² Quoted in Cunningham, “Sam Davis,” 205-6. Simpson notes that Cunningham also displaced the coat at the United Confederate Veterans reunion that year in Nashville.

³³ Sally (Lawing) Ivie scrapbooks, vol. 3, Tennessee Historical Society Collection, TSLA.

Cunningham, who had deserted the Army of Tennessee; and in making Davis the epitome of virtue, it foreclosed on the public space for the commemoration of African American struggles—particularly those of men who had escaped slavery and served honorably in the Union army. While this was going on, Tennessee passed a secret ballot law, a Poll Tax, and literacy tests in order to effectively disfranchise African Americans. But it wasn't enough to purge blacks from political life. A segregated society also required a segregated history, and though African Americans in Middle Tennessee continued in private spaces to commemorate the heritage of emancipation throughout the darkest days of segregation, the memorialization of Davis' story contained a social power that trumped all other competing narratives in the region's collective consciousness.

As the Sam Davis project gained momentum, Cunningham joined forces with veterans' groups and Tennessee legislators to bring his monument to fruition. Adding to the donations from all states in the Union, the State of Tennessee eventually appropriated \$5,000 for the monument and appointed Cunningham head of a committee to choose an appropriate site on the Capitol grounds. The treasurer of the committee was John C Kennedy, the man that the Davis family had sent to retrieve their son's body from the shallow grave outside of Pulaski in 1863. The committee resolved to raise money from every state in the Union and to make the monument "a presentation to the youth of all America" of "what one American soul of heroic mould [could do] even when encased in the body of a mere boy." Notices were placed in newspapers across the Union, and appeals sent to northern veterans' associations. The fundraising effort was easier in some states than in others. From the Office of the Adjutant General in Des Moines, a veteran of the 2nd Iowa Infantry enquired, "Is not this the man who went to his death at Pulaski? . . . If this is the one I think it is, I haven't the least idea but what nearly every one of the regiment to

which I belong would be willing to subscribe a small amount.” But by the close of 1908, seventeen states—all outside the South—had failed to respond. Appeals to governors and congressmen followed, and on January 25, Representative Albert V Locke of New Hampshire sent a personal check to complete the roster of all states in the Union. Unveiled on the capitol grounds on April 29, 1909, the monument depicts Davis in a defiant posture, his arms crossed and head tilted slightly backward looking south. The Tennessee governor delivered a eulogy. In an editorial the following day, the Tennessean underscored the broader meaning of the statue’s unveiling, commemorating both a cause, “though lost, still just,” and a civilization, “the Old South, whose son he was.”³⁴

Shortly after the statue was erected, the Tennessee UDC arranged in November 1912 to have a Sam Davis memorial window installed in the Museum of the Confederacy in Richmond. These monuments—probably the most prominent signs of Civil War heritage that Tennessee has yet produced—testified also to the social power of the communities that produced them. Cunningham and his associates provide just one example of the ways in which middle-class whites across the South moved at the turn of the century to reclaim the space of historical memory and refurbish an image of southern whiteness. It was a cultural space in which class and gender differences were subsumed into strict racial segregation and where commentators mitigated anxieties about the New South by alluding to a comforting, mythical past.

³⁴ Copies of correspondence relating to the Sam Davis Monument Committee can be found in the Clarkson Family papers, X-M-6 ac. no. 90-258, TSLA; “A Son of the Old South,” Nashville Tennessean, 30 April 1909.

BOUND BY LOVE

Sumner Cunningham died on December 20, 1913, but his efforts lived on in the form of the UDC. His editorial mantle was taken over by Edith Pope, his assistant editor, who kept the Confederate Veteran in print until 1932. It is one of the peculiarities of the Confederate tradition that women became the key custodians of the flickering flames of remembrance in the 1890s. Through their efforts they ensured that a Confederate sensibility drawn from the 1860s would persist well into the 20th century.

The UDC as an organization served multiple purposes – social, literary, historical, monumental, and benevolent – that marked a significant broadening of the role of women within the Confederate tradition. It was a self-consciously nostalgic association, seeking, as Mrs. John P. Hickman, one of the Nashville organizers put it, to bring together those “who are bound . . . by a bond of love and respect for all the principles involved in the issues of the sixties.”³⁵ Yet it would be mistake to view the UDC’s activities as a pastime of sentiment – more than any other organization between 1898 and 1918 the UDC ensured the future of the Confederate past by building statues of commemoration, vetting historical publications to insure that the ‘truth’ about the Confederacy prevailed, and educating a new generation of sentimental rebels to revere and honor the Confederate tradition. As historian LeeAnn Whites has remarked, “The UDC proposed to do on a cultural level what their fathers had failed to do: win the war for the South.”³⁶

³⁵ Cody, History of the Tennessee Division, 12.

³⁶ LeeAnn Whites, “You Can’t Change History by Moving a Rock: Gender, Race, and the Cultural Politics of Confederate Memorialization,” in Alice Fahs & Joan Waugh, eds., The Memory of the Civil War in American Culture (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 216.

Inarguably, the UDC defense of the Confederacy was more successful in shaping the cultural and historical landscape of the region than the efforts of the most valiant Confederate soldier. Compare the ruined redoubts of wood and earth that fortified the Confederate defensive works around Nashville, which today are invisible to the unguided eye, with the enduring statues, monuments and archives created by the UDC, and an observer can contrast, metaphorically, the ruined political dreams of the Confederacy with the transcendent triumph of Confederate historical memory fifty years later. Through monument building and through their historical work, women sought to capture and convey the spirit—the heroic poetry—of Confederate history in legend and fond remembrance. Religious sensibilities added a dimension of what was seen as divine inspiration to their work. The extraordinary organizational efforts of the period 1895-1915 were also driven by a sense of urgency and accountability. The spirit of the Confederacy had to be entombed and enshrined in the hearts and minds of white Middle Tennesseans lest the past become the property of the enemies of Confederate memory. The enemies were everywhere—the Yankees with their damnable lies about the Confederate experience; the professional historians with their scientific approach to history; the Negroes with their ‘uppity’ emancipation celebrations and indifference to the romantic accounts of the antebellum; the New South boosters with their indifference toward the past; and the grim reaper himself, who diminished the numbers of authentic Confederate souls with each passing year.

The establishment of a Confederate Soldiers’ Home on the grounds of the Hermitage, Andrew Jackson’s residence east of Nashville, was the founding achievement and pride of the Tennessee division of the UDC. But it was not without conflict since the State owned the Hermitage and some legislators questioned whether a Confederate voluntary association was the best agency for the protection of a presidential home. In fact a separate organization, the Ladies

Hermitage Association, chartered February 19, 1899, had sought to purchase the 250 acres of land, including the home and Jackson's tomb, intending to convert the Hermitage into a national museum and to "invite pilgrims who delight to honor the memory of the man who made national the sentiment, the 'Federal Union must and shall be preserved.'"³⁷ The Cheatham Bivouac, by contrast, played the needs of Confederate veterans off against the move to turn the Hermitage into a shrine to national history, arguing that no 'better guardians of its sacred precincts' could be found elsewhere. "We insist that if the entire Hermitage estate should be turned over to the contemplated use no vandalic [sic] usages would be made of it by such Confederate soldiers."³⁸

The debate was fairly amicable but revealed differences between those who wished to see no incongruity between accommodating Confederates at the home of a national president and those (including former Confederates) who thought the two purposes were distinct.³⁹ Eventually a compromise was reached on the common ground that, as the Nashville Daily American put it, that as "all felt a national interest in Jackson" it was agreed that "nothing should be done that disturbed the national character of his home."⁴⁰ But the wider political commons remained divided, as a bill considered by the House to deed the land and property in shares to the two associations passed only on a divided vote of 55-34. One dissident made an appeal on behalf of ex-Federal soldiers, arguing that "the state ought to do justice to all the soldiers of Tennessee." As for Black Federal veterans, "if it was not thought proper to admit colored men to this

³⁷ J. Wooldridge, ed., History of Nashville, Tenn. . . . (Nashville: H.W. Crew, 1890), 566-67.

³⁸ "The Soldiers' Home," Nashville Banner 7 March 1889.

³⁹ The Rev. Dr. C. D. Elliott, a veteran of Forrest's cavalry, felt that the national interest in Jackson should outsway the claim of the Confederate veterans. "I say it is a shame—a damnable shame—that the Confederate soldiers have not been taken care of. . . . but the Hermitage should be preserved forever." Quoted in Nashville Daily American, 12 February 1889.

institution there should be a separate place provided for them.”⁴¹ The arrangement gave the Ladies Hermitage Association the home, custodianship of Jackson’s tomb, and 25 acres of land (far less than the 250 acres they had sought). The remaining 475 acres (together with an appropriation of \$10,000) went to the Confederate Soldiers’ Home. A new building would be constructed separate from the main property to house the ailing Confederates. Over the coming years the state appropriated up to \$10,000 for upkeep and maintenance; it also provided for any new building work and improvements to the land, as well as the cost of religious and burial services.⁴²

The State’s decision was a significant one on two counts. Not only had the land of a former president who had stood firm during the Nullification Crisis against the proto-secessionists of South Carolina, been given to an association whose mission was to care for aged secessionists. The creation of the Home with state assistance was also the notable exception to a prevailing belief in the pre-New Deal South that voluntary associations, and not the state, should provide care and shelter for the infirm and the indigent. On both counts the decision represented the political power of the Confederate tradition. In the opening ceremonies for the Home, opened on May 1, 1892, the presence of over 2,000 spectators for a building that could accommodate 125 veterans demonstrated the place that the Confederate tradition and its associated causes had as (in Charles Reagan Wilson’s apt phrase) a ‘civil religion.’ The speaker on the day, Prof. William R. Garrett of Peabody College, revealed as much in heralding the

⁴⁰ “Trying to Harmonize,” Nashville Daily American, 12 February, 1889.

⁴¹ “The General Assembly,” Nashville Banner, 29 March 1889.

⁴² “History of the Tennessee Confederate Soldiers’ Home,” Nashville Banner, January 7, 1908. Copy in Hickman papers, TSLA.

ailing veteran as someone whom the state owed “honor, reverence, promotion, gratitude.”

Arguing that it was perfectly fitting that the Confederate veterans should be cared for (and in some cases buried) on the estate of Andrew Jackson, Garrett entered a plea for amnesia about the conflict which has brought them to a site of juxtaposed national and Confederate traditions. “But why need we recount the memories of the great contest?” he argued. “Let its passions sleep in the graves of its heroes.”⁴³ In time a total of 974 veterans were admitted to the Tennessee Soldiers’ Home – all of them white, Confederate, and poor. About one-third had wounds relating to their war-time service.⁴⁴

Leading members of the Tennessee UDC matched their concern for the welfare of ailing veterans with an interest in the shaping of young minds in the schools and colleges of the region. Again they took their lead from the UCV, which had formed a historical committee in 1892 to combat what were seen as the lies and distortions of Yankee history. As one Tennessee veteran put it in 1890, “our Northern foes deny us any just cause soever, and in a thousand methods and ways vilify and abuse all who sympathized with the Confederate.” “We were the true patriots—they the aggressors,” he continued “and every year has but intensified the facts.”⁴⁵ In battling what was seen as the ‘falsehoods’ of Northern history, the early historical work of the UDC had the dual purpose of seeking vindication for the Confederate generation while providing a true education for a later generation. Perhaps no other aspect of their work was taken on with such passion and dedication. The UDC committees and chapters collected battlefield relics and

⁴³ Nashville Daily American, 13 May 1892; see also Rosenburg, Living Monuments, 41-42.

⁴⁴ Rosenburg, Living Monuments, Table 1, 161, Table 7, 165.

⁴⁵ Minutes of the Third Annual Meeting of the Association of Confederate Soldiers Tennessee Division, Held in the City of Shelbyville, October 8, 1890 (Nashville: Foster & Webb, 1890), copy in Hickman papers, TSLA.

regimental rosters; they wrote alternative histories and school textbooks; they urged veterans and other survivors of the 1860s to record their experiences in print; they lobbied the state to create a permanent archival record; and they sought to influence the claims of the professional and quasi-objective study of history that was coming to dominate in local universities. Their work was cast in romantic and heroic terms and drew upon the literary and oral traditions of historical storytelling. But it was the work of a nostalgic imagination driven by a need for vindication from the fate that loss on the battlefield had bestowed. For good reason did Caroline Gordon tentatively title her 1930s Civil War novel “A Cup of Fury,” for she had come of age in a world shaped by the historical memory produced by the UDC.⁴⁶

FROM A SOUTHERN STANDPOINT

Sensitivities around the historical interpretation of the Civil War dated to the early post-war period and featured in political campaigns beyond the Reconstruction era. Yet with the Democrats predominant in political life, and the black vote largely removed, the sectarian bickering over whether the Confederate cause was righteous or treasonous had dissolved into an almost farcical play on the predominant themes of national reconciliation. Two of the most featured politicians of the decade, brothers Alf and Bob Taylor, the older brother (Alf) a Union supporter, the younger (Bob) a Confederate defender, both from East Tennessee, turned their past differences into a ‘war of the roses’ hustings event mixing discussions about policy with a light-hearted chiding about the late unpleasantness. Once retired from political life the Tennessee brothers developed a ‘Yankee Doodle and Dixie’ political burlesque, which toured

⁴⁶ Eileen Gregory, “Preface,” to Caroline Gordon, None Shall Look Back (1937; rept., Nashville: J.S. Sanders & Company, 1992), vii.

across the country, mixing “music, pathos, comedy, and eloquence”. As one of their advertisements put it, “sometimes mirth is more than medicine, and flowers more than food.”⁴⁷ While freighted with the sense that the trauma of the war years persisted, Tennesseans appreciated a bit of light-hearted banter about the past.

The representation of the Confederate cause in historical textbooks, however, was no laughing matter so far as the UCV and the UDC were concerned. A *cause célèbre* galvanized the movement in 1894 when a student in a Tennessee grammar school refused to study Thomas Wentworth Higginson’s history of the United States because “it made the Yankees win all the battles.” The student encouraged others in the class, as a speaker at a UCV reunion had it, to burn their books. UCV camps across the South roared with approval when newspapers picked up the story. From Arkansas five hundred veterans signed a petition applauding the students for daring “to take the first step toward writing a history that would do justice to the South.”⁴⁸ It was, of course, easier to condemn Northern falsehoods than to produce Southern histories, but in the 1890s some self-consciously pro-Southern schoolbooks began to appear. One such text, “The Civil War from a Southern Standpoint,” was the work of Ann. E. Snyder, a founding member of the Nashville UDC. Published in 1893 by the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, the book was revised and abridged later in the decade for use in schools and colleges. Unsurprisingly, perhaps, the Confederate Veteran endorsed Snyder’s book as recommended reading.⁴⁹ Snyder’s work

⁴⁷ “Yankee Doodle and Dixie,” advertisement, CV 3 (May 1895), 158.

⁴⁸ CV 4 (1896), 363; see also James McPherson, “Long-Legged Yankee Lies: The Southern Textbook Crusade” in Fahs & Waugh, eds., Memory of the Civil War, 71.

⁴⁹ CV 3 (June 1895).

was of enduring influence; it is listed as an authority in the New Deal Guide to the State published by the Works Progress Administration in the 1930s.

Tennessee's divided Civil War past emerged in conflicts between East and Middle Tennesseans over representations of the war in school textbooks. When in 1900 A.B. Wilson, an East Tennessean educator, took issue in a series of articles with the bias in a Garrett & Goodpasture's History of Tennessee, Dr. W. R. Garrett, professor of history at Peabody College in Nashville, and editor of the American Historical Magazine, published a long response.⁵⁰ Wilson criticized the decision to devote a chapter to Forrest, whereas Admiral David Farragut, an East Tennessean who remained with the Union, was virtually ignored; he pointed to an unfair distribution of portraits between Union and Confederate Tennesseans; and lambasted the laudatory account of the Ku Klux. The deeper point, however, concerned the authors' effort in treating the Confederate cause not as a disgraced doctrine but as equal in honor and purpose to the cause of the Union. Garrett, however, saw no reason to apologize and relied upon the considerable body of testimony that had been produced since the war to credit the legendary exploits of Forrest and document the authenticity of the Klan. In refuting Wilson's charges point-by-point, Garrett's 'evidence', however, consisted of a body of opinion developed since the war, and was drawn from a dispassionate reading of the primary source materials produced in the 1860s.⁵¹ To have done otherwise, to have "rekindl[ed] buried passions, or instill[ed] into the

⁵⁰ Dr W. R. Garrett, "Controverted Points in Tennessee History," American Historical Magazine vol. 6, 1901, 118-173. A.B. Wilson's critique had appeared in four weekly issues of the Knoxville Journal and Tribune published between Dec 9-30, 1900.

⁵¹ On the Ku Klux, for example, Garrett asserted that his account was "founded on Lester and Wilson's 'History of the Ku Klux Klan,' and can be verified, if necessary, by the affidavits of many reputable citizens of Pulaski and vicinity." Garrett, "Controverted Points," 171.

tender minds of children sentiments of partisan animosity” would have been “a crime against society,” Garrett argued.⁵²

U.S. Senator (and former governor) William B. Bate gave an explicit illustration of the proximity of memories of the battlefield to the instruction of the classroom. General Bate had led Confederate forces at Franklin and on October 5, 1889 gave the consecration address at the “Battle-Ground Academy,” a school for boys on the “field of Franklin.” The presence of a school on such a spot provided “an educational monument” to the memories of the battle and to “successful training of youth.” The work of the school was in “transforming the haversack of the soldier into the satchel of the school-boy; making a campus of an ‘eternal camping-ground.’” Warming to the theme, Bate compared the school-boy’s shooting of “harmless marbles” where “grim and daring soldiers did shoot their *minies* and throw their cannon-balls unto the death.”⁵³

The testimony of Gates P. Thruston, a Union general who settled in Nashville after the war, provides an example of how well the Confederate memorialists had shifted the terms of historical debate. “How unwise and strange it now seems,” Thruston, a noted amateur archaeologist, wrote in 1901, “that the leaders of the Republican party at Washington should have attempted to inaugurate new State governments in the South with the aid of the military.” From a thirty-year perspective the Nashville-based lawyer, a life-long Republican, regarded “the whole plan of Reconstruction as an abomination.” “No one can recall the contentions, the

⁵² Ibid., 166.

⁵³ Address delivered by General Wm. B. Bate on Occasion of Dedicating the ‘Battle-Ground Academy’ on the Field of Franklin, October 5, 1889, published by Citizens of Franklin, copy in Hickman Papers, TSLA.

bitterness, the prejudice, and ignorance of that wretched period of reconstruction,” he concluded “without a sigh of relief that they are evil memories well nigh forgotten.”⁵⁴

BUILDING THE PAST

While defenders of the Confederate tradition felt under siege in the textbook business, the arena was much less competitive in the monument business. The work was, in Senator Bate’s view, of equal importance to the battles over history textbooks. “Not only let Southern pens write truthfully Confederate history, but let the chisel of sculptors make our marble speak and the brush of artists make the canvas glow in the preservation of Confederate history.”⁵⁵

Between 1895 and 1915 the Middle Tennessee heartland became a theme park of Confederate statues and memorials, with some 20 monuments being erected on courthouse greens, old battlefields and town squares. Local committees of the UDC were often the prime movers (or at least the prime fundraisers) in this “statuomanie” for commemorating in physical form the lone Confederate soldier.⁵⁶ No longer were these funereal markers the mournful reflections of a defeated people, but the boastful assertion that, while the Confederate soldier may have suffered, history was on his side. The work was commensurate with the textbook crusade because, as architectural historian Catherine W. Bishir has observed, the prominence of

⁵⁴ Gen. G. P. Thruston, “A Relic of the Reconstruction Period in Tennessee,” American Historical Magazine vol. 6, 1901, 243-250.

⁵⁵ Address delivered by General Wm. B. Bate on Occasion of Dedicating the ‘Battle-Ground Academy’ on the Field of Franklin, October 5, 1889, published by Citizens of Franklin, copy in Hickman Papers, TSLA.

⁵⁶ For a comparative study of statuomanie see Daniel J. Sherman, “Art, Commerce, and the Production of Memory in France after World War 1,” in John R. Gillis, ed., Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 186-214.

the Confederate monuments “lent authority to the version of history they represented.”⁵⁷ In marking prominent public spaces with statues to Confederate soldiers, elite whites sought to stamp their authority on public memory through the creation of official symbols. Many of the statues depicted a solitary sentinel, but they did not stand alone – the work of the Confederate tradition sustained and defended them as the honorable standard bearers of a civilization whose spirit endured.

Why did the monument builders do it? They were pretty clear with themselves about their motives for doing so. John P. Hickman, former Confederate captain and member of the Confederate pension board, explained that monuments “proclaim, with no uncertain sound, to all coming generations the self-sacrifice, devotion to principle, heroism and gallantry of their forefathers. Different localities have erected different monuments, but each breathing the same love and devotion, and only governed in size and artistic design by the financial status of the respective localities.”⁵⁸ A UDC fundraiser in Franklin explained her motives in clear educational terms: to ensure that children “might know by daily observation of this monument” the sacrifices of an older generation.⁵⁹ “For generations,” noted a UDC historian in 1947, the monuments erected in Tennessee “will bear witness, love and loyalty to a just cause and a brave people, but they have also built in the hearts of their descendants a sentiment that will live and be

⁵⁷ Catherine W. Bishir, “Landmarks of Power: Building a Southern Past in Raleigh and Wilmington, North Carolina, 1885-1915,” in W. Fitzhugh Brundage, ed., Where These Memories Grow: History, Memory, and Southern Identity (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 139-168.

⁵⁸ “Our Confederate Dead, Address of Capt. John P. Hickman on Decoration Day at Farmington,” undated newspaper clipping, Hickman Papers, TSLA. N.b address noted on clipping as May 16, 1893.

⁵⁹ Quoted in Cox, Dixie’s Daughters, 91-92.

cherished long after the monuments have crumbled into dust.”⁶⁰ This sentiment was cast in accusatory terms on the monument erected at Franklin: “Would it not be a blame for us, if their memory part from our land and hearts? And a wrong to them and shame for us?”⁶¹

In 1910, Hallum W. Goodloe, division commander of the United Sons of Confederate Veterans, set out to record data on Confederate Monuments in Tennessee. He estimated that in all the regions of Tennessee over one hundred thousand dollars had been spent on more than twenty monuments in cemeteries and on town squares. Although the State and, on occasion, local authorities stumped up matching funds, much of this money was raised by women through ice cream suppers, cakewalks, and concerts. Most of the expenditures had come after 1893 in which year the Ladies Aid Society erected in Clarksville’s Greenwood cemetery an eight-foot bronze Confederate private atop a forty-eight foot column at a cost of \$7,500. By 1910 statues had been put up on the public squares or courthouse yards in the Middle Tennessee towns of Franklin (1899), Gallatin (1903), Fayetteville (1906), Pulaski (1906), Lewisburg (1907), Mount Pleasant (1908), and Nashville (1909).⁶² Most of these projects would not have been possible without the small commercial market that emerged across the former Confederacy to cater for the statuomanie at a cost affordable to local communities.⁶³ Still, some of the projects took many years to complete. At Shiloh, where many thousands of Tennessee Confederates died, early local efforts floundered and only after the Tennessee UDC created a State Legislation Committee

⁶⁰ Cody, History of the Tennessee Division, 103.

⁶¹ Ibid., 114.

⁶² See Goodloe Papers, Box 11, folder 5, TSLA.

⁶³ See Edward L. Ayers, The Promise of the New South: Life After Reconstruction (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 334-35.

and invested twelve years of efforts were sufficient funds amassed to fund the battlefield monument at a cost of fifty thousand dollars.⁶⁴

A number of explanations, then, can be given for the monument craze. On one level, it served as a means of commemorating the veterans before they died, restoring the manly valor of the early 1860s to a pride of place within the post-war community. Second, the monuments were a clear racial celebration of the ability of whites to govern their own communities and to position themselves nationally on their own terms. Third, in honoring the ordinary Confederate soldier, standing alone in virtuous simplicity, the monument builders were mediating the contemporary dislocations of the New South by honoring the civilization of the Old South. Not all Southerners appreciated the effort, however, and Corra Harris famously ridiculed the monument industry in a 1912 novel, explaining that the truth of the matter was that “the figure of the soldier on the pedestal was of extremely short stature” because “the ‘Daughters of the Confederacy’ . . . had not been able to afford the price demanded, and the skinflint sculptor shortened the legs of the hero to make up the difference.” Harris worried that “Once you erect a statue, you have belittled and defeated yourself. You cannot compete with it. The Thing outlasts you. This is one reason why in those countries where there are the greatest number of monuments to the memory of men and deeds there is to be found the poorest quality of living manhood.”⁶⁵ Few Middle Tennessee women agreed, however, and many devoted efforts to burnish and display the highest quality of manhood in the Confederate tradition. For many the executed Confederate scout, Sam Davis of Smyrna, Rutherford County, was the epitome of perfection. Lacking any heroic leaders to match

⁶⁴ Shiloh efforts cited in Cox, Dixie’s Daughters, 89-93.

⁶⁵ Corra Harris, The Recording Angel (1912) cited in Sarah E. Gardner, Blood & Irony: Southern White Women’s Narratives of the Civil War, 1861-1937 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 168-69.

Virginia's celebration of Robert E. Lee, Jeb Stuart, and Stonewall Jackson, it took the Confederate tradition in Tennessee many years to discover its eponymous hero – the martyred scout, Sam Davis.

The Tennessee UDC's crowning achievement—a dormitory for the daughters of the Confederacy on the campus of Peabody college—combined monument building with education. As early as 1903 the Tennessee division had begun campaigning to build a women's dormitory at Peabody College. The effort initially was to secure a Chair of Southern History, but they “failed to secure the co-operation and interest of the General Organization.”⁶⁶ The new idea was to provide a building “where girls of Confederate ancestry could have rooms at nominal rent” while training as teachers. “In appreciation of this trust, the College had bound itself to establish a Chair of Southern History, and reported that this had been done before the fund was placed in their keeping.” The building was dedicated in 1935 as Confederate Memorial Hall, a certain part of it being entirely under the control of the Tennessee UDC. The Tennessee UDC raised £50k of the \$150k cost and initially it housed twenty five UDC scholars.

STORING THE PAST

The novelist Bobby Ann Mason writes in her story “Shiloh” that history as represented by monuments leaves “out the insides of history”.⁶⁷ It was a point taken by the neo-Confederates of the 1890s, with veterans, sons, and daughters playing prominent roles in the creation of a State archive at Nashville that would house the ‘insides’ of history – albeit from a particular point of

⁶⁶Cox, Dixie's Daughters, 134; Cody, History of the Tennessee Division, 50-51, 53-57, quotation from 50.

view. Although the Tennessee Historical Society had served as a repository of sorts for State records, Tennessee had to wait until 1919 before the State appropriated sufficient funds to maintain a full-time archivist. As in other former Confederate states, veterans were among the most prominent advocates of a State archive. So were their sons. At the Nashville Reunion of the UCV in 1904, the SCV announced its intention to push state legislatures to support the creation of state archives. The UDC also added its power and influence to the movement.⁶⁸ The Daughters, especially, played a significant role in the solicitation of veteran's memoirs in the late 19th and early 20th century. A C. McLeary's Humorous Incidents was one of many memoirs produced at their behest, as the author acknowledges in his prefatory note. It was a nostalgic tale that avoided the "hard times we had, for that is pretty well known," but tells "of some of the funny things that happened, which kept us in good spirits."⁶⁹

When the state finally got around to establishing an archive, it chose as the custodian the poet and local color novelist John Trotwood Moore. It was an obvious choice, given that Moore had found a large regional audience for his sketches and tales of Tennessee life and regional history in periodicals such as Trotwood's Monthly and The Taylor-Trotwood Magazine. Between 1905 and 1908, Moore published twenty-five articles on the theme 'Historical Highways of the South', with the places and battles of the war often featured.

⁶⁷ Quoted in Tara McPherson, Reconstructing Dixie: Race, Gender, and Nostalgia in the Imagined South (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 272n.5

⁶⁸ See extensive quotation of the Nashville reunion's resolutions in CV 8/04.

⁶⁹ A.C. McLeary, Humorous Incidents of the Civil War, 5. Electronic edition published by the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1997, <http://docsouth.unc.edu/mcleary.mcleary.html> (last accessed 23 August 2004).

Born in Marion, Alabama in 1858, the son of a lieutenant in the Fortieth Alabama Infantry, Moore was self-consciously a child of the Confederate generation. Too young to remember the war years himself, the sensitive young man nonetheless absorbed both his father's sentiments about the 1860s and the wider sensibilities that he drew from oral testimony and from the marks of the war upon the landscape. Acutely conscious of history and place, Moore was in love with Middle Tennessee. His biographer accurately describes his work as "writing at the grass roots". Farmer, horse-breeder, and school teacher, Moore famously viewed the 6000 square miles within the geological basin of Middle Tennessee as 'the dimple of the Universe'. In one story of the war, he depicted Hood's army on its ill-fated march to Nashville as arriving in 'God's country'. He was an obvious choice in 1919 to be the convener and cataloguer of regional memory for a society that now viewed its Civil War past in epic terms. For Moore, history was memory – and memory was but yesterday. "Men time things wrong," he once wrote: "our real time is from memory to memory." Yesterday, he observed, could be 'twenty-five years ago'.⁷⁰

John Trotwood Moore had his differences with Lost Cause enthusiasts, but no figure played a more prominent and varied role than Moore in the consolidation and articulation of the Confederate aesthetic tradition in the early twentieth century. Moore wore many hats – poet, novelist, folklorist, popular historian, and archivist were among some of his professions – but while his fame as a writer has long dimmed, in historical terms his influence persists as a crusading collector and cataloguer of authentic Confederate experience. It is no accident that his portrait hangs prominently in the manuscript reading room at the Tennessee State Library &

⁷⁰ John Trotwood Moore, "Yesterday" from Songs & Stories from Tennessee (1897; rpt. Philadelphia: Henry T. Coates & Co., 1903), 216.

Archives. From the late 1890s until his death in 1929 he was Middle Tennessee's principal architect of white racial memory, and, as the State's first archivist-librarian-historian between 1919 and 1929, he built a treasure house of Confederate memory – a legacy continued by his wife who, having inherited his post, served as State archivist for another twenty years.

Upon his appointment, Moore found that the state had lost some of its treasures and had a lot of catching up to do. The state's history, Moore believed, had been "badly neglected by her own people." While its people slept, "Tennessee [was] deprived of her treasures, in some cases robbed of them from so many sources that I grow indignant when I think of it." Moore cited the Lyman C. Draper papers at the Wisconsin Historical Society, the Jackson, Polk, and Johnson papers in Washington, and John Sevier's diary in Mississippi as prominent examples that "make us all heart sick when we think of it."⁷¹ Despite the eventual allocation from the Tennessee General Assembly, Moore still encountered what he described as the "humiliating obstacle" in "the widespread indifference to matters historical" in the state.⁷² Putting great faith in county level history, Moore was dismayed to learn upon taking office that only thirty-nine of Tennessee's ninety-five counties had responded in any way to an earlier initiative to create County Historical Committees.

Moore set out vigorously to make up for time lost and, in particular, to capture the records of Tennessee's Confederate soldiery before it was too late. This, clearly, was his first priority, and the one to which he devoted an enormous amount of effort in his first five years as archivist. He determined "to secure the name and address of every Confederate and Federal

⁷¹ John Trotwood Moore to Miss Susie Gentry, Dec. 20, 1923. Tennessee State Librarian & Archivists Papers, Box 21, folder 19, TSLA.

⁷² Annual Report, Tennessee Historical Commission 1922. Tennessee State Librarian & Archivists Papers, Box 15, folder 9, TSLA.

survivor in the State and mail to each a questionnaire.” In his first annual report as Chairman of the Tennessee Historical Commission, Moore set out his “plan of procedure.”

He first set to the task of organizing a list of special local correspondents, one at each post office in the state, to help create a complete census of war veterans and provide a local point of contact for respondents. For candidates for this role he first approached the old soldiers who were still alive, mentally and physically; teachers of history in the County high schools; the local correspondents of county newspapers; and finally district school teachers and pastors of county churches. Addresses were supplied by the Confederate Veteran’s mailing galley for Tennessee, any pension records accessible to state officials, and the rosters of the veterans’ bivouacs still active. “You can render your State no greater service now,” wrote Moore in a half page advertisement in the Confederate Veteran, “nor leave to you posterity a more valued heritage than to contribute your reminiscences.” The response was immediate and gratifying. Within a short time, every county responded and the names and addresses of old soldiers were arriving at Moore’s office at the rate of over one hundred a week. In reviewing the activity, Moore compared his results favorably with earlier efforts. In compiling his Military Annals of Tennessee in 1886 Dr. J.B. Lindsey had secured rosters of only 12 percent of those who enlisted in the Confederate Army. And in 1915, an early effort by a Vanderbilt University professor to survey Confederate veterans had yielded only 18 responses. Moore had already doubled the information collected by Lindsey nearly forty years earlier.⁷³

⁷³ Annual Report, Tennessee Historical Commission, 1922; advertisement in the CV 30 (March 1922), 82; the responses of both Confederate and Union veterans were published in five volumes in 1985 by the Southern Historical Press, Inc. of Easley, South Carolina; see also Fred Arthur Bailey, Class and Tennessee’s Confederate Generation (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987).

This was no data collection exercise, however. Moore wanted to procure material for “a true history of the Old South”, demonstrating that the antebellum civilization had low levels of class conflict, slaveholding, and illiteracy – in other words that it was a civilization worth fighting for. Taking Gustavus W. Dyer’s survey questionnaire, Moore secured 1,650 responses from Civil War veterans across the State. The questionnaire went beyond a simple request for biographical data (records of service and contours of life since the war). Much information was requested of the old soldier’s antebellum lifestyle – how much land did his family own? what kind of house did they occupy? how many slaves did they own? was slaveownership a factor in politics? were there opportunities for a poor man to advance economically? The veterans were encouraged to write of their broader experiences and to give as much family history as they remembered. No effort was made to secure responses from Union black veterans. In the tenor of the questions, and the freight that they carried, the survey of Tennessee Civil War veterans was not an exercise in objectivity but a designed effort to produce primary evidence for the emerging field of southern historical studies that was beginning to challenge what many saw as the distorting influence of northern schools of historical thought.⁷⁴

CORNERS OF THE FIELD

At the same time that Moore was reaping the civil war memory of whites, the Tennessee pension board (on which he sat) was extending its meager benefits to blacks deemed to have remained loyal to the Confederate clause. In 1921 – two decades after enacting the Tennessee

⁷⁴ Dyer, a Chicago trained sociologist, covered his original 1915 solicitation of responses by claiming that he was “convinced . . . that the leading history of the United States grossly misrepresents conditions in the Old South.” Dyer quoted in Fred A. Bailey, intro., The

Confederate pension provision for whites – the Tennessee State Assembly passed a law “to provide for those colored men who served as servants and cooks in the Confederate army.”⁷⁵ Between 1921-35 280 aged and infirm African American men (most from West Tennessee), including two men formerly owned by Nathan Bedford Forrest, applied for the \$10 per month. (Nine applicants came from Maury County – a county with hundreds of black Union pensioners – and under 30 came from Nashville.) They had to prove need and that they had loyally ‘served’ until the end of the war. In a cruel confirmation of the instability of black families that slavery had produced, widows were exempt. This odd gesture, too little too late for most, came at the end of twenty years or more of efforts by the UCV and particularly the UDC to bring loyal black servants back into the Confederate family. The myth of the loyal servant, and the nostalgic love that memoirs had shown for black female caregivers in particular, had become a cardinal truth of the Old South idyll. The extension of Confederate pension benefits to black men was part of the appropriation of black history and identity and an effort to silence competing narratives about the African American experience during the war.

The emancipationist memory of the war – while subsumed often within the accommodationist positions of many leaders in the black community – could not be extinguished, however. Annual emancipation celebrations, notably on the 50th anniversary in 1913, and a liberationist reading of the gospel within the weekly congregations of many black churches, kept an alternative reading of southern history alive. Nashville alone possessed 57 black churches by 1920. Allied to the churches were two black-owned publishing houses that, though moderate and muted in their engagement on issues of racial justice and historical memory

Tennessee Civil War Veterans Questionnaires vol. 1, (Easley, SC.: Southern Historical Press, Inc., 1985).

(especially when compared with the Confederate Veteran) maintained a millennialist approach to black history incorporating some of the features of the emancipationist story. Schools and colleges also carved out some quasi public spaces, on the campuses and in the classrooms, where versions of black history could be absorbed and acted out. A tradition among northern philanthropic agencies (the Jeanes Foundation and the Rosenwald Fund, for example) of supporting rural black schools dated back to the early days of Reconstruction and remained strong. Though financially strapped, the Reconstruction-era Fisk University – which continued to be the intellectual centre of the black community, and where students protested against a white patrician leadership in 1925 – was the first to historically black college or university to introduce a black history course into the curriculum in 1911. But off campus, in any public sphere black memory was severely circumscribed. Black communities also lacked the capacity to retain and store houses of memory on anything like the scale available to the white communities of the Tennessee heartland. As Fitz Brundage has observed of the South as a whole, “whereas white historians could harness the state to their historical and cultural ambitions, blacks could not realistically harbor similar ambitions.”⁷⁶

Any professional effort by blacks to develop an alternative reading of the emerging school of southern historical studies was hamstrung by second-rate facilities and training and had carefully to walk the line of segregation in scholarship. Insight into the policing of the color line in scholarship can be seen in an exchange of correspondence between Walter L. Fleming, a historian at Vanderbilt University, and Mr. C. L. Fry in the President’s office at Fisk University just a few blocks across town. Fry had written Fleming to ask for his suggestions of suitable

⁷⁵ Tennessee Public Acts 1921, ch. 129.

⁷⁶ Brundage, The Southern Past, 140.

research topics for black scholars to pursue. Fleming wrote back: “I want to urge the value of biographic studies of negro leaders, especially those noted for *constructive* work even though they may be somewhat obscure.” He went on to suggest that Fisk scholars focus on the “Negro church” and “the development of Negro education”, “inter-state migration” and “the Colored Farmers’ Alliance of the 1890’s,” among other topics. “Presumably,” Fleming added, knowing only too well that the major professional journals and associations were effectively closed to black scholars, “the Southern Workman and Journal of Negro History will be open to your needs.” There was no suggestion in this ‘agreement’ of any sort of investigation of conditions under slavery or of the need to establish a record of the coming to freedom during and after the Civil War. The great epics about the war years, it seems, were to be the preserve of white scholars and writers. Fleming suggested as much in concluding his instruction with the following suggestion: “. . . I am very much disposed to say that Vanderbilt University will keep out of any particular corner of the field desired by Fisk University.” Scholarship, in effect, was to be pursued along segregated lines.⁷⁷

The irritation to Black Tennesseans burned as brightly as ever. When Thomas Dixon’s The Clansman, a fictional treatment of the Middle Tennessee saga of the Ku Klux Klan, appeared as a play, the Nashville Globe could not hide its exasperation. Describing the production as “inflammatory agitation” and its architects as “mob instigators” the newspaper’s correspondent wondered how the story of the “murderous Ku Klux Klan” who “drenched the fair

77 Walter L. Fleming to Mr. C. L[uther]. Fry (office of the president, Fisk University), November 3, 1927, History and Political Science Departments, RG 519, box 72, folder 42: Fisk University, Special Collections, Alexander and Jean Heard Library, Vanderbilt University. Fry replied to Fleming a week later “to sincerely thank you for your letter of November 3rd, together with the suggested list of possible projects.”

Southland with innocent Negroes' blood" could have become so perverted.⁷⁸ While the anger of blacks was carefully concealed, we get some sense of the frustration at the whitewash of history from the novels of the Nashville-based writer, Sutton E. Griggs. In Imperium in Imperio (1899) Griggs imagined a utopian government for African Americans in Waco, Texas, as the true and unrealized new south (which he contrasted with the 'scowling south'). The Hindered Hand (1905) was a direct response to Thomas Dixon's The Leopard's Spots. Castigating Dixon's "grossly misleading productions" Griggs related the "adroit groupings of half-truths which make abominable untruths" of Dixon's writings as the "legitimate fruit of a system of repression."⁷⁹ Environmental determinism, however, got the better of Griggs and he eventually came to believe in the inferiority of blacks and to valorize white civilization.

The leaders of the black community were not blind to the fact that African Americans had a need for a usable past of their own, and for an argument against the prevailing orthodoxy. Nationally, as David Blight has noted, "many black leaders in the early years of the century took increasingly critical stands on the costs of sectional reunion and tried to shape a historical memory devoted to racial justice."⁸⁰ But evidence for this locally is thin on the ground. Lily-whiteism continued to dominate the local Republican party, which had almost entirely forgotten the emancipationist vision the party had temporarily embraced in the late 1860s and early 1870s. Local black leaders, such as James Napier, continued to trade votes for a degree of local preferment for appointed local offices, but while black electoral alignment to the Republicans

⁷⁸ The Globe's correspondent was unable to get into a viewing of the movie as only whites were admitted, "Review of the 'Clansman'", Nashville Globe 1 Feb. 1907.

⁷⁹ Sutton E. Griggs, The One Great Question: A Study of Southern Conditions at Close Range (Nashville: Orion Publishing Co., 1907), esp. part two, quotation from p.52.

⁸⁰ Blight, Race and Reunion, 362.

persisted its strength was sapped by apathy and cross-over appeals from Democrats. While the Nashville Globe reported occasionally on the passing of the ‘old vet’s’ and could at times exhibit a radical edge, its main attentions were on the politics of economic up-lift and economic solidarity: “We owe it to ourselves to strive with all of the power within us to keep our little business enterprises alive,” the Globe thundered in 1909 in the midst of a city-wide streetcar boycott by blacks in a failed protest against the introduction of segregated facilities. But the Globe had no radical tradition from Reconstruction to fall back upon, and on the few occasions when it tried to galvanise interest in the annual emancipation celebration, the paucity of social memory within black communities was apparent.

James C. Napier, the former Nashville city councilman and Republican party loyalist, continued to be the standard-bearer in politics for Tennessee blacks. In 1911 he scored a remarkable success for his loyal efforts when President Taft appointed him Register of the U.S. Treasury. He held the position from February 1911 until July 1913 when he resigned in protest when (under President Woodrow Wilson, the first southern Democrat to be elected to the White House since the war) the Treasury required him to carry out a segregation order. Napier’s brief period of national service was cause for celebration both in Nashville and in Washington D.C. and he was feted by many of the leading African Americans of the day. On one such occasion Napier spoke to a group of two hundred black leaders at the Odd Fellows’ Hall in Washington D.C. and reflected on the historical legacy of the 1860s. What he focused on, however, were the “peculiar conditions” of Reconstruction and the passions and prejudices that were “fanned into a burning flame” by ideologues on both sides. “We must confess,” he concluded, that the conflicts of the immediate post-war period “took deep root in the minds of both white and colored people.” Gradually, Napier believed, a “better spirit and a better feeling” were beginning “to

permeate the minds of the people.” Yet the principle obstacle remained, in Napier’s view, the lack of self-sufficiency within the black community. Reconstruction, he observed in an address given to the Bethel Literary Society in Washington D.C. in November 1907, “went to naught” as the successors of Charles Sumner and Thaddeus Stevens through a “weakness, frailty and lack of courage.” In these conditions, Napier believed that the black community should focus on building up its own inner strengths and wait for better days to return to the fight for civil rights.⁸¹

What was Napier’s view on the war? Few records exist that capture his view, or the views of other prominent Middle Tennessee blacks, on the great conflict of the 1860s. But we get an insight into his thinking from an address delivered not in Middle Tennessee (where such bold pronouncements would undoubtedly have jeopardized his economic and political standing) but to the alumni of Howard University in Washington D.C. Speaking in 1907, Napier argued that whites in neither the North nor the South were willing to acknowledge the truth about the war. While “some people were then and are now wont to make claim that this war was waged in the interest of State’s rights and others that it was for the preservation of the Union,” Napier pointed to a deeper truth:

Every gun that was fired, every soldier that fell was just so much done for the enslavement or the freedom of the Negro. The people of the United States are not yet prepared to confess this. The Country is not yet far enough from those days of strife to acknowledge it. But the day will come when some student of history will take the annals of those events and show the truth—that this war was waged with the direct purpose and that alone, on the one hand, to enslave the Negro and, on the other, to free him. Because God and right were on the side of the latter they were victorious.⁸²

⁸¹ Napier’s comments at the Odd Fellows’ Hall are recorded in “At the Nation’s Capital,” *Richmond Reformer*, 6 May 1911; “Speech of Honorable J.C. Napier before the Bethel Literary Society, Washington D.C., November 19 1907,” Box 1, folder 23, James C. Napier Papers, Special Collections, Fisk University.

⁸² [untitled address delivered at a gathering of the alumni, Howard U., Washington, D.C. in 1907; an incomplete manuscript], Box 1, folder 25, James C. Napier Papers, Special Collections, Fisk University.

In the safe surroundings of Howard, Napier felt free to speak his mind and convey to the younger men in his audience a reading of the war that put the cause of emancipation at the heart of the matter. He knew too well, however, that the men of Howard, like the men and women of Fisk, would need to keep wise counsel on such matters and work at improving the social and political standing of their communities before conditions would allow for so bold a declaration of the meaning of the war.

6. Epilogue

If I should tell them, what would telling mean
To men whose logical eyes might never see
Those living fields I knew where memory
Was not yet shut in many books but strode,
A young Telemachus, the Old Plank Road?

- "Late Answer: A Civil War Seminar" – Donald Davidson⁸³

By the 1920s the heritage of the Tennessee Confederates exerted a powerful influence on the minds of the young. Take the group of young white intellectuals gathering in the dormitories of Kissam Hall at Vanderbilt University to share poetry and to find a foothold for themselves in the modern world. As a means of mapping the regional past, the Lost Cause was their principal frame of reference – as it had been for their fathers⁸⁴ – and it was something each of the Vanderbilt Fugitives and Southern Agrarians had to think with and to think through. Four of the Vanderbilt Agrarians (Donald Davidson, Andrew Nelson Lytle, Lyle H. Lanier, and John Crowe Ransom) were reared within the Tennessee heartland; three others (Allen Tate, Frank L. Owsley and Robert Penn Warren) were from just north and south of the Middle Tennessee border. As Donald Davidson explained, one of main drivers behind the coming together of the Twelve Southerners in the late 1920s was that “suddenly we realized to the full what we had long been dimly feeling, that the Lost Cause might not be wholly lost after all.” “In its very

⁸³ Donald Davidson, Poems 1922-1961 (University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 53.

⁸⁴ John Trotwood Moore, father of Fugitive poet Merrill Moore, recognized in his later years that he had “had the Lost Cause on me ever since I can remember anything.” John Trotwood Moore diary, 3 June 1924, John Trotwood Moore Family Papers, TSLA.

backwardness,” he went on, “the South had clung to some secret which embodied, it seemed, the elements out of which its own reconstruction—and possibly even the reconstruction of America—might be achieved.”⁸⁵

Though the disparate minds that came together for the publication of I’ll Take My Stand in 1930 would chart a variety of intellectual routes through the thicket of modern America, the Civil War was no mere historical abstraction: it marked the most painful and complex event in their historical memory, an epic struggle of a noble civilization doomed to yield to the forces of centralization and modernization. As Virginia Rock has observed, “for these men of letters [the war years] offered the raw material, themes, and symbols for biographies, novels, poetry, social criticism, and historical interpretation.”⁸⁶ Between them the Agrarians wrote four narrative biographies of Civil War figures; four novels with themes set in the 1860s; at least two major poems (Allen Tate’s ‘Ode to the Confederate Dead’ (1926) and Davidson’s “The Sod of the Battlefield” from Tall Men (1927)); a number of historical essays; and a meditation on the Civil War centennial.

Donald Davidson stood out among the Agrarians for the almost doctrinal way in which he viewed social memory as providing the texture of historical identity. While at odds with the currents of modernist thinking swirling around intellectual life in the 1920s, Davidson’s view of identity was essentially populist in drawing directly from the investments in social memory that veterans and other neo-Confederate memorialists had engaged in over the previous fifty years. Born in Campbellsville just outside Pulaski in 1883, Davidson recognized in later life that

⁸⁵ Quoted by Louis D. Rubin, Jr., “Introduction,” from I’ll Take My Stand: the South and the Agrarian Tradition (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1962), xxv-xxvi.

⁸⁶ Virginia Rock, “The Twelve Southerners: Biographical Essays,” I’ll Take My Stand, 363-4

memories of the war era had been fed to him like mother's milk. From his grandmother he "heard many terrible and also stirring tales of her experiences during the war—all she went through during the Federal occupation of Middle Tennessee." On top of hearing stories first-hand at his grandmother's knee, the young Davidson also spent hours outside a country store listening to the stories of Confederate veterans. Although a man of high scholarly habits, Davidson's understanding of the history of his region was not acquired through a dispassionate consideration of primary and secondary texts. He took his reading of the war by drinking deeply from the wells of social memory that had been dug around him. Consequently his thinking about the war was dominated by the sense of traumatic loss, by the need to valorize in defense of the cause, and by the dialectic between remembering and identity—the hallmarks of the Confederate tradition that had been developing in the four decades since the war.⁸⁷

Davidson's feelings about the war were so hot that it was as if he had experienced the violence and swirling emotions of the conflict first hand. The war, in his view, arose from an unjust and savage attack by the northern states on the integrity and sovereignty of southern communities. Forced to defend their homes against a barbarian invader, southern men fought with honor and distinction against the odds and even when all seemed lost. Reconstruction, an uncivilized attempt to force black supremacy, was a "second stage of fierce civil war" and besmirched the name of democracy. Citizenship, Davidson believed, was an entitlement of whites alone. The legacy of slavery, he believed, would forever separate black from white and prevent African Americans from acquiring close and usable relations to their cultural and

⁸⁷ Donald Davidson to Stark Young, Sept. 29, 1952, quoted in Paul V. Murphy, "The Social Memory of the South: Donald Davidson and the Tennessee Past," Carroll Van West, ed., Tennessee History: The Land, the People, and the Culture (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1988), 323.

historical identities. Davidson did not acquire this history through reading; as one of his narrators observes in the poem 'Late Answer: A Civil War Seminar,' "How could he learn what history books forbade?" Rather he *felt* it around him and learned the contours of its legends through oral renditions and physical reenactments – "I knew where memory / Was not yet shut in many books." In such ways the cardinal truths of Confederate heritage were embroidered into Davidson's identity like a series of slogans tattooed on his home-spun sleeve – 'Remember Franklin', 'Honor Sam Davis,' 'Support the Ku Klux,' and 'Defend White Supremacy.'⁸⁸

Davidson was unquestionably the most conservative – and arguably the least gifted – of the Agrarian critics. In time became the most stubborn adherent to a view of the sovereign white South, and his firm adherence to the doctrine of segregation led him to take a lead in the region, during the 1950s and 1960s, against the modern civil rights movement. But his views on cultural identity, as Paul V. Murphy has argued, have been hugely influential on modern conservative thinkers. Davidson was a fierce and romantic regionalist. "I yield to nobody in my love of the South," he wrote in 1925, "and my loyalty to its best traditions." Claiming "a personal affinity with the soil of Middle Tennessee" Davidson exhibited fierce adherence throughout his life to the "blood-kin [who] fought at Shiloh and Murfreesboro" and cultivated a primordial bond to his ancestors through both agrarian and military traditions. Cultural (and thereby racial) identity, in Davidson's view was provided by a social memory of the past.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ Davidson's interpretation of regional history received its fullest treatment in the two volumes he contributed on the Tennessee river valley to the Rivers of America series. Davidson, The Tennessee 2 vols., (Nashville; J.S. Sanders & Company, 1991; orig. pub. 1946).

⁸⁹ Paul V. Murphy, "The Social Memory of the South," 323-342. See also Paul V. Murphy, The Rebuke of History: The Southern Agrarians and American Conservative Thought (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

Yet Davidson's mystically clouded view of the origins of social memory forms, and his denial of their malleability over time in the hands of individuals with evolving needs and aspirations, points to the severe limitations of the Confederate heritage he remained uncritically close to throughout his life. By social memory Davidson essentially referred to a selective folklore that memorialized the great and epic deeds of past eras enacted by what he referred to as the 'Tall Men', the white pioneer farmers and martial supremacists who cleared the land of trees and natives in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. He also referred to race as the central defining characteristic of his social, cultural and political identity.

Both these points are embodied in his emotionally charged minor epic, The Tall Men, published in 1927, a semi-autobiographical narration of remembrance by a son of the South seeking historical orientation in the modern world. "Something (call it civilization) crept / Across the mountains once, and left me here," the narrator observes. As he goes about his day, cosseted by the modern conveniences provided by "prisoned air, steel, and electricity", the hero encounters a Northern man with "a sleek copyrighted smile" and recalls in contrast to the "little man" the tallness (stature) possessed by his ancestors – the tall men who fought the Indians, who hacked a space out of the wilderness so that civilization could flourish, who bent the negro slave to his will, defended his home against the Yankees, and in defeat showed their greatness of spirit. Davidson's narrator honors these men, and acknowledges their seed in his bones, through a sacramental act of communion, plucking a single bloom from the sod of an old battlefield and

⁹⁰ Donald Davidson, The Spygrass: Views and Reviews, 1924-1930 ed. John Tyree Fain (Nashville, 1963), 200.

proclaiming “This is my body, woven from dead and living, / Giving over again to the quick
lustration / Of a new moment.”⁹¹

Memories woven from the dead was a privilege Davidson afforded to white southerners alone as he excluded blacks from the community of southern identity. In this the racial supremacy of Davidson’s thinking is laid bare and we see the falsity of the claims made on behalf of the Confederate tradition that denied agency and history to African Americans. Davidson saw blacks as historical nonentities, the tragic consequence of over two centuries of slavery. In a 1945 essay, “Preface to Decision”, which set out his justification for the continuing of segregation, Davidson saw slavery as the “prime cultural fact” that resulted in African Americans having a “hiatus or lurking humiliation where there ought to be history.” By contrast, for the white man “his history is with him wherever he goes.” The epistemological fallacy behind Davidson’s thinking, so painfully evident to some of his fellow Agrarians, reveals race to be the central binding feature of the Confederate social memory tradition.⁹²

To the black families that had survived slavery, and to the black men who had fought as true republicans for their liberty against eternal oppression, the history of their journeys, while not as visible to an outsider as the Confederate monument on the courtyard square, were just as burdensome a source of identity. But racial prejudice was too central a preoccupation of the political needs of contemporary whites in the 1920s to concede that African Americans too might have a past, albeit one that was not as usable in the present political circumstances. Those circumstances—the use by whites of the regional power apparatus to maintain the political and social privileges associated with being white—meant that memory and identity had become

⁹¹ Davidson, Poems 1922-1961, 132.

⁹² Donald Davidson, “Preface to Decision,” Sewanee Review 53 (Summer 1945), 395-96.

wrapped up with the meaning of citizenship. And Davidson was keenly aware of this. Only whites, he believed, could possess citizenship in the modern south because only whites could claim a southern Confederate heritage. It was a tautology that drove the more progressively-minded Robert Penn Warren to distraction. Davidson's error was to view history as an unalterable fate while consciously fighting to preserve a particular fate for the history of his ancestors. Warren would come to call the historical tradition of his native region 'The Great Alibi,' meaning that the war as the central feature of southern memory could be used in ways that "explains, condones, and transmutes everything."⁹³

The irony is that in attempting to put all African American experience within a single racial cast – "the doom defined by history," as Warren put it⁹⁴ – the neo-Confederate memorialists have doomed their own traditions to racial typecasting. In time, it is the Confederate tradition that is collapsing under the truthful criticism of those whom it sought to contain and of those within its own community who yearned for a past that could yield new possibilities and accommodations. This realignment of regional memory, enabled by shifts in the distribution of power within the state and the nation, was already in the making at the time of Davidson's death in 1968. Forty years on, the inheritors of the Emancipationist/Republican legacy erected the first physical monument to the fact that fully 40 per cent of Middle Tennessee's black male residents had fought against the Confederacy and for their freedom. It yet stands alone as a solitary challenge to the dozens of Confederate sentinels across the region that will continue to stand for many a year. But the monument to black Union soldiers symbolizes the rebalancing of regional

⁹³ Robert Penn Warren, The Legacy of the Civil War, intro. by Howard Jones (Lincoln, NE.: University of Nebraska Press, 1998; orig. pub. 1961), 54

⁹⁴ op. cit., 55.

memory. In so doing it reveals the mutable qualities of memory itself and presages a time of future reckonings and future identities.

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