RED, WHITE, AND SHADES OF GRAY: THE DEVELOPMENT AND
ENTRENCHMENT OF CONFEDERATE IDEOLOGY IN AMERICA,
1865-1939

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INTRODUCTION

On July 1, 2000, the state of South Carolina removed the Confederate battle flag from atop the dome of its Capitol building. The move followed a six month economic boycott of the state led by the NAACP, which sought to have the flag banned from flying on public grounds. To the NAACP and those siding with it in the flag controversy, the Confederate banner represents a legacy of slavery and hate, and displaying it in public is highly offensive. Defenders of the flag, however, maintain that it stands as a symbol of their history, and removing it is akin to a repudiation of part of their heritage. The economic boycott cost South Carolina as much as $20 million in lost tourism revenue, pressuring business interests to call for the flag’s removal. Ultimately, it was decided that the flag should come down, but the victory of those who wanted the flag gone from the Capitol dome was bittersweet. Opponents of the flag attained only a partial triumph, since instead of completely banning the display of the Confederate flag on public grounds, a compromise solution was worked out in the state legislature. Under the compromise, in exchange for the removal of the flag from atop the Capitol dome a slightly similar flag was allowed to fly at a nearby Confederate memorial located just in front of the building. Thus, despite the efforts of the state legislature to bring an end to the controversy, the compromise solution was unsatisfactory to many on both sides of the issue.¹

The flag controversy highlights the continued pervasiveness of the Confederate legacy in America, which continues to make its presence felt, even though it has been almost a century and a half after the Confederacy’s demise. My thesis traces the establishment of Confederate legacy: first, as a collective memory held by Southerners of the generation who fought the war and lived through Reconstruction; and secondly, as an ideological force that spread outward beyond the South, eventually becoming accepted and entrenched as a legitimate part of historical and popular interpretations of the Civil War era that have proven difficult to uproot.

The work of French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs on collective memory offers a central rationale behind the formation and establishment of a Confederate collective memory within the post-war South. For Halbwachs, recalling the past depends upon the social conditions which currently influence the person remembering, as well as the environment in which the memory originally occurred. Collective memory is a reconstruction of the past, not merely a recollection of events. Even for people experiencing events as they occurred, individual memories become fragmented over time and are rebuilt within the framework of present social contexts, and the memories of individuals and groups are shaped by the social environment in which they live and interact with one another. To an extent, the past does shape the present, at least in terms of the perception of continuity. Halbwachs postulates, however, that the present social context is what exerts the definitive influence upon what is remembered about the past, and the remembered past is reconstructed to fit into the social frameworks of those living
in the present. It is only in relation to ideas held in the social setting of the present that memories of the past are called forth and are able to take shape in organized and meaningful ways.\(^2\)

Chapter 1 focuses on the reestablishment of southern identity and the development of a new collective memory within the South centered around the defeated Confederacy. Using Halbwachs, the social contexts surrounding Southerners, especially relating to (in terms of the Confederate legacy) white southern males, helped shape and direct the collective memories held by Southerners regarding the Confederacy following the war. White southern males needed a way to respond to the challenges confronting them in the face of post-war disillusionment and Reconstruction. With women stepping beyond their traditional roles, blacks seemingly holding the positions of authority, and Northerners belittling their masculinity, white males in the South needed to reestablish a sense of identity, and ultimately sought to reassert their dominance atop the social order. The development of the Lost Cause by elite Southerners was one way to respond to northern claims of southern inferiority. Early commemorative activities and even direct action through violence by vigilante organizations like the Ku Klux Klan also aided white southern males in reestablishing a sense of place, and these activities also helped to link Southerners together around a shared Confederate past. Thus, the social conditions and southern responses to them contributed to shape the collective memories of Southerners,

and Southerners used these memories to rebuild a sense of commonality and identity against the social and environmental uncertainties of the times.

Chapter 2 deals with the celebration of the Confederacy, which intensified as Reconstruction came to an end in the South and Southerners sought vindication for their cause. During this period, the collective memories of Southerners began to coalesce into a shared Confederate tradition that began to move from the realm of actual memory toward ideology. Southerners started to appropriate the Confederate legacy to build and reinforce their society in ways that bolstered their traditional values against the continued tensions brought on by economic and social changes. They increasingly linked the Confederate tradition with masculinity and white supremacy, and they used that tradition to help unify different classes of southern white males against potentially contentious issues within their own ranks, such as economic disparities. For example, elite whites aimed to undermine dissent from those in the lower classes by playing up the example of the Confederate soldier, who carried on without complaint in the face of adversity.

Further, the Confederate tradition was modified to fit an ideological position more conducive to sectional reconciliation. Instead of the previously harsh rhetoric put forward by the first Lost Cause advocates, Southerners increasingly used a softer, more conciliatory tone as they sought to reestablish their place as equals within a reunited nation. Additionally, both Northerners and Southerners began to reconstruct the remembrance of the Civil War in ways that removed the most contentious issues from the picture. For example, in commemorative events, the design of monuments, and historical
writings, the issue of slavery as the central reason for the South seceding was denied in favor of constitutional justifications. Even the veterans themselves began to blot out the more horrific or shameful actions they experienced during the war in favor of a glorified recollection of the period. This kind of forgetfulness was especially evident at reunions where former adversaries were in attendance. At these events, in a climate of conciliation, common hardships and camaraderie began to overshadow divisive issues. Finally, in this climate of consensus and conciliation, the Spanish-American war marked a critical moment in the rapprochement process between the two sections, as North and South united to fight against a common enemy.

Chapter 3 examines the transformation of the Confederate legacy from the actual collective memories of those who lived through the war and its aftermath to a more ideologically based legacy that perpetuated itself in discourse. As the generation that fought the war began to die off, succeeding generations did not have direct access to those who experienced the Civil War itself. To be sure, many Southerners, as noted in the battle flag example, saw themselves as the direct inheritors of the Confederate legacy, but they themselves had no personal memory of the war. Instead, they had to rely on second-hand interpretations of the war which appeared in historical and popular writings, and in the new media of film. By this time (the early twentieth century), however, southern perspectives on the war had become the dominant narratives. Thus, the works of the period were heavily impacted by that perspective. The perpetuation and transmission of Confederate ideology into discourse can be seen in many examples. In
my thesis, I chose Thomas Dixon's novel, *The Clansman*, and Margaret Mitchell's *Gone With The Wind*, to highlight the further dissemination of Confederate motifs into the general public. I also used the film adaptations of those novels, namely D.W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation*, and David O. Selznick's, *Gone With The Wind*, to show how southern perspectives on the war reached an even wider audience through the media of film. In these works, the transmission of Confederate ideology seems to perpetuate itself seamlessly, yet the ideology itself underwent subtle changes too, as the authors and directors did not escape the influence of the social conditions of their own times.

Thus, the Confederate legacy became entrenched in America, both as discourse and ideological legacy within society itself (especially southern society). For decades, the southern interpretation of the Civil War remained the dominant narrative of the period, and competing versions of Civil War history were muted as work after work perpetuated its ideology. However, changes in society and the work of historical revisionists and social reformers have done much to overturn these old perspectives, especially in the realm of scholarship. Nevertheless, as noted earlier, there remain those who see the Confederacy in terms of a proud heritage, and the long and difficult work to uproot and bring to light the negative aspects of that legacy continues.
CHAPTER 1

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A CONFEDERATE TRADITION: THE LOST CAUSE IN THE POSTWAR SOUTH, 1865-1877

At the end of the Civil War, a devastated South needed to rebuild from the ashes of its defeat. Compounding the tremendous loss of life and material destruction, serious challenges arose which shook the foundations of southern society to the core. The antebellum social relationships which Southerners used to define themselves and organize their society were in a state of disarray, and the coming of Reconstruction further undermined the stability of the prewar social order. Indeed, both internal and external pressures threatened southern identity as Southerners tried to adapt to life under northern rule. The changes brought by the end of the war were felt throughout the social spectrum, but in terms of challenging the hegemony of the pre-war social order, white southern males, the apex of that antebellum hierarchy, were directly affected.

The uncertainties confronting southern identity affected all segments of southern society. Men who left for the battlefields expecting victory, confident in the infallibility of their martial prowess, returned beaten and disillusioned, filled with doubts about whether they had upheld their masculine honor.\(^1\) In many cases it was southern women who carried their households through the initial period of confusion brought on by the South’s surrender. As they had during the war, they supported their men and displayed contempt

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\(^1\)Gaines M. Foster, *Ghosts of the Confederacy: Defeat, the Lost Cause, and the Emergence of the New South, 1865 to 1913* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 12-14.
for the northern invaders, sometimes openly. Consequently, southern women were perceived or depicted as the segment of southern society that remained the most staunchly devoted to the Confederate cause after the war, a position which was both comforting and unsettling to the psyche of southern males.\(^2\)

The end of slavery and the coming of Reconstruction further challenged southern identity. Through legislation enacted by Congress, then under the control of northern Republicans, the antebellum racial order in the South was overturned. Formerly powerful slave holders and high ranking Confederate civil and military officials (often one and the same) were disenfranchised, while freedmen gained the right to vote.\(^3\) In order to retain their traditional hegemony over southern society, white males in the South sought to reimpose their control over the freedmen and reassert their masculinity against the potentially undermining influence of southern womanhood. The creation of a new southern tradition, based on the glorification of the vanquished Confederacy, helped them do so.

This chapter focuses on the establishment of a Confederate tradition in the South, a tradition that served to reaffirm the prewar masculine and racial identities of white southern males. It reinforced the antebellum social order within the South (to an extent, since slavery was gone), and helped define and preserve the memory of the Confederacy for future generations of Americans from all regions. Closely tied to

\(^2\) Ibid, 29-30.

\(^3\) This was done through the Civil Rights Act of 1866 and the First Reconstruction Act of 1867. Joe H. Kirchberger, The Civil War and Reconstruction: An Eyewitness History (New York: Facts on File, 1991), 336-338.
southern notions of honor and embodied in what became known as the “Lost Cause, the postwar writings and activities that perpetuated the memory of the Confederacy,” this tradition eventually spread beyond the region, and even today exerts an influence on how Americans remember and interpret their Civil War. Ultimately, as will be seen in subsequent chapters, the diffusion of Lost Cause thought nationwide helped to ease the process of sectional reconciliation, and gained the vanquished Confederacy a measure of the vindication that many Southerners had long hoped for under northern rule.

The chapter is divided into four sections, each addressing key factors which shaped the formation of the Confederate tradition in the South. First, in order to understand the depth of southern disillusionment in the initial period following the war’s conclusion, and the actions taken by Southerners in response to postwar tribulations, a discussion of southern honor is necessary. Second, depictions of the capture of Jefferson Davis were illustrative of both the attack on southern masculinity by Northerners and the potentially undermining threat posed to patriarchal hegemony in the South by southern women moving beyond their traditional social sphere. Third, the efforts of elite Confederates to justify the legitimacy of the Confederacy and vindicate the righteousness of its cause influenced the way future generations interpreted the South’s defeat. Their contrasting treatment of two Confederate generals, Robert E. Lee and James Longstreet, was particularly reflective of their beliefs. Finally, the postwar activities of Southerners to

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4 Gaines M. Foster describes the Confederate tradition as “the dominant complex of attitudes and emotions that constituted the white South’s interpretation of the Civil War. The tradition developed out of and in turn shaped individuals’ memory of the war, but it was primarily a public memory, a component of the region’s cultural system, supported by the various organizations and rituals of the Lost Cause.” In other words, the tradition helped buttress southern identity against the upheavals brought by the end of the war. Foster, 5.
reestablish identity, through direct action (relating to attempts undertaken to reassert white rule in the South), and commemorative observances, further aided in the establishment of a Confederate tradition. By participating in such events, Southerners were able to place themselves within a shared Confederate identity, which helped them overcome war-induced hardships, and establish an enduring Confederate legacy for the future.

**Southern Honor**

Perhaps the most important element of white southern masculine identity was honor. Historian Bertram Wyatt-Brown, in *Southern Honor*, traced the origins of honor in the South back to ancient times. Wyatt-Brown described two types of honor at work in southern society. He referred to the first type, based on the Indo-European system of ethics, as “primal honor.” The other, developed much later and based on the Stoic-Christian system cultivated by English humanists, he called “gentility.” Gentility was the honor associated with elite members of southern society. It was a refined type of honor, emphasizing moral uprightness and associated with high social position. Sociability, learning, and piety, were the main characteristics emphasized by this sort of honor, and the behavior of male elites in southern society was largely determined by this (though as Wyatt-Brown points out, all three were not given equal weight, especially learning). Wealth, more than anything, separated the practitioners of this type of honor from other Southerners. By contrast, primal honor was a darker type of honor, “kept alive by the exigencies of an inhospitable, dangerous world where masters had to rule in fear.” This
sort of honor allowed Southerners, in times of uncertainty or challenge, to resort to passions that often lent themselves to the usage of violence (for example, lynching). Most white male members of southern society, regardless of economic standing, were influenced to some degree by this type of honor.\(^5\)

Wyatt-Brown noted five underlying features which governed the conduct of Southerners with respect to honor. These included:

1. honor as immortalizing valor, particularly in the character of revenge against familial and community enemies;
2. the opinion of others as an indispensable part of personal identity and gauge of self-worth;
3. physical appearance and ferocity of will as signs of inner merit;
4. defense of male integrity and mingled fear and love of women; and finally,
5. reliance upon oath-taking as a bond in lieu of family obligations and allegiances.\(^6\)

The first aspect of honor listed above concerned personal bravery and family/community protectiveness. Impugning a male Southerner’s personal valor or attacking his family or community (even verbally) was a serious offense, often leading to violent acts of retribution, including murder. If the attack came from inside the community, Southerners could turn against one another. If the attack was external to the community, however, it was a point of unity which bound Southerners together.\(^7\)

The second aspect of honor emphasized the importance of one’s public reputation. Personal honor was directly linked to how someone was perceived and (ultimately) treated in southern society. For example, as Wyatt-Brown points out, in

\(^5\)Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor, Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 34, 89-90.

\(^6\)Ibid, 34.

\(^7\)Ibid, 34-45.
southern society those who lacked honor also lacked reputation. Slaves, judged to be “incapable of reliability and therefore impervious to the dictates of community judgment” were without honor. Poor white “crackers” were similarly judged by the dominant segments of the community, and they too were relegated to the fringes of southern society.8

The third aspect described a kind of “organic” honor. Physical traits were supposed to reflect inner virtue. For Southerners poor health, small stature, and physical defects carried, using Wyatt-Brown’s words, “special opprobrium” within southern society, though a person could work to overcome these “deficiencies.” For example, he noted that Alexander Stephens “always regarded the puniness of his body as a sore trial,” yet he became Vice President of the Confederacy. At its most basic level, this aspect of southern honor also encouraged the assignment of value to parts of the body (such as the genitals, considered the most sacred and vulnerable aspects of a man’s body). This helps explain why horrific actions such as the mutilation of the genitals of black victims lynched for rape were condoned.9

The fourth aspect of honor was sexual honor, which governed the acceptable roles of men and women within southern society. This type of honor, along with public reputation (the second aspect of honor), reinforced traditional gender boundaries. Women were expected to maintain the highest levels of virtue, give their support to the men within their households and community (maintain an attitude of submissiveness), and limit

9Ibid, 48-50.
themselves to activities concerning the domestic sphere (a vitally important role, but still
subservient to men). In times of uncertainty (especially war), they were to display
courage, but also “remind men of their martial, protective duties.” Men, who were to live
in the wider world outside the domestic sphere, had an altogether different set of
standards. Young men often tried to prove their masculine worth and challenge the
authority of the older generation through sexual conquests (seducing women). Such
actions, while looked down upon, were not usually fatal to a man’s overall reputation.
Conversely, a woman who strayed or displayed “loose” morals could be severely
ostracized, bringing dishonor not only upon herself but her entire family. This paradox,
that women were held to such high standards of virtue while promiscuity was “allowed”
for men, was condoned because men and women were seen as living in separate worlds.
Since men interacted with the harsh world outside the home, and were expected to defend
the honor of women and their community (Wyatt-Brown called this a kind of southern
male imperative), sexual standards were not the same for them. Women had to maintain
their virtue within the home, because if they did not, men would not have a reason to
protect them. Consequently, a man’s honor would diminish if the women in his household
did not keep their virtue or effectively manage their households. Even women gossiping
against their men (or others) could destroy male reputations, and was strongly frowned
upon. As the second aspect of honor noted, reputation was everything in southern
society, and a bad reputation caused by a woman’s lack of virtue meant a loss of honor for
their men.\textsuperscript{10}

\textsuperscript{10} Ibid, 50-55.
Thus, men both loved and feared women. Women were necessary because men could protect them, thereby displaying their masculinity and by extension upholding their own honor. On the other side of the equation, if women maintained their virtue, they also maintained the honor of their men. The support women gave to men was essential for their men’s honor, reputations, and indeed their very sense of self-worth. Women could also destroy their men’s reputations, however, and this meant that men feared them too. For southern males, it was vitally important that the gender boundaries within southern society—with women in the domestic sphere and men in the public sphere—be strictly maintained. Women stepping outside of the domestic sphere were a potentially serious threat to the honor and psyche of southern males. Also, an attack on a woman’s virtue by outsiders (those not within the family or community), or the failure of a southern man to protect the honor of the women in his household, undermined men’s sense of honor and self-esteem, and were considered serious provocations which could lead to violence.

The fifth aspect of honor, oath taking, carried special import to Southerners. The oral bond given by a person was considered a sacred pledge, not merely ritual. In lieu of kinship ties, oath taking tied together members within a community. Such ties, however, held only when each party was considered honorable. Only those with honor could take oaths and sit in judgment of other members in white southern society. For example, it was not considered appropriate for blacks to sit on the jury in a court proceeding which concerned a white person. Oath taking, however, could also be superseded when honor itself was under attack. As Wyatt-Brown recounted, some Southerners had no problem with taking the loyalty oath to the Union at the end of the
war. They felt no qualms about doing so because they did not feel the Union respected their honor, nor did they consider the Union honorable. Thus, while oath taking was a significant ritual which Southerners used to bind their (non-familial) relationships, only those whom Southerners considered honorable were eligible to participate.  

The close relationship between southern honor and identity meant that any challenge to southern identity represented an attack on southern honor as well. The end of the war brought on a host of uncertainties within southern society and forced Southerners to defend their honor, sometimes on the primal level. In the case of attacks against southern identity at its most fundamental levels, such as taking away what the majority of white male Southerners in the nineteenth century perceived as basic rights (voting and racial hegemony for example), even elite Southerners found motivation to overcome their practice of gentility and take part in the violence which helped restore white rule to the South.

**Southern Masculinity Under Siege and The Capture of Jefferson Davis**

In terms of rebuilding southern patriarchal identity, the gendered terms assigned to the Confederacy by northern critics, especially men from the middle and upper classes of northern society, were particularly aggravating to southern males. Southern and northern conceptions of masculinity, even before the war, were defined as opposites with respect to one another. Southern males resented northern notions of masculinity, and vice

\[11\text{Ibid, 55-59.}\]
versa. They defended their "superior" masculinity against what they perceived as the weak, corrupting influence of the North. Northerners were similarly repulsed by southern masculine notions, and both regions denigrated each other's masculine ideals, often through the usage of feminine terms. The end of the war, however, left southern men uncertain of their masculine identity in relation to both Northerners and southern women. The Confederacy's defeat seemed to conclusively position northern masculinity as superior to southern masculinity, while the expansion of women's roles beyond the domestic sphere (also brought on by the war) was equally unsettling. Amidst these uncertainties, the capture of Jefferson Davis and depictions of this event by Northerners touched an extremely sensitive nerve for many former Confederates. Before discussing Davis, however, the differences between northern and southern masculinity must be examined.

Historian Nina Silber, in *The Romance of Reunion* described key differences between northern and southern masculinity. In the South the plantation system gave rise "to a strong tradition of chivalric and heroic behavior, as well as a code of masculinity, that affected the lives of all southern white men." This masculine code developed out of the distant past, drawing upon old agrarian-based, aristocratic notions, including martial valor and knightly fortitude. An emphasis on physical strength and aggression were also characteristic elements of southern masculinity. At the heart of this masculine code, southern manhood was closely related to, and indeed defined by, honor. As noted previously in Wyatt-Brown's descriptions, southern honor included the essential support

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given by women in upholding the honor of their men, in addition to a southern male’s maintenance of his reputation and status within the community. Further, since women were in a supportive position and blacks were considered as without honor of their own, white southern males were atop the social hierarchy of southern society. Thus, for white males in the South, upholding honor, displaying martial prowess/qualities, and maintaining hegemony over society were key elements of their masculine identity.

In the social hierarchy of southern society, large planters were the most visible representatives of southern masculine behavior since they were at the very top of society, above the lower classes of white male southerners. Northerners were especially critical of this group after the war, since they believed that these elite Southerners had misled the lower classes of southern society to rebel in order to protect their own slave holding interests. Indeed, many Northerners did not credit the lower classes of white southern society with their own agency in choosing to fight for the South. As described by Silber, they viewed the lower classes in the South as “partially excused [for joining the Confederate cause] out of their own blindness and stupidity, which had been cultivated over years of living under a tyrannical, slave holding aristocracy.”13 Women were in an important, but secondary role as supporters of their men, and relegated to the domestic sphere. Slaves, lacking honor in southern patriarchal society, were thought incapable of

\[\text{13 Ibid, 17.}\]
displaying true manliness (by Northerners as well) and were placed at the bottom of the southern social system (if they were considered socially ranked at all).14

Despite shared points of cultural commonality, there were fundamental differences between northern and southern masculinity. While both groups cultivated a strong sense of family and community responsibility, shared a common history and religion (Christianity, though denominational affiliation could cause divisions), and relegated women to the domestic sphere, their conceptions of manhood and honor diverged. Instead of physical and martial valor based upon an aristocratic, agrarian shaped honor, Silber notes that northern masculinity and honor were constructed around ideas of “respectability,” backed up by “a host of religious and moral values, especially an emphasis on restraint and self-control.” Northern masculinity was also heavily influenced by a strong belief in capitalism under the economic system of free labor. In northern society, at least in theory, a male who worked hard and kept his emotional and sexual vices in check had an opportunity to advance his material and social standing. The market place and an individual’s skills and willingness to work dictated how far that person could advance. If a job opportunity affording better pay or enhanced benefits opened up, under the free labor system a worker was (theoretically) free to leave his current place of employment and take his skills to the new job and higher wages. Thus, instead of an agrarian-based aristocracy dependent on the labor of others, the middle-class white male, whose livelihood and social standing were earned through his own labor, became the

representative figure of masculinity in the North (though compared to the southern planter, a northern middle-class male did not possess anywhere near as much power).\textsuperscript{15}

Many Northerners viewed the masculinity practiced in the South as directly opposite to their own. The southern masculine code lent itself to emotion and "passions" which, as noted above, northern males considered superfluous and tried to contain. Southern masculinity's reliance on physical strength and violence, along with its acceptance of sexually "loose" standards, reinforced northern stereotypes of the backward, uncivilized, and reckless nature of southern men. For Northerners, a male's ability to control his emotions, his capacity for social and economic self-improvement, and respect for the rule of law (as opposed to acting on impulse and using violence or demonstrations of physical strength to settle differences) were more important than relying upon notions of honor to determine one's reputation and standing within the community.\textsuperscript{16}

Northerners also used the southern reliance on the slave system to counter claims of southern masculine superiority. Northerners equated men in the South, especially the large planters, with "indolence and idleness." For example,

In the pre-Civil War years one Wisconsin resident had described the southern ruling class as "a set of cowards, full of gasconade, and bad liquor, brought up to abuse negroes and despise the north, too lazy to work." Such a class, many had concluded, had proven to be the economic, political, and social antithesis of everything the North represented.\textsuperscript{17}

Thus, competing masculine identities ultimately became a major factor in determining how

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid, 21-22.

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid, 8, 20-21.

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid, 18.
the North dealt with Southerners following the war. Despite staking out an exclusive claim on true masculinity, however, Northerners’ dislike of their southern counterparts’ masculine system was hardly a one-sided affair.

Southern men also viewed their masculinity as antithetical to that of the North, and, as was the case with Northerners, the differences in masculinity took on added meaning when paired with the divergent economic systems practiced in each region. As Northerners increasingly identified themselves with free labor and became more critical of slavery, southern responses in defense of the slave system intensified too. Before the war, southern men were especially critical of the abolitionists, and depicted them in ways that undermined their manhood:

Northern abolitionists, portrayed as men of talk and not of action, were especially subjected to this gendered ridicule. Antislavery lecturers, the Baltimore Patriot declared, had to be escorted by “a life-guard of elderly ladies, and protected by a rampart of whale-bones and cotton-padding.”

Southerners also boasted of their fighting abilities against northern “men’s apparent lack of virility.” Silber, citing the work of historian Michael Adams, notes that there was a flip-side to northern notions of free labor superiority. The southern emphasis on martial and physical qualities seemed to expose a weakness in northern masculinity, especially during the early part of the war. The world of “capital and commerce” was far removed from the battlefield, and early Confederate victories made this point painfully clear to Northerners. Southern courage and resolve seemed invincible, and northern soldiers themselves stood in awe of their counterparts on the battlefield. By the end of the war, however, Northerners

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Ibid, 22.
could claim "superiority in matters of war, leadership, and culture," and present their masculinity as true, while southern masculinity was portrayed as a sham.\(^{19}\)

An editorial in the *Chicago Tribune* celebrating the fall of Richmond was illustrative of the way many Northerners viewed the southern cause at the end of the war. It linked the fall of the Confederate capital, using Biblical quotations, with the sinfulness northern men associated with uncontrolled passions and less than honorable womanhood. At the same time, the northern cause was represented as holy and just:

> The city of Richmond. "Babylon the Great, Mother of Harlots and Abominations of the Earth." . . . "Rejoice over her, thou Heaven, and ye holy apostles and prophets; for God hath avenged you on her. And a mighty angel took up a great millstone, and cast it into the sea, saying, "Thus with violence shall that great city Babylon be thrown down, and shall be found no more at all."\(^{20}\)

As this editorial shows, by the end of the war the martial superiority of southern males had vanished in the minds of Northerners. Northerners claimed victory, not only militarily but in matters of culture and economics as well, while southern men were filled with self-doubt. For southern men, "defeat on the battlefield must have led soldiers raised in a culture that celebrated personal bravery and martial skills to question whether they had lived up to expectations, to question whether they had behaved honorably."\(^{21}\) Thus, at the end of the war, southern masculinity stood upon shaky ground, and an angry North sought to impose its own "superior" masculine and economic systems upon the South.

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\(^{19}\) Ibid, 18, 22-23.


\(^{21}\) Foster, 25.
Southern soldiers were unsure whether or not they had upheld their masculine honor. They returned home disillusioned, and in many cases it was southern women who had to carry their men through the initial shock of the Confederacy’s defeat. In his memoirs, former rebel George Cary Eggleston observed that without the efforts of southern women to cheer and keep their men’s spirits up, the South may not have recovered for generations.\textsuperscript{22} Although this statement is an exaggeration, southern women were indeed of great comfort to the returning soldiers, and they provided aid to them despite the fact that women faced anxieties of their own. As noted before in the discussion on honor, southern men needed such assurances from their women for their psychological well-being. Southern men needed to feel that they had carried out their role as protectors of their families and communities, and southern women gave this to them.

Eliza Andrews, a young woman from Georgia during the war, recalled some of the aid women provided to Confederate soldiers returning after Lee’s surrender. For example, women cooked rations for the returning soldiers despite facing food shortages. She wrote in her diary, “pinched as we are for supplies, it is impossible to refuse anything to the men that have been fighting for us. Even when they don’t ask for anything the poor fellows look so tired and hungry that we feel tempted to give them everything we have.”\textsuperscript{23}

She also described the wretched condition of returning Confederate soldiers standing

\textsuperscript{22}Eggleston’s memoir was titled \textit{A Rebel’s Recollections} (New York, 1905), quoted in Francis Butler Simkins and James Welch Patton, \textit{The Women of the Confederacy} (Richmond: Garrett and Masse Inc., 1936), 257.

outside government offices (presumably hoping for assistance) that was illustrative of their physical and mental state at the end of the war:

It is especially difficult around the government offices, where the poor, ragged, starved, and dirty remnants of Lee's heroic army are gathered day and night. The sidewalk along there is alive with vermin, and some people say they have seen lice crawling along on the walls of the houses. Poor fellows, this is worse than facing Yankee bullets. These men were, most of them, born gentlemen [probably an assumption by Andrews], and there could be no more pitiful evidence of the hardships they have suffered than the lack of means to free themselves from these disgusting creatures... The men are all talking about going to Mexico and Brazil; if all emigrate who say they are going to, we shall have a nation made up of women, Negroes, and Yankees.24

The pervasive disillusionment was not only felt by the soldiers, but also by southern civilians. Andrews described the community's reaction to receiving news of Lee's surrender:

Alas, we all know only too well what armistice means! It is all over with us now, and there is nothing to do but bow our heads in the dust and let the hateful conquerors trample us under their feet. There is a complete revulsion in public feeling. No more talk about help from France and England, but all about emigration to Mexico and Brazil.25

Thus, both southern men and women faced distress and uncertainty, but though the women of the South were demoralized, as demonstrated by Andrew's account, they still met the challenge of taking care of and uplifting those around them.

The women of the South were perceived or portrayed as the segment of southern society that remained the most staunchly devoted to the Confederate cause after the war. Their support of the Confederacy brought praise from southern men and

24Ibid, 184.

25Ibid, 171.
condemnation from Northerners. During the war many southern women (especially those in the upper classes) publicly rallied behind the Confederacy and contributed material aid to its armies, often going with less for themselves in order to support the cause. To sustain themselves and their families while their men were fighting, many women were forced to step out of their domestic roles within southern society. They had to assume their men’s duties in addition to their traditional responsibilities, some becoming managers of their plantations while others sought work outside the home.\textsuperscript{26} When northern forces crossed into southern territory and began to destroy the sources of material support which supplied the Confederate armies (for example, farms), women were directly affected and remained extremely bitter towards the North when the fighting ended.\textsuperscript{27}

The returning Confederate soldiers were beaten and bewildered, apparently unable, at least on the surface, to offer any more resistance, but southern women continued to display more overt forms of resistance toward the victorious North. Though they could not take up arms as their men had, southern women managed to convey their contempt of the occupying Federal troops in more subtle ways. For example, one method of defiance was demonstrated through the angry swish of a woman’s dress at Yankee soldiers. Despite such a seemingly insignificant gesture, Silber notes that Yankees were highly sensitive to such actions, and interpreted them as evidence of continued rebelliousness in the South:

\textsuperscript{26}Simkins and Patton, 111.

\textsuperscript{27}Ibid, 247-250.
The toss of southern women's skirts held more serious implications than a mere rebuff to Yankee authority. Postwar observers portrayed southern women as the very foundation of the Confederacy—its main supporters and defenders. In a society that held women's political participation in contempt, this notion of southern women's intense commitment to the Confederate cause only underscored the illegitimacy of that government.  

Thus, the hostility southern women displayed towards Federal troops drew heavy criticism from the North. Southern women became a focal point for northern anger and many Northerners "came to believe that a sense of gendered order and hierarchy would only be reestablished in the South through the guidance and direction of Northerners."  

Northerners saw the power of women in the South as one of the basic flaws within southern society and a clear demonstration of the failure of southern males to keep their women in check. They described the South as a region which had lost its manliness, where women continued to fan the fires of rebellion as they had during the war. The anger directed against southern women by northern men served two purposes. First, placing the blame on southern women for sustaining the Confederate cause was an attempt to emasculate southern men and to help buttress northern claims of masculine superiority. Second, by criticizing southern women, northern men indirectly addressed concerns they had about their own women, many of whom had also briefly stepped beyond the domestic sphere during the war. Although the comfort and support of their women was appreciated and necessary for the psychological well-being of southern males, attacks on southern

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28 Silber 27.

womanhood—and by extension southern masculinity—by the North placed southern males on the defensive.  

Silber notes that both northern and southern men may have exaggerated the true level of intransigence displayed by southern women to suit their purposes. As noted above, many Northerners believed that southern males needed northern guidance to control their unruly women. Thus, Northerners may have played up the hostility of southern women to justify their plans to remake the South in their image, and indirectly, to keep the potentially transgressive behavior of their own women in check. Perhaps northern men sought to direct their women’s attention to an example of what they perceived as a dangerous unrestrained womanhood. On the other hand, southern men “may have embellished and exaggerated these accounts of angry southern ladies,” to reassure themselves that their women still supported them during this period of uncertainty. Additionally, Gaines M. Foster, in his book *Ghosts of the Confederacy*, highlights some other reasons for this embellishment of southern feminine hostility towards the North. Foster wrote that southern males may have exaggerated their women’s hostility in order to emphasize their undying loyalty to the Confederate cause during a time when they themselves could not openly do so. Northerners meanwhile, may have seen the hostility of southern women as a chance to prove their masculinity through

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31 Ibid, 28-34.
the "romantic conquest of the most hostile element in the South," a theme that would emerge time and again in later popular cultural works about the Civil War era.32

Probably the most significant example of northern depictions of the South as an emasculated region concerns the events surrounding the capture of Jefferson Davis, former president of the Confederacy. When the war ended, Davis tried to flee northern troops sent to arrest him. Despite his attempts to elude his pursuers, Davis was eventually found and taken prisoner.

Controversy arose over northern depictions of this event. At the moment of his capture, Davis was caught trying to escape while wearing some sort of disguise given to him by his wife, most likely some of her own clothing. Northerners often described or illustrated Davis as running away in a full dress, though this is debatable. Nevertheless, as a representative figure of the Confederacy and southern men in general, being caught in women's clothing of any sort allowed the northern press to have a field day. Cartoon images of Davis began to appear bearing titles such as, "Jeff's Last Shift," "The Chased Old Lady of the C.S.A.," and "Jeffie Davis—the Belle of Richmond." These images spread rapidly, and could be found in "magazines, museums, and even private farms" throughout the North. As Silber writes:

The prints frequently displayed soldiers in the very act of exposing the Confederate president, often depicting a single Union soldier using his sword to lift Davis's skirt, thereby revealing the hoop-skirt and unseemly boots which had given him away. One print in particular, leaving little to the viewer's imagination, suggested that more than just boots had been responsible for Davis's undoing. Entitled "The Head of the Confederacy on a New Base," the cartoon pictured Davis with skirt drawn

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32 Foster, 26-33.
back, legs parted, a phallic sword between his legs, and a threatening Union soldier standing above him.\textsuperscript{33}

Such imagery fueled northern males' belief in their "true" masculinity over the "false" masculinity displayed in the South. By portraying one of the most visible symbols of the Confederacy in this fashion, in essence the northern media was depicting all southern men as cowards, hiding behind their women and afraid to stand up for themselves. The gendered ridicule of the former Confederate president also reinforced the notion that southern women were the real culprits who had sustained the rebellion and were keeping alive rebel thoughts, since Davis's wife supplied the means for him to disguise himself. Silber further notes that by "casting Davis as a spiteful southern female, northern cartoonists found a way to stifle this feminine hostility, to squelch that aspect of the rebellion that could not be defeated on the battlefield." Thus, the emasculation of Davis by Northerners aimed to demonstrate the lack of proper masculine order within southern society, and also to contain the defiance of southern women. Further, it emphasized notions that the South was a region that needed reorganization along northern guidelines.\textsuperscript{34}

The fact that Southerners were greatly insulted by such depictions of Davis's capture was demonstrated in the heated responses of several Confederate leaders to a newspaper article which appeared in the Philadelphia \textit{Weekly Times}. Published on July 7, 1877, the article, written by former Union Major General James H. Wilson, revived the

\textsuperscript{33}Silber, 32.
\textsuperscript{34}Ibid, 28-35.
issue more than a decade after Davis’s arrest took place, and contained all of the sensitive
gendered elements recounted above. No longer constrained by a sense of disillusionment,
Southerners were quick to respond. In particular, the Southern Historical Society was
motivated to print the “true” story of Davis’s arrest. In all, they devoted thirty pages,
including several letters from other Confederate leaders in defense of Davis and his
character, to the issue. The main defense came from Major W. T. Walthall, a former
member of the Confederate administration. Point by point, he attacked the details of
Wilson’s article, from the period of Davis’s flight out of Richmond through the capture
itself. Part of Walthall’s defense dealt specifically with the former Confederate leader’s
disguise. According to Walthall:

... the President was already fully dressed. He hastily took leave of his wife, who
threw over his shoulders a water-proof cloak or wrapper, either as a protection from
the dampness of the early morning, or in the hope that it might serve as a partial
disguise, or perhaps with woman’s ready and rapid thoughtfulness of its possible use
for both these purposes.  

Walthall’s article took pains to point out that Davis did not disguise himself in women’s
clothing. Instead, he donned one of his wife’s rain protectors, an article of clothing
common to both men and women. Even more relevant in terms of masculinity, Walthall
emphasized that Davis was no coward. In Walthall’s account, instead of fleeing from the
armed and mounted Union officer who sought to arrest him, Davis advanced toward him,
perhaps hoping that the officer would fire a wild shot during which Davis might be able to
throw him from his saddle, take his horse, and escape. Walthall wrote that Davis’s “plan,”

Papers v. 5 no. 3 (March 1878): 110.
which Davis himself never professed (it was postulated by Walthall), was never tested because Mrs. Davis intervened, throwing herself around the president’s neck to protect him, thus hindering his opportunity to elude capture. It should also be noted that throughout this defense the word escape, not flight, was emphasized. After Mrs. Davis “prevented” him from escaping, according to Walthall, Davis, “simply said, ‘God’s will be done,’” and passively acquiesced. In essence, by defending Davis, Walthall and others were defending the masculinity of the South itself, and by portraying Davis in a masculine light, these Confederate leaders defended their own masculinity as well.

As the above accounts point out, the gendered terms through which Northerners and Southerners imagined one another remained a point of contention well after the war. In terms of sectional reconciliation, both regions would have to modify their positions to be more inclusive of the other’s viewpoint. The North eventually needed to stop trying to remake the South in its own image, and both sides had to establish a sense of mutual respect for one another. Until then, the hostility between both sides would remain.

One segment of the South was particularly sensitive to attacks against its masculine honor, as well as to any challenges to its position within southern society. Southern elites, many of whom served as Confederate officers during the war, were

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36 Walthall speculated that Davis’s own experiences during the Mexican war would have led him to develop such a plan, improbable as it might seem, since the dangers of war would have taught Davis to think quickly while under duress. Apparently, Davis had once recounted an event during that war in which he was fired upon by the entire front rank of a mounted Mexican cavalry squadron, all of whom missed. Walthall postulated that same experience may have led Davis to approach the Union officer instead of fleeing, since in the excitement of the moment, if he shot at Davis he would probably miss, thus allowing Davis the opportunity to relieve him of his horse. Ibid, Ill.

37 Ibid, 97-126.
staunch defenders of southern traditions, including white supremacy. This part of the southern population was extremely influential in determining how Americans remembered the Civil War period, and in terms of its core beliefs, its treatment of two former Confederate generals is particularly revealing.

**Lee, Longstreet, and the Confederate Elites**

After recovering from the shock of defeat, some Confederate officers sought to present and preserve their own version of Civil War history. Drawn, for the most part, from the upper strata of southern society, and facing the same upheavals confronting Southerners in general at the end of the war, these men sought vindication for both their cause and themselves. They did not necessarily hope for vindication "in *their* time," but as Thomas L. Connelly and Barbara L. Bellows note, the articles and speeches of this generation reveal, with a "certain air of resignation, almost religious in nature," an unwavering belief that future vindication was inevitable.38

This first, or "Inner" generation of Lost Cause advocates did not, however, simply wait for divine intervention to bring justification for their Cause, but actively sought to present their version of Civil War history to the public. Further, because they were part of the defeated Confederacy--for the most part coming from the ranks of its high officers--and were writing under the shadow of Congressional Reconstruction, the

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38 The word "their" is italicized by Connelly and Bellows to emphasize that these former Confederates expected their eventual vindication to come as guided by God’s time, not man’s. Nevertheless, this did not mean that they passively waited for divine intervention to occur. Thomas L. Connelly and Barbara L. Bellows, *God and General Longstreet: The Lost Cause and the Southern Mind* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982), 7.
works of these Inner Lost Cause advocates reflected not only a desire to justify the Confederacy, but constituted a written southern response to the social upheavals of the time. As staunch defenders of the Confederacy, their writings were often heavily laced with vitriolic emotionalism, especially when confronting those who dared to proffer an opposing view. Thus, one can infer that they wrote as much to ease their own damaged psyches as for the Cause. Lost Cause writers of “the generation of Jefferson Davis and Jubal Early possessed a quality of anger that wrought a one-dimensional approach . . . The Confederates of the Inner Lost Cause wrote more to appease their own frustrations and fears than to convert a national audience.”39 Reconciliation with the North would not come through them.

Highly organized and emotionally driven, these Inner Lost Cause advocates--through magazines, veterans organizations, and even pulpits since some of them were also ministers--sought to mold the public’s interpretation of Civil War history on their terms.40 If the sword could not deliver victory in war, than perhaps the pen would in peace. The version of history they presented was a critical force in shaping the memory of the Civil War in the South. It redefined the memory of the war, changing it from a legacy of rebellion and defeat into a celebration of the Confederacy and those who fought for it. In turn, their efforts influenced later generations of pro-Confederate scholars/commentators. These later or “National” generations of Lost Cause proponents, who wrote for a nationwide audience while still adhering to southern Civil War precepts, including some

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39 Ibid, 6.

40 Ibid, 5-6.
who professed to standards of scientific objectivity, namely historians, eventually secured a place for the memory of a vindicated Confederacy within the larger context of a reconciled and reunited nation.\footnote{Ibid, 5.} Thus, it was this later generation of Lost Cause advocates who contributed to the process of sectional reconciliation, helping to ensure that the national memory of the Civil War resembled the southern interpretation of events.

Examples of National Lost Cause advocates and their works are discussed in more detail in subsequent chapters. However, they are worth mentioning here by way of highlighting the influence Inner Lost Cause advocates had in providing a foundation for those who succeeded them. For now though, Inner Lost Cause advocates and their activities remain the immediate area of concern.

The Virginians

The most influential Inner Lost Cause advocates were drawn from a group of postwar Confederates who became known as the "Virginians." Made up of a "loose coalition of Virginia organizations," and directed for the most part by former Confederate officers who had served in the Army of Northern Virginia, they were the first major group of Southerners to codify "an explanation of the war and defeat." The commemorative activities of the Virginians and other Civil War veteran's groups, their societies and works, are discussed in more detail in the next chapter, but two underlying tenets of their version of Confederate history are significant here. First, the Virginians made it clear that during
the war they believed the Confederacy was defeated because it was “overwhelmed by numbers.” Second, they put forward the notion that at Gettysburg, the one battle that in their opinion might have given the Confederacy its victory, a single general, James Longstreet, “lost it.” The establishment of these tenets helped buttress southern identity against some of the challenges that confronted them after the war. In turn, these tenets exerted a sustained influence on later Lost Cause advocates, the aforementioned National Lost Cause writers, and eventually found their way into the collective memories of succeeding generations of Americans, South and North. The establishment of these Lost Cause tenets was aided in large part by the way the Virginians treated two former Confederate generals: Robert E. Lee and James Longstreet. 42

The Apotheosis of Robert E. Lee

Robert E. Lee was a name familiar to few southerners before the Civil War despite his coming from a family of high pedigree in Virginia. 43 Lee had served in the United States Army for over thirty years until 1861, when he resigned and joined the

42 Foster describes the movement of the Virginians as a “ghost dance” because of the irrationality that seemed to run through it. If they had only preached a return to traditional southern values they might have gained a wider following. However, instead of confronting the uncertainties plaguing the postwar South, the Virginians continued to fight the war over and over through the pen. The two tenets listed above come from this backward looking side of their movement, but they are critical in order to understand how the Virginians rationalized the South’s defeat during the war. Ibid, 47, 60.

Confederate cause. During the war, he rose to command the Army of Northern Virginia from 1862 until 1865, guarding the Northeastern defenses of the Confederacy and launching two unsuccessful invasions of the North. After the war he lived a fairly quiet life, though he did accept a position as president of Washington College. He died on October 12, 1870.

Literally within hours after Lee’s death, movements to commemorate him were under way. The Lee Memorial Association was formed in Lexington the very afternoon of Lee’s passing, in order to “guard his sacred dust.” Throughout the South people mourned for him. On October 18, 1870, the citizens of Atlanta paid tribute to Lee. John B. Gordon, one of Lee’s former officers, gave a speech at the event which foreshadowed the Lost Cause tenet of “overwhelmed by numbers”:

Lee was never really beaten. Lee could not be beaten! Overpowered, foiled in his efforts he might be, but never defeated until the props which supported him gave way. Never until the platform sank beneath him did any enemy ever dare pursue.

With such an outpouring of sympathy over a regionally mourned and nationally recognized figure, the Virginians knew they had a golden opportunity to reach a vast audience with their message of redemption for the Confederacy. If they could create an image of perfection and infallibility in Lee, the portrait of emasculated and morally corrupt southern males, as exemplified in the attack on Jefferson Davis, could be countered.

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44 Ibid, 8-10.
45 Foster, 51.
46 Connelly, Marble Man, 28.
47 Atlanta Constitution, 18 October, 1870.
While still alive, Lee was not the figure of reverence he would become. His men adored him, and followed him with devotion, but to the general public Lee was but one of several Confederate notables. In the hearts and minds of Southerners, generals like Beauregard and Jackson occupied a place equal to if not superior to Lee’s. Ultimately, it was the Virginians who built up Lee’s legacy. Many were former officers who had served under Lee during the war, and after his death they moved to secure and elevate his position as the premier exemplar of the Confederate cause within southern memory. At the same time, they sought to defend their sense of honor against northern critics, and to obtain justification for the cause in which they fought. Both objectives dovetailed nicely.

In order to create an aura of infallibility and superiority around Lee’s memory, those who worked to achieve his apotheosis needed to overcome several obstacles. For one, in terms of the collective memories of Southerners, Lee needed to stand both apart from and above the other Confederate generals. For the Virginians, if Lee was to become the preeminent symbol of everything noble about the Confederacy and the South, then no one could be allowed to share the spotlight with him. Additionally, Lee’s shortcomings needed to be whitewashed. The exemplar of superior southern manhood could not be shown to have faults, nor could he be held responsible for mistakes which led to Confederate defeat in battle. Thus, to create an image of perfection for Lee, the blame for the Confederacy’s defeat on the battlefield needed to be shifted elsewhere. Finally, Lee’s most controversial positions and opinions, relative to the issues which continued to divide North and South, needed to be refined. To make Lee’s legacy more acceptable in

48 Connelly and Bellows, God and General Longstreet, 26.
northern eyes, his support of slavery and his bitterness towards the North needed to be
downplayed. Although this aspect of Lee’s apotheosis was perhaps the least important
initially, it helped to deflect criticisms of the South by Northerners, and became an
important stepping stone on the path toward vindication for the Confederacy and future
national reconciliation.

Over the decades that followed Lee’s death, the Virginians sought to make him
“the only important Rebel hero, a man incapable of military or personal error.”49 This had
a dual purpose, since raising Lee’s stature also boosted the Virginians’ own. They
achieved success in Lee’s apotheosis for a number of reasons. For instance, many of the
Virginians were highly influential Southerners who comprised the leadership of key
postwar organizations, and who obtained control of most of the important southern
documents accumulated during the war. With these societies and documents behind them,
the Virginians immortalized Lee with an air of credibility. According to Thomas Connelly
and Barbara Bellows, both historians,

They were the guiding forces behind, “the Lee Memorial Association, the Lee
Monument Association, the Association of the Army of Northern Virginia, and
other South-wide organizations that embellished the General’s exploits. In several
hundred books, articles, and orations, his devotees fashioned the image of the
invincible Lee who was outnumbered but never defeated.

One could say that the Virginians acted like a Confederate advertising agency, marketing
Lee’s image as the “superior Confederate” for emulation by the southern public. Further
helping the Virginians’ efforts was a shift in the geographic center of southern literary
activity. As Connelly and Bellows note,

49 Ibid, 27.
Virginia [itself] had become the focus of southern letters, replacing the moribund literary centers of Charleston and New Orleans. The Southern Historical Society, along with its influential journal, fell under the control of Lee devotees such as his former corp leader Jubal Early, his nephew Fitzhugh Lee, former staff officers such as Charles Marshall and Walter Taylor, and his postwar confidant at Lexington, the Reverend John William Jones.\textsuperscript{50}

With Virginia as the nexus of southern literature, the attention of the entire South was focused in its direction. Through the Southern Historical Society and its journal, probably the most important vehicle for presenting their version of events, the Virginians propagandized and defended Lee’s record—or at least their interpretation of it—deflecting criticism from outsiders and building up his image until the general was the preeminent Confederate symbol. Additionally, since this society was largely under the control of its former officers, the Army of Northern Virginia received a disproportionate amount of coverage. Thus, the war in the East was magnified and enhanced over battles in other sections of the country, raising Lee’s stature as the most important general in the most critical theater of the war, and enhancing the reputations of all those who fought in that part of the conflict.

The Virginians also enhanced Lee’s legacy by overlooking or downplaying his flaws. If Lee was to become the posthumous standard bearer for the Confederate cause, he needed an image which reflected no weaknesses. One of the central themes put forth by Inner Lost Cause advocates was the belief that throughout the war southern soldiers were “the better men.”\textsuperscript{51} If this image of the superior Confederate soldier was to hold,

\textsuperscript{50}Connelly and Bellows, \textit{God and General Longstreet}, 26-27.

then as their representative figure Lee could not be remembered in a way that implied inferiority, as had the postwar image fashioned for Davis by northern detractors. He could not have made mistakes in judgment which cost the Confederacy its chance at victory. Thus, in battles such as Gettysburg, it was not Lee who made critical mistakes which led to defeat, but rather the officers who served under him. Furthermore, to gain the level of adoration that the Virginians sought for him, Lee’s postwar image was carefully crafted by them for almost universal appeal. Thus, the Robert E. Lee presented by the Virginians took on many forms, from dutiful son to a virtual “god of war.” In fact, Lee was raised so high that, in some respects, he could be viewed as, “a Christlike figure . . . [who] acquired an image of moral purity and martial perfection that raised him—and by association, all male southerners—above the level of ordinary men.” Such images made Lee into a kind of “everyman,” in whom all Southerners could find something. And for the Virginians themselves, Lee truly was heralded as their representative of the righteousness of the Confederate cause and the embodiment of the superiority of southern civilization.

One final and critical element in the apotheosis of Lee by the Virginians was that Lee became a figure of reconciliation rather than a sectional hero who continued to divide Northerners and Southerners. In stark contrast to Jefferson Davis’s, Lee’s legacy as depicted by the Virginians gained acceptance in both regions, South and North. This acceptance became possible because of the “refinement” of Lee’s positions by his

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53 Conelly, The Marble Man, 3.
advocates with regard to some of the most divisive between the two sections. Most importantly Lee's stance on slavery and his overall bitterness toward the North were modified or downplayed, in part to deflect northern criticism of the general, and more importantly, to establish him as the perfect exemplar of white southern manhood. Such an image would stand in opposition to the North's portrayal of Davis, thereby countering the image of a feminized southern manhood inferior to that of the North. To be sure, many hard-line Virginians did not in any way advocate reconciliation with the North.

Nevertheless, in order to uphold southern honor, Lee's apotheosis was fashioned such that the general eventually became an admired figure for Southerners and Northerners alike, and his legacy provided an area of common ground which helped further sectional reconciliation.

First, Lee's position with regard to slavery needed adjustment. The southern stance on slavery had, in general, always been hampered by a sense of moral ambivalence. Alan T. Nolan, a lawyer recognized for his work in Civil War history noted that:

On the one hand, southern leaders and theologians proclaimed that slavery was a positive good for master and slave alike. On the other hand, the southern leadership class was religiously orthodox. The southerners sensed a discrepancy between their historic faith and the new faith in slavery. In addition, lascivious connections between masters and female slaves lingered in the system. In a society that boasted of chivalry, morality, and racial purity, the sexual side of slavery was a disturbing, dirty, and open secret. Further, the whole Western world was arrayed against the southern view, as many of the Founding Fathers had been, and they were much respected and imitated by the planter aristocracy. The mixture of religious tradition, the standards of Western culture, and the theories of the supporters of the institution created what Bell I. Wiley identifies as a widespread "sense of guilt" in the southern leadership.54

If Lee was to become the epitome of the virtuous Confederate hero, as the Virginians hoped, then he could not be seen as a defender of an institution fraught with such moral ambiguities. Related to this, the “moral guilt” over slavery held by many in the southern leadership class needed to be assuaged somehow. Thus, the notion that the South seceded with slavery as the major impetus for the Confederacy’s formation had to change, and until such a change occurred, the North would continue to hold the moral high ground. It must be noted, however, that while the North strongly opposed slavery, many Northerners did not necessarily differ on racial matters with their southern counterparts. Alan T. Nolan points out that Northerners themselves were conflicted over the racial question, for despite “a conviction that slavery was wrong,” a “crude and virulent racism” also prevailed. This shared racism was successfully exploited by Lost Cause advocates for both the upholding of southern honor, and for providing important common ground that later aided the reconciliation process.

What Lost Cause advocates attempted to do, and were largely successful in eventually achieving, was to remove slavery as the critical underlying motivation for the war. This is discussed more thoroughly in chapter 2, nevertheless, it was important that Lee’s position with regard to slavery reflect this altered position. With slavery removed as the main issue of the war, southern honor could be upheld, and the moral baggage which came with the institution could also be set aside. By subtly altering the image of blacks under slavery, away from one of suffering in terrible conditions under cruel masters,

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55 Ibid, 32.
Southerners were able to promote other, more honorable rationales for their secession. Nolan notes that they did this by forwarding a stereotyped image of the “happy darky,” which eliminated black agency and characterized the slaves’ situation as one of contented dependency, under the beneficence of their masters:

By eliminating slavery as the issue that had divided the North and South and led them into the war, and by changing the image of the real black person to that of the happy darky, the southern leadership facilitated northern acceptance of the honor of the South. It is, of course, not surprising that the South discarded the protection of slavery as the reason for its conduct. States’ rights, liberty, and the Constitution were surely more likely rationales for secession. It is also not surprising that the South was anxious to create the happy darky, who replaced a much more complex and threatening person, the real slave and freedman.56

For the most part Lee’s stance on slavery fell in line with the typical southern aristocratic view. Nolan writes that Lee was conventional in that he “believed [italics his] in slavery although, like many Southerners, he at the same time disliked it in the abstract and was uncomfortable with it.”57 Nevertheless, Lost Cause advocates, including later historians, selectively overlooked Lee’s support of the slave system, instead choosing to portray Lee as openly favoring emancipation. As with other parts of the general’s legacy, they overemphasized certain pieces of evidence against apparently contradictory ones. Frequently, Lee’s testimony before Congress in 1866 that he had always favored gradual emancipation was cited as conveying his true feelings on the slave issue by his advocates, which included historians such as Douglass Southall Freeman (who wrote a major biography of Lee’s life, long considered as the definitive work on the general). However,
citing Lee’s own letters before, during, and even after the war, Nolan demonstrates that Lee’s position on slavery was not emancipation, but rather that he supported slavery, at least in private, as the preferable state of relations between the races. The contradictions in Lee’s position apparently only surfaced under conditional circumstances, as for example, when the war dragged on and a need arose to recruit blacks into the ranks of the Confederacy, and as in his testimony before Congress after the war, when emancipation had already been achieved. Also frequently noted as part of Lee’s anti-slavery position was Lee’s freeing of the slaves on the Custis estate just before the outbreak of war. However, his father-in-law had written in his will that the slaves were to be freed five years after his death, and Lee, as executor, was doing nothing more than meeting his obligations under the terms of the will. Nolan concludes that Lee’s pro-slavery beliefs simply reflected those of his contemporaries. However, Lee’s advocates effectively transfigured the general’s pro-slavery position, portraying him instead as an anti-slavery, emancipation advocate. Thus, the general’s image was successfully detached from and insulated against the moral opprobrium which would have accompanied support for the slave system, and this helped make Lee into a more universally acceptable hero, one that could uphold southern manhood against northern criticism. As time went on, the intersectional admiration of the general helped to establish Lee as common focal point for future reconciliation, something that would not have been possible without the anti-slavery

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58 Ibid, 9-29.
image crafted by Lee's defenders, an image which continues to exude a heavy influence to the present.59

One final element of Lee's legacy that needed careful modification by his adherents was his bitterness toward the North. Nolan writes that Lee was a sectional partisan, angered over northern interference over the rights of States to run their own affairs. As noted above, he was anti-black and opposed the pro-black legislation coming from the North. Further, Lee's being called on to testify before Congress was a point of outrage for his supporters, and likely did not improve the general's anti-northern sentiments. Nevertheless, Lee was portrayed as a man who preached conciliation with the North. It is clear that a return to armed conflict against northern interference was strongly opposed by Lee, but as Nolan points out, Lee's feelings as to whether the South was right to secede never wavered. Lee's legacy, however, grew even greater because his advocates over-emphasized the conciliatory role Lee appeared to play after the war. Instead of pointing out the strong sectional convictions that Lee continued to hold, in essence they removed Lee from his political views and in a way placed his legacy outside of politics. As such, Lee was an even larger figure for reconciliation, since his politics and sectional values were swept out of sight in favor of a conciliatory and cooperative image.60

The establishment of such a towering legacy for Lee spawned questions of its

59 Nolan cites some contemporary writings on Lee: "Lee had no sympathy...for...slavery,"' according to The Oxford Companion to American History. The Illustrated Encyclopedia of the Civil War, published in 1986, states that he was "personally opposed to slavery." The 1989 edition of the Encyclopedia Britannica identifies him as a "disbeliever in slavery," and the authors of a 1988 book, The Generals, report that one of the reasons why Mary Custis consented to marry Lee was because he shared her "anti-slavery sentiments." Ibid, 9.

60 Ibid, 134-152.
own. If the general was infallible, and southern civilization was so superior in morals and manhood to that of the North, why had they failed? To attempt to resolve this, as noted above, one of the rationalizations for the South’s defeat was that Lee simply faced superior numbers. He was not truly beaten. The other key rationalization for Lee’s defeat was that it was not Lee who failed, but rather his subordinates who failed him. Eventually the onus for the Confederacy’s defeat was shifted by the Virginians to a single subordinate in one crucial battle: James Longstreet at Gettysburg.

The Vilification of Longstreet

General James Longstreet’s efforts during the Civil War certainly seem to qualify him as one of its great commanders, worthy of a high place within the collective memories of Southerners. Serving in the Army of Northern Virginia, he was second in command under Lee for much of the war, and Lee trusted him implicitly, even nicknaming him his “old war horse.” Longstreet’s reputation among common soldiers and fellow officers—in particular, those who served under him—was also high, and remained so well after the fighting ended. Thus, Longstreet’s postwar legacy as one of the Confederacy’s greatest generals seemed secure. Unfortunately for Longstreet and his supporters, it was not.  

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If Longstreet had died from wounds he suffered during the closing days of the war, perhaps his legacy would have survived intact. This is a harsh judgment, but one that cannot be overlooked, for as stellar as Longstreet’s war record was, his controversial postwar activities and political positions severely diminished his chances for a high place among the honored Confederate generals. Further, with regard to Lee, criticism from contemporaries of Longstreet, most specifically influential members of the aforementioned Virginians, worked to ensure that Longstreet would not attain the postwar recognition he had earned on the battlefield. Longstreet was ultimately seen by many Southerners as an “anti-Lee”, an exemplar of what a white southern male should NOT become. To understand how a man who should have been a Confederate hero could fall so far out of public favor, two factors come into play. First, Longstreet’s postwar activities must be recounted, since they made the general a prime target for criticism and vilification. Second, regarding the anti-Longstreet position of the Virginians, the battle of Gettysburg must be examined. Specifically, the controversy over the infamous “sunrise order,” must be reviewed, since this “order” in effect shifted the blame for the Confederate disaster at Gettysburg from Lee to Longstreet. Ultimately, both of these had the combined effect of solidifying Lee’s image of infallibility and relegating Longstreet to the back pages of Confederate history.

Immediately after the war, Longstreet turned to business to support himself and his family, and financially he did fairly well. He settled in New Orleans, and in partnership

with two former Confederate officers, Edward and William Owen, formed a cotton brokerage firm. Longstreet also obtained the presidency of a local insurance company. Thus he pulled in a steady income, faring much better than did most former Confederate soldiers and officers.\footnote{Wert has a highly detailed account of Longstreet’s postwar career. For the purposes of this work, only significant examples relating to Longstreet’s vilification have been used here. Ibid, 408-409.} Unfortunately for his legacy, instead of remaining content with quietly earning a living through these positions, Longstreet became entangled in politics.

The “Radical” take over of Congress in the 1866 election, and the subsequent 1867 Reconstruction Acts, infuriated white Southerners. Longstreet, like many former Confederate officers, urged moderation and reconciliation with the North. In his view, the South had been fairly beaten, and when a local newspaper solicited commentary from prominent citizens about the Reconstruction Acts, he advocated compliance, since only through cooperation could a meaningful Constitutional government be reestablished.\footnote{Ibid, 410.}

This position might have been acceptable, or at least tolerated, had Longstreet not gone further with it. The local Republican party in New Orleans praised Longstreet’s comments, and saw an opportunity to lure him into their party. Longstreet’s advocacy of cooperation with the North also inclined him favorably towards working with the Republicans. Longstreet viewed an alliance with the Republican party as a means by which Southerners could control the black vote and thus preserve the South, keeping whites in control of the region. In a private letter sent to select colleagues, he stated his opinions on the matter:
It is all important that we should exercise such influence over that vote, as to prevent its being injurious to us, & we can only do that as Republicans. As there is no principle or issue that now should keep us from the Republican party, it seems to me that our party South should seek an alliance with the Republican party. . . . If the whites won't do this, the thing will be done by the blacks, and we shall be set aside, if not expatriated. It then seems plain to me that we should do the work ourselves, & have it white instead of black & have our best men in public offices.  

Longstreet saw working with and even becoming Republican as a pragmatic solution to the challenges of Reconstruction. However, as his more politically savvy correspondents knew, most Southerners viewed any kind of contact with the “black Republicans” in the South as akin to treason. Ignoring their advice, Longstreet forwarded the letter to a local newspaper. From there, his letter was picked up by newspapers nationwide, and the reaction to it was predictable. Northerners praised Longstreet’s position, but Southerners vilified him:

In their indignation and fury, Southerners saw only Longstreet’s argument for cooperation with the party that had emancipated the slaves and had destroyed large portions of the region, not his plan for controlling the freedman vote. Only the black New Orleans Tribune denounced his views as an attempt to deny freed blacks suffrage and to restore the antebellum ruling class.

As a result of the firestorm of criticism created by the letter, Longstreet lost his friends and his business, and was forced to leave New Orleans.

Throughout the rest of his life Longstreet attempted to rebuild both his financial successes and his reputation. Using patronage, especially through his personal friendship with President Ulysses S. Grant and an ever deepening relationship with the Republican Party, he managed to obtain government positions which ensured him a steady income.

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65 Ibid, 411.

66 Ibid, 412.
Cooperating with the Republicans ensured Longstreet financial stability, but it also cost him any chance of rehabilitating his public image among Southerners. Longstreet returned to New Orleans in 1869, after being appointed surveyor of customs for the port of New Orleans by Grant. This gave him financial stability, but:

Although he needed a job and income, many white Southerners thought that Longstreet had committed an unpardonable sin. It was one thing to endorse support for Republican Party policies; it was altogether another matter to hold a government position and participate in Republican rule in the South. Newspapers immediately accused Longstreet of putting self-interest over principle. He was called a scalawag, a Southerner who betrayed his native region for power and money doled out by Republicans. 67

Further, Longstreet took up this position during the period when the Lost Cause was beginning to form, thus, his position would appear even more repugnant to Southerners:

Longstreet’s military reputation and stature among Southerners never recovered. Explanations for the Confederate defeat were beginning to coalesce into the Lost Cause myth. According to the myth, Confederate soldiers had been vanquished by an onslaught of northern manpower and material resources. Bravely, stoically, they had withstood Yankee aggression for four long years, and only at the end had they surrendered to the powerful foe. Religion served as the cornerstone of the myth as the cause became righteous, the living became heroes, and the fallen, martyrs. To join the Republicans, the political instrument of conquest and defeat, was to betray those who had died for the cause and those who were living under an imposed rule by the conquerors. Longstreet and those like him were even likened to Judas Iscariot. Longstreet and his family faced social ostracism, like that accorded a “leper,” when they returned to New Orleans. 68

In such an environment, it was no surprise that Longstreet moved deeper into the Republican fold.

67 Ibid, 413.

68 Ibid, 413-414.
One of the most damaging events of Longstreet’s postwar career came on the night of September 14, 1874. At that time, Longstreet was no longer holding the position as surveyor of customs, but held the commissioned position of major general of the state militia of Louisiana, with direct control of all militia, police, and civil forces within New Orleans, a position awarded to him by then Governor Henry C. Warmouth in 1872. After an extremely divisive and fraud-plagued election for Louisiana governor in 1872, both Republican William H. Kellogg and Democrat John McEnery declared victory. Kellogg “won” only because of the support of the Grant administration and the threat of federal troops intervening. Over the next year and a half, tensions mounted until they boiled over into what became known as the White League fight. After much violence and rioting, which resulted in a number of deaths and even an assassination attempt on Kellogg himself, Kellogg had declared a state of martial law, and Grant had federal troops stationed throughout New Orleans. As militia general, Longstreet commanded a major part of those forces, which were comprised of both white and black troops. On the night of September 14, an estimated force of eighty-four hundred armed White League members, the supporters of McEnery, attempted to seize the State house. They were opposed by a force of thirty-six hundred militia and policemen led by Longstreet, many of whom were black. Longstreet rode forward to meet with the White League members to tell them to disperse, but was quickly captured by them. The White League members, many of whom were presumably former Confederate soldiers, charged Longstreet’s troops and quickly routed them. It was a short-lived victory, however, for Grant soon ordered in troops to restore order. McEnery and those leaders who supported him were arrested and
Longstreet was released. This event served to cripple severely if not destroy the general’s already damaged reputation. As historian Jeffry D. Wert noted, “Longstreet’s role in the White League Fight resulted in more denunciation and vilification. He had led mostly black troops against former Confederate soldiers, which to white Southerners was another indication of his betrayal of the cause.”

Controversy continued to plague Longstreet long after the White League Fight. Some of the general’s difficulties were self-created, while at other times Longstreet’s past helped his detractors create problems for him. To support both himself and his family, Longstreet continued to rely on Republican patronage, obtaining government positions until the election of Democrat Grover Cleveland made it impossible for him to do so. Leaving Louisiana for Georgia, Longstreet continued to engage in Republican politics, though he proved more of a liability for the local party than an asset. Late in life, Longstreet even changed his religious affiliation, from Episcopalian to Catholic, and for the heavily Protestant South, this was yet another act of betrayal. The most significant undertaking of Longstreet during this later phase of his life, however, was the writing of his memoirs. A classic memoir of the period to this day, the general wrote it largely as a final answer to his detractors, in particular to the influential members of the aforementioned Virginians. These detractors of Longstreet had engaged the general in a

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69 Ibid, 414-416.

70 As an interesting side-note, in 1880 Longstreet sought and obtained an Ambassadorship to Turkey from President Hayes, but finding himself ill-suited for such work he was soon recalled. Ibid, 418-419.

71 Piston, 118.
decades-long, highly controversial print battle, a contest through which they were largely successful in shifting much of the blame for the Confederacy's defeat at Gettysburg away from Robert E. Lee and onto Longstreet. To understand how they accomplished this, it is necessary to return to a discussion of the Virginians and Lee's apotheosis and to examine just how Longstreet's vilification played a role in this.

As mentioned before, the Virginians were wholly dedicated to the defense of the southern cause. To them, Longstreet's postwar activities would have appeared downright treasonous. How could Longstreet, a former Confederate general, publicly endorse the Republicans? This was the party which, from the Virginians' perspective, sought to undermine everything they had fought to preserve. Many former Confederates, such as the recalcitrant Jubal Early, would never side with the Republicans on anything--much less join them as Longstreet had—even if it was to control the black vote. As such, their criticism of Longstreet was inevitable. The Virginians, however, did not merely denounce Longstreet but actively combined their vilification of him with their apotheosis of Lee. Thus, while the Virginians built up Lee and further destroyed Longstreet's postwar reputation, working to deny him a favorable place within southern Civil War memory, they also had the much larger effect of tainting future Civil War historiography and American memory itself.

The beginnings of the clash between Longstreet and the Virginians came after Lee's death. As with so many of his postwar activities, Longstreet himself sowed the seeds of his own vilification. Not long after the war, he was interviewed by a journalist, William Swinton, for a work detailing the history of the war on the Eastern Front. In the
interview, Longstreet was critical of the Gettysburg offensive. While none of Lee’s former officers commented on the interview when Lee was alive, Lee’s death and Longstreet’s own words gave them an opportunity simultaneously to insulate and raise Lee’s image, and by extension their own, and at the same time to punish Longstreet for both criticizing his former chief and seemingly betraying the cause. In a speech made at Washington College on the anniversary of Lee’s birth, former Confederate general Jubal Early opened the attack on Longstreet, pinning the blame for the Gettysburg disaster squarely on Longstreet. In order to understand how he did so, a summation of the battle is necessary.

The battle of Gettysburg can be divided into three phases, each corresponding to the three days during which it was fought, July 1-3, 1863. The battle began on the first day with a surprise engagement between the Army of Northern Virginia and the Army of the Potomac on the outskirts of the town. On the second day, Longstreet’s divisions attacked the left flank of the Union army in an effort to collapse its line. The third day centered around the disastrous charge by Pickett against the Union center, which ultimately forced the Confederates to retreat from northern territory. In the mind of the Virginians and later Lost Cause advocates, the defeat at Gettysburg became the crucial battle that had effectively cost the South the war.

The first day of the battle is noteworthy for this discussion, not so much for Longstreet’s actions, but for the actions of Lee and two subordinates, Generals Richard Ewell and Jubal Early. Confederate General A.P. Hill’s troops stumbled upon Union

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72 Ibid, 422.
troops on the morning of July 1 and engaged them. Neither side was expecting to find the other there, and this was especially the case for the Confederates, since their cavalry, the “eyes” of Lee’s army under the command of General J.E.B. Stuart, was not present.73 Although the Confederates were initially checked, they eventually drove the Union forces out of the town and onto the hills overlooking Gettysburg. The keys to the first day’s initial successes were the reinforcements of Ewell and his subordinate Early. Their arrival turned the tide and forced the Union forces to regroup atop Cemetery Hill. This was not a decisive victory, however, for the Union would receive reinforcements and solidify their defenses along Cemetery Ridge during the night. More importantly, this was a missed opportunity by the Confederates.74

By pushing onward, the Confederates might have captured Cemetery Hill, thus making the Union position untenable and sparing the Confederate army the losses it suffered over the next two days of the battle. Early’s forces, closest to the hill and hardly damaged in the first day’s fight, could have easily marched against the hastily organized forces atop the hill and taken it. However, Early did not do so.75 Instead, he went in search of his superior Ewell, and tried to urge other generals to attack it, although his was the only division near full strength. Early’s memoirs point to the potential of heavily destructive fire against his division by batteries already on the hill, thus he felt that he “could not make an advance from my front [the Confederate left] with advantage, and

73 Wert, 281.
74 Piston, 48.
75 Ibid, 48.
thought it ought to be made on the right.” 76 He also pointed out that he had received a report that the enemy was advancing along the road to the Confederate left flank and rear and took the precaution of leaving one of his four brigades there, even though he “believed this an unfounded report.” 77 By the time the Union had retreated through town, Lee himself had arrived on the scene and ordered Ewell to push forward onto Cemetery Hill. However, Lee did not know the condition of Ewell’s forces and worded the message cautiously, only to advance “if Ewell thought the operation was ‘possible,’ and if, by attacking, he would not bring on a general engagement.” Ewell had only one usable division, Early’s, since only part of the Confederate army was then present; the rest were scattered and had only hastily been ordered to reconsolidate at Gettysburg. Thus he was overly cautious and did not advance. Early later was of the opinion that an attack would have been successful, but only with reinforcements. Thus, even though Lee sent another attack order, again discretionary, Ewell held his position. 78

During the night, Lee met with Ewell and Early, trying to get their opinions and muster support for an attack on the federal right flank. Early, however, speaking for his strangely silent commanding officer, stated that an attack there was not possible. 79 He


77 Ibid, 270.


79 Early may have felt he had a better grasp of the battlefield because he had scouted much of the terrain both that day and several days before. Ibid., 194.
offered an alternative plan to Lee’s, that it would perhaps be more feasible to attack the enemy’s left, and this was supported by Ewell and another of Ewell’s division commanders, General Robert E. Rodes. Ultimately, Lee concurred, and Longstreet’s First Corps, without the division of General George Pickett, was given the task to fight the main battle on the second day.\(^80\)

The time set for the Confederate attack on the second day became the main point of contention in the Gettysburg controversy between the Virginians and Longstreet. In his speech, Early alleged that Longstreet had been slow in preparing to attack the Union left flank, thus giving the enemy time to prepare for the Confederates. Early’s allegation was backed up one year later by William N. Pendleton, former chief of artillery for the Army of Northern Virginia, who stated that in fact Lee had ordered Longstreet to attack \textit{at dawn}. This became known as the infamous “sunrise order.”\(^81\) To the Virginians, if Longstreet had simply followed Lee’s “order” and attacked \textit{at dawn}, the battle of Gettysburg would have ended in Confederate victory.\(^82\) This alleged order, however, was fictitious. Further, even if such an order had been given, it could not have been carried out to Lee’s specifications. Longstreet himself cites the responses given to him from some of General Lee’s staff officers and Lee’s military secretary A.L. Long, showing that no “sunrise order” had ever been issued.\(^83\) Some historical accounts, however, side with

\(^{80}\) Ibid, 194-195.

\(^{81}\) Wert, 422.

\(^{82}\) Piston., 118.

\(^{83}\) The letters include written replies from W.H. Taylor, Charles Venable, and Charles Marshall,
Early and state that Longstreet was deliberately slow in bringing up his forces. Longstreet had expressed misgivings about Lee’s attack plans and tried to convince him to shift the entire army to the right, around the entire Union army. Such a maneuver would have placed the Confederate army between the Union forces and Washington. Faced with such a situation, the Union would have been forced to attack the Confederates on ground of their own choosing. Lee, however, was convinced that an attack at Gettysburg was the best option and so Longstreet was over-ruled. Historian Douglas Southall Freeman, in his 1935 biography of Lee, attributed Longstreet’s “slowness” in having his forces ready to attack on the second day to wounded pride. In Freeman’s opinion, after Lee rejected Longstreet’s plans on the night of the first day, Longstreet, “at his camp, a few miles away, was eating his heart away in sullen resentment that Lee had rejected his long-cherished plan of a strategic offensive and a tactical defensive.” Thus, the implication was that Longstreet allowed the rejection of his alternative strategy to affect his performance prior to and during the second day of the battle, effectively allowing the members of Lee’s staff who would later join Early in discrediting Longstreet after the General alienated them by criticizing Lee while trying to defend his own reputation. James Longstreet, From Manassas to Appomattox: Memoirs of the Civil War in America, Civil War Centennial Series, ed. James I. Robertson, Jr. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1960; reprint, New York: Kraus Reprint Co., 1969), 379-380 (page references are to reprint edition).

84 Early, 272.

85 Such a move was echoed by others. For instance, prior to fighting General Hood repeatedly urged Longstreet to at least attack further on the right, but Longstreet, knowing Lee had rejected his suggestion, ordered Hood to proceed. Longstreet, 368.

86 Ibid, 358-359.

Union to dig in and prepare their defenses.\textsuperscript{88} While the general was indeed somewhat slow in readying his troops, and probably did allow his disagreement with Lee to affect him, his sluggishness only meant that the attack would have started a little earlier in the day, not at dawn.\textsuperscript{89}

In Longstreet's defense, through statements made by him and others, there are arguments to counter the Virginians' allegations. For example, on the night of the first day, by the time Lee had made up his mind to attack the Union left flank--due to the recommendations of Ewell and Early especially--the forces of Longstreet were still miles away from the battlefield. To get his men into position Longstreet's troops were forced to march throughout the night toward Gettysburg, most only arriving on the battlefield at dawn and hardly in any shape to attack immediately. Further, despite the criticism that Longstreet did not give his best efforts, his forces achieved much success when they attacked. Indeed, they put tremendous pressure on the Union army and very nearly won. The Virginians and those who sided with them also failed to point out that, for the most part, Longstreet's forces were fighting the bulk of the Union army unaided. Lee had planned to use the troops from the Confederate left flank to "make a demonstration that would prevent [the chief commander of the Army of the Potomac, General George] Meade from shifting any troops to his left to face Longstreet." He wanted a coordinated "en echelon" attack by his forces, where one division would attack in order after the other,


\textsuperscript{89} Ibid, 279.
starting from Longstreet’s forces and working left across the Confederate line. The timing of these attacks, however, was coordinated badly, and the Union was indeed able to shift forces against Longstreet and beat him back. The day ended with the Confederates holding more territory and having forced the enemy army to the breaking point, but the Union line held. Longstreet’s troops had done remarkably well, despite being “late.” In retrospect, the inability to win on the second day with the loss of so many irreplaceable troops should have effectively concluded the battle of Gettysburg. It did not. Wert writes:

July 2, not 3, 1863, was the pivotal day of Gettysburg. The Army of Northern Virginia nearly achieved a victory. That it did not can be attributed to internal problems and human failings, and to the performance of the Army of the Potomac. While disappointed with the day’s outcome, Lee thought that night, as he reported, “the result of the day’s operations induced the belief that, with proper concert of attack, and with the increased support that the positions gained on the right would enable the artillery to render the assaulting columns, we should ultimately succeed, and it was accordingly determined to continue the attack.” The agony of Gettysburg was not finished for the First Corps and James Longstreet.

The third day of battle was somewhat less important to the controversy surrounding Longstreet himself, but is critical for Lee’s image, because it stands as one of the greatest threats to his supposed infallibility. It was the day of Pickett’s charge, when Lee tried to smash through the Union Center with one final massive assault. On this day, Lee clearly did want an early morning attack. By this time, however, Longstreet was convinced more than ever that his alternate strategy was the correct one, and he was slow to ready his forces, heavily remonstrating with Lee not to order the advance. Lee could have considered this insubordination by Longstreet, but did not. He remained adamant

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90 Ibid, 278-279.
about attacking though, stating that “the enemy is there, and I am going to strike him.”

The attack went forward. Pickett’s division led the way, straight into the murderous fire from the Union army, and was nearly destroyed. Eventually, the attack faltered all along the line. The day after the failed assault, the Confederates withdrew, and the battle of Gettysburg was over.

Initial southern reaction to the three-day battle was negative. Criticism of Lee came from both officers and men. It was also present within the Confederate government and some southern newspapers. Longstreet, however, did not take part in the criticism, even when he was the one person who had the most reason to do so. Instead, “he stressed that Lee deserved the South’s full support. He felt that all of Lee’s subordinates should share the blame for the army’s setback.” It is highly ironic that the person who became the target of most of the blame for the battle’s outcome was one of the clearest voices of support for Lee immediately after it.

Gettysburg was an unmitigated disaster for the Confederacy, and the defeat cannot be attributed to only one man. Nevertheless, the Virginians were successful (in large part) in doing just that. As noted above, there was a plethora of mistakes committed.

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91 Ibid, 284.

92 Pickett “never forgave Lee.” After their only postwar meeting, Pickett said, “That old man... had my division massacred.” Several other officers including artillery General Edward Porter Alexander also were judgmental about the charge on the third day. Even enlisted men felt negatively about the campaign, “one soldier referred to the invasion of Pennsylvania as ‘ill-fated,’ while another believed it to be ‘as clear a defeat as our army ever met with.’” Piston, 62-63.

93 Ibid, 63-65.

94 Ibid, 64.
by both Lee and many of those who served under him, not Longstreet alone. Stuart was missing from the scene, so finding the Union army at Gettysburg was unexpected. Ewell and Early did not seize the initiative at a critical moment on the first day of battle. Longstreet did not receive any “sunrise order.” Lee probably should never have attacked on the third day, and in retrospect, perhaps he would have been better off to have taken Longstreet’s advice. In spite of all these factors, postwar criticism of Longstreet’s actions at Gettysburg stuck.

In order to bolster Lee’s image, no counter strategy for Gettysburg was acceptable to the Virginians. As Lee had stated, the enemy was at Gettysburg and had to be attacked. Acceptance of Longstreet’s criticism of Lee or favorably acknowledging his alternate strategy would have undermined Lee’s persona as invincible and infallible. Instead, the Virginians and later advocates of the Lost Cause convinced themselves that if Gettysburg had been won, the Confederacy’s misfortunes would have been reversed. With Longstreet, they also had a ready-made scapegoat for the Confederacy’s failure and Lee’s defeat. Despite being outnumbered and facing difficult terrain, somehow Lee would have succeeded if Longstreet had only followed orders and attacked at dawn on the second day. The Virginians controlled the Southern Historical Society, thus they had access to primary source documents which they guarded carefully and they enjoyed the ability to publish their version of events through the Society’s journal. Longstreet, with only a handful of supporters, did not have the same access to such documents. Further, the postwar career of Longstreet undermined any public sympathy and credibility the
general might have enjoyed. It is no wonder then that Longstreet was fighting a losing battle.

In terms of history and memory, the writings of the Virginians and their control over primary source material tilted the balance preponderantly in their favor over Longstreet's. Since most of the source material favored the Virginians and their interpretations of both Gettysburg and Civil War history in general, later historians and National Lost Cause writers also wrote in a similar vein. For example, textbooks printed prior to the 1930s were largely unfavorable toward Longstreet and praised Lee.95 Other texts entirely omitted Longstreet and focused instead on Lee and his former second in command before Longstreet, General Stonewall Jackson, hence even denying the existence of Longstreet "as second in command and [Lee's] most trusted adviser."96 Presumably, the veneration of Lee was so complete by then that the defeat at Gettysburg only required superior Union numbers. Further, professional historians of the late nineteenth and early-to mid-twentieth century increasingly were dependent "on the printed word rather than memory for information. Biography was the most popular form of history, and the biographies written of Lee served to anchor Longstreet in his unfavorable place in southern history."97

95Piston notes several of these texts including: Makers of American History (New York, 1904), which praised Lee for not criticizing subordinates for failure at Gettysburg; Half-Hours in Southern History (Richmond, 1907), which blamed Longstreet for slowness in the battle; and An American History (Boston, 1913) which placed the defeat at Gettysburg on the "disastrous misunderstanding" with Longstreet who was supposed to attack at dawn. Ibid, 172.

96Ibid, 172.

97Ibid, 173.
Perhaps the most influential biographical work in praise of Lee and vilifying Longstreet was Douglass Southall Freeman's *R. E. Lee*, a four volume biography (1934-1935). Freeman was a Southerner and the son of a former private in the Army of Northern Virginia. Thus, he had links to the past generation and their memories of the war. Yet, as a professional he depended on written sources, a large portion of which had been written by the Virginians and other Inner Lost Cause advocates. Freeman predictably "portrayed the war in the eastern theater as much in terms of a contest between Lee and Longstreet as between rebel and Federal soldiers." Freeman went on to state that, "the seeds of much of the disaster at Gettysburg . . . were sown in that instant when Lee yielded to Longstreet and Longstreet discovered that he would . . . he could dominate Lee." Freeman devoted four chapters to the battle of Gettysburg. In those chapters, the narrative largely appears as a blow-by-blow restatement of the Virginians' arguments against Longstreet. Almost all of Freeman's sources were in the anti-Longstreet camp, including Early, whose mere recollection of Lee saying, "Longstreet is a very good fighter when he gets in position and gets everything ready, but he is so slow," is included as evidence. Freeman apparently did not probe very deeply into the motives behind the writings of those who criticized Longstreet, but accepted them at face value. Ewell and Stuart are given part of the blame for the defeat, but the lion's share of blame is placed on Longstreet, whom Freeman describes as basically a poor substitute for the now


99 Ibid, 175.

100 Freeman, *R. E. Lee*, 80.
dead "Stonewall." Freeman does not entirely omit Lee from blame, but he places that blame on Lee's "overconfidence" in the abilities of his commanders and soldiers. Lee's tactical decision to invade Pennsylvania was "a daring move, but in the circumstances that Lee faced, politically and in a military sense, it was probably justified." Lee's stubborn insistence on offensive strategy went unquestioned in Freeman's work, as did his infallibility. Writing almost seven decades after the Civil War, Freeman's Lee was again defeated by overwhelming numbers, and Longstreet lost Gettysburg. The Virginians could not have asked for anything more.

The tenets of the Lost Cause offered an explanation for Confederate defeat in war. Equally important, however, were the actions undertaken by white Southerners in peace, in order to reestablish their sense of identity and begin to take back their region from northern control.

**Attempts to Reassert White Rule and Early Commemorative Activities**

The final area of discussion for this chapter on southern identity and the establishment of a Confederate tradition relates to the actions undertaken by Southerners of all classes in the face of postwar uncertainty. Since chapter 2 will deal more closely with commemorative activities and the reestablishment of white supremacy in the South,

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101 It should also be noted that Jackson's role is de-emphasized by Freeman as well, though Jackson, not Longstreet, was seen by Freeman as Lee's most trusted lieutenant. Ibid., 149, and Piston., 175.

102 Freeman, *R. E. Lee*, 150.

103 Ibid, 147.
only a brief analysis of them will be undertaken here. Two areas of discussion follow: a discussion of how Southerners tried to reestablish white supremacy through direct action, and an examination of early southern commemorative activity. In each case, the bonds which united Southerners were strengthened as participation in these activities allowed them to solidify their sense of identity and community. In turn, the activities themselves, tied to commemorating the war dead or undertaken in response to the upheavals of Reconstruction, exerted an influence upon the collective memories of Southerners and contributed in the way they remembered the Confederate cause.

Direct action under Reconstruction and Federal military occupation was limited, yet white southern males in particular attempted to reassert their hegemony over southern society. The emancipation of former slaves, the disenfranchisement of white leaders unwilling to take the loyalty oath, and the presence of black men in the electorate during Reconstruction was a bitter pill for white southern men to swallow. The attitudes of white Southerners toward black equality in the early postwar period, coupled with Reconstruction policies crafted in response to the perceived continued disloyalty of Southerners, ensured North/South divisiveness and served as a critical rallying point for the revival of southern identity.

Soon after the war ended, southern local governments began to reestablish themselves under Presidential Reconstruction. One of the first problems these governments confronted was how to deal with the newly emancipated slaves. In particular, since the former slaves had made up a large part of the work force, how could white Southerners continue to use them as a source of labor and keep them under control?
The answers the new legislatures found were embodied in the insidious “black codes” which sought to preserve white supremacy in the South and keep blacks as the main labor force, subservient to white control. The codes, historian Eric Foner notes:

Intended to define the freedmen’s new rights and responsibilities, the codes authorized blacks to acquire and own property, marry, make contracts, sue and be sued, and testify in court cases involving persons of their own color. But their centerpiece was the attempt to stabilize the black work force and limit its economic options apart from plantation labor. Henceforth, the state would enforce labor agreements and plantation discipline, punish those who refused to contract, and prevent whites from competing among themselves for black workers.\footnote{Eric Foner, \textit{Reconstruction: America’s Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877} (New York: Harper \\& Row, 1988), 199.}

For southern whites, this was an attempt to reestablish antebellum order and return as closely as possible to a state of antebellum racial normalcy. For the North, however, the black codes were seen as an example of continued southern intransigence.

With the failure of Presidential Reconstruction, Congressional Reconstruction (or “Radical” Reconstruction to Southerners) began. The reports of continued southern resistance to northern hegemony concerned Congress. For the Republicans, the black codes appeared very much like an attempt by Southerners to reinstate a form of slavery. In response to this perceived southern defiance, the granting of voting privileges to blacks under the First Reconstruction Act of 1867 was a way both to reward them, since many blacks had fought and died for the Union, and to prevent intransigent southern whites from regaining political power.\footnote{George M. Fredrickson, \textit{The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817-1914} (New York: Harper \\& Row, 1971), 184-185.} The Act effectively excluded most southern leaders and
the majority of ex-Confederates from voting, and secured voting rights for pro-Republican constituencies, including blacks.\textsuperscript{106}

The move to enfranchise blacks while disenfranchising the majority of eligible southern voters created a rallying point for southern whites. With Congressional Reconstruction, the postwar inversion of order was more than ever an unsettling reality for them. While Federal troops remained in the South, however, open action against the new laws could not be taken. Nevertheless, the cause of “white supremacy” was embraced by many white southern males who sought once again to confine blacks to an “inferior caste.”\textsuperscript{107} Using racialist arguments and categories of difference that had sprung up well before the Civil War, white supremacists argued against the status of blacks as equals. These arguments included “scientific” explanations of the world, especially through the work of natural scientists and their theories on race and separate creationism.\textsuperscript{108} One of the clearest examples of this type of white supremacist defense was written by Nashville publisher Buckner Payne. Writing under the pseudonym “Ariel,” his pamphlet entitled, \textit{The Negro: What Is His Ethnological Status}, Payne argued that an inferior species along the “higher orders of the monkey” was created before Adam and Eve, and the black race resulted from some of Adam and Eve’s descendants marrying with


\textsuperscript{107}Fredrickson, 187.

this inferior species. The actions of white supremacists were not limited to philosophical arguments alone. Some of them took up violence.

The rise of the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) gave Southerners a means of covert yet direct resistance to northern rule. Though the initial KKK was a small and short-lived phenomenon, its symbolic importance had widespread implications. The Klan’s rituals and actions in the South provided Southerners with an outlet for releasing their frustrations against northern oppression and with a means for reaffirming southern identity. The Klan’s actions helped to restore southern honor on a primal level by using violence to strike fear into the forces seeking to emasculate white men and invert the traditional order of southern society. Equally important, hearing of the Klan’s activities inspired Southerners who otherwise had little hope in resisting the changes imposed upon them by the North. Finally, since many Clansmen were themselves former Confederates, they also embodied a living link to the Confederacy. Indeed, they incorporated Confederate themes into their activities. For example, to further heighten the fear of their victims, some Clansmen in their hooded uniforms claimed they were the spirits of dead Confederate soldiers. Ultimately, the memory of the Klan served as a poignant reinforcement of southern regional identity, the legacy of the Confederacy, and a symbol of white


supremacy that Southerners could rally around in defiance of northern rule and black equality.

Another way Southerners tried to reestablish their identity in the immediate postwar era was through commemorative activity. This subject is explored more fully in chapter 2, but there was a clear difference between later commemoration and the commemorations immediately following the war. Later commemorations were more celebratory in mood. The Confederacy had become a point of pride for Southerners and a Confederate tradition had been established. The early commemorations helped to establish that tradition, but they were more somber and reserved. The South had just been defeated, and many commemorative activities were centered around sites of mourning, namely cemeteries, where the pain of defeat and loss weighed heavily.

Early commemorations and memorials helped to reaffirm southern identity and aided in the establishment of a Confederate tradition. In communities throughout the South, memorial activities began not long after the end of the war, as residents sought to give their loved ones proper burials. Commemorative groups began to form in the region as early as late 1865, and by 1866 memorial associations were established throughout the South. For the most part, they were led by women and most of the groups adopted the title of Ladies' Memorial Association (LMA). Though these local groups were run by women, men often played an important role in their establishment and were active participants in bringing about commemorative events too. For example, prominent men contributed money to these groups, and the LMAs also recruited many young veterans for the manual labor involved in creating commemorative sites. In terms of southern
patriarchy, these shared activities also helped to soothe the sense of emasculation southern men felt, since through activities such as these women showed publicly that they still relied on their men and would stand by them and their communities.

Besides burials, there were other functions undertaken by LMAs with regard to the establishment of a Confederate tradition. The design of cemeteries themselves and the commemorative activities which took place around them were also important. The designs of Confederate cemeteries were reflective of late eighteenth through early twentieth century trends in grave design and commemoration noted by George Mosse in his work *Fallen Soldiers*.\(^{111}\) They were made to evoke contemplation and regeneration, and also served as sites for the formation and preservation of collective national, or in the South’s case, regional, memories. While they commemorated the dead, the new cemeteries were meant just as much for the living. “Memorial associations boasted of their beautiful, dignified landscaping and built paths or streets through them to facilitate visits by the living.”\(^{112}\) They became points of pride for the community, which southerners showed off to visitors, and “found solace and inspiration” in.\(^{113}\)

Monuments were later added to many of these cemeteries. These early monuments were not initially meant to evoke Confederate pride, but rather, like the design

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\(^{112}\) Ibid, 39.

\(^{113}\) Ibid, 39-40.
of the cemeteries, to evoke contemplation over the fallen.\textsuperscript{114} Thus, the cemeteries and early monuments were sites of solitude and peace. They were meant for self-reflection and communal bonding, not to evoke the memory of a rebellious spirit. As sites of memory, however, they also brought comfort and reinforced the sense of shared history and identity for a people who desperately needed it.

Commemorative events also helped to reestablish a sense of community and create a shared Confederate tradition. The commemorative activities of the LMAs typically centered around the unveiling of monuments, usually within the local Confederate cemetery, and Confederate Memorial Day, also known as Decoration Day. In this early period of southern postwar commemorations, the unveiling of monuments was usually a somber event designed to evoke sorrow, and orators at such events expressed themes of mourning.\textsuperscript{115} At this time, the designs of the monuments built for the Confederate cemeteries were typically reflective of death and grief. For example, a pyramid or more often a classical obelisk was chosen for the site, not a statue of a Confederate soldier.\textsuperscript{116} Decoration Day, the forerunner of Memorial Day, was being observed in the South as early as 1865.\textsuperscript{117} Different areas of the South celebrated the date of their memorial day centered around important events in the life of the Confederacy (for example, the

\textsuperscript{114}Ibid, 41.

\textsuperscript{115}Foster, 42.

\textsuperscript{116}Ibid, 41.

\textsuperscript{117}G. Kurt Pickler, Remembering War the American Way (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995), 58.
anniversary of Stonewall Jackson’s death). Thus, there was no set memorial day for the entire South. Though the membership of the LMAs tended to be made up of wealthier residents of the community, all segments of society living within the community were encouraged to take part in these events, further tightening communal bonds and centering those bonds around a shared location and memory. According to Foster, memorial activities and rituals provided opportunities to express grief, but also helped Southerners deal with the disruptive changes in their society:

By honoring the dead, whom some considered especially heroic because they never surrendered, Southerners preserved what they considered part of the best of their recent past. And of course, their praise for the pure motives and noble sacrifices of the fallen redounded to their own credit as well. At the same time, the services for the dead helped the South begin to reduce, or at least to alter, its commitment to the Confederacy. With memorial exercises the major expression of Confederate sentiment, the South ritualistically acknowledged the death of its cause. By placing memorials outside the normal living and working areas of the community, southerners symbolically placed distance between their daily lives and their lost cause. Memorial activities thereby helped the South assimilate the fact of defeat without repudiating the defeated.

Foster’s observation may or may not be metaphorically or psychologically representative of what Southerners were going through. Personally, I disagree that Southerners were distancing themselves from the Confederate cause. Rather, they probably buried the cause deeper within themselves, as a way to keep hope alive under federal occupation. What is certain, however, was that these rituals knitted the community together around a shared

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118 Some areas celebrated Confederate Memorial Day in relation to critical events in the life of the Confederacy. For example Georgia celebrated on April 26 (Johnston’s surrender), other groups on June 3 (Davis’ birthday), and May 10 (Stonewall Jackson’s death). Stephen Davis, “Empty Eyes, Marble Hand: The Confederate Monument and the South,” Journal of Popular Culture 16 (1982): 2.

119 Foster, 45.
Confederate tradition. After the grieving was done, this tradition ultimately inspired hope, and kept alive the possibility for future vindication. As for Confederate Memorial Day activities themselves, they took different forms, ranging from simply decorating the graves with flowers, to more extensive commemorations. The larger commemorative activities on Confederate Memorial Day could include formal processions, prayer services, and speeches, not all of which (necessarily) took place at the cemeteries themselves. Such ritual activities further enhanced the development of a shared Confederate tradition.

In summation, following the war southern identity faced a time up upheaval brought on by the disillusionment of defeat and a vindictive North. To answer the challenges of Reconstruction and to respond to attempts by Northerners to emasculate them, southern white males needed to reestablish a sense of identity for themselves and to regain their hegemony over a society whose traditional social order appeared to have inverted. One group that attempted to rationalize why the South lost the war was the Virginians, who began to establish in writing the basis for what would eventually develop into the Lost Cause. They developed two critical tenets as they apotheosized Confederate General Robert E. Lee and vilified his second in command, General James Longstreet: first, that Lee could make no mistakes; and second, that Longstreet personally lost the decisive battle of the war. These tenets soothed the psyches of white southern males. Instead of southern martial qualities having failed, it was simply sheer numbers that allowed the North to win. Further, with the blame for his defeats cast squarely upon Longstreet and others (to a lesser extent), Lee was presented as the infallible exemplar of

120 Ibid, 42.
white southern manhood, a persona that could deflect the worst criticisms that Northerners could throw at southern masculinity. Lee was, therefore, also cast as a role-model for Southerners. The women of the South contributed greatly in upholding southern identity in the face of Reconstruction, by supporting their disillusioned men when they needed it most, and also by leading the way in commemorative activities. At the same time, some southern white males, through the newly formed Ku Klux Klan, resorted to using vigilante tactics to reestablish white rule in the South, trying to take control back from blacks and their Republican allies. Thus, through both commemorative activities and direct action, Southerners began to rebuild a sense of personal and communal identity, based upon a shared Confederate experience. In turn, these shared experiences began to coalesce into a larger collective memory that gave Southerners hope for eventual vindication.

Chapter 2 deals with commemorative activities and the changing nature of commemoration with regard to the Confederacy. In place of mourning, the Confederacy was increasingly the subject of celebration and became a tradition that southerners took pride in. Combined with a renewed sense of hope, Southerners increasingly sought vindication for themselves, and reconciliation as equal partners with Northerners in a reunited nation. As time passed, the harsh rhetoric between both sides began to fade, replaced by an emphasis over shared beliefs and a downplaying of the issues which had divided the two sections in the first place. This reconciliatory culture was reflected at events such as Veterans' reunions, and can be seen in both academic and commemorative (memorials) works. Eventually, with the outbreak of the Spanish-American War,
Southerners did achieve the vindication they had sought, as the two former adversaries united to fight a common enemy.
Chapter 2

COMMEMORATION AND SECTIONAL RECONCILIATION: THE EXPANSION OF SOUTHERN CIVIL WAR MEMORY, 1877-1907

On June 3, 1907, in the former Confederate capitol of Richmond, Virginia, a monument to Jefferson Davis was unveiled. Although it was not the largest of the Confederate monuments, as Gaines M. Foster notes, the memorial was:

...still the grandest, most ostentatious of the major Confederate memorials. At its center stood an Edward Valentine statue of Davis with an arm outstretched as he lectured from a history book. A 50-foot, 13 column, semicircular colonnade formed a backdrop. At both ends stood square piers, on each of which perched an eagle, and in the center directly behind the Davis figure rose a 67 foot Doric column topped by an allegorical figure of a woman.¹

Heavy with symbolism, this monument was not just a memorial to the late Confederate president. It stood as a veritable shrine to southern Civil War vindication. The main inscription on the memorial consisted of two Latin words, “Deo vindice,” which translate as “God will vindicate.” The figure of Davis lecturing from a history book was presumably directed at future generations, emphasizing the legitimacy of the southern cause—that Southerners went to war for historically and morally justifiable reasons. Indeed, around the molding near his statue an excerpt of Davis’s farewell speech to the United States Senate at the time of Mississippi’s secession was inscribed:

¹Gaines M. Foster, Ghosts of the Confederacy: Defeat, the Lost Cause, and the Emergence of the New South, 1865 to 1913 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 158.
Not in hostility to others, not to injure any section of the country, not even for our own pecuniary benefit, but for the high and solemn motive of defending and protecting the rights we inherited, and which it is our duty to transmit unshorn to our children.

The inscription was representative of the Constitutional justification for secession which Lost Cause advocates promoted. Finally, literally to “top off” the vindication theme, the figure of a woman atop the statue pointing to heaven was given the name “Vindicatrix,” and she stood as the embodiment of the monument’s “spirit.”

Ironically, however, the design of the monument itself seems to be a phallic representation of a large white penis. Thus, the tiny figure of the woman is only placed upon her pedestal by the underlying support of a broad, massive masculine foundation, reflective of the patriarchal hierarchy espoused by white males in the South.

Figure 1: Jefferson Davis memorial, Richmond, Virginia.

2 “South Unveils Stately Shaft to Jeff. Davis,” Atlanta Constitution. 4 June, 1907.
During Reconstruction, Southerners could only dream about a far off vindication of their actions during the Civil War. As noted in chapter 1, the South was a defeated and occupied region, northern animosity and distrust remained high, and uncertainties plagued the very foundations of southern life. However, by the time of the Davis memorial's unveiling, a very different climate had developed within the country, one that was considerably warmer toward the South and receptive of its views on the war. This chapter examines factors which helped bring about this new receptiveness toward southern Civil War interpretations, and details how these changes aided sectional reconciliation and ultimately influenced all Civil War memory and subsequent perspectives of that era in American history.

This chapter is divided into four sections loosely covering the period from the end of Reconstruction (1877) until the time of the Davis monument's unveiling. I chose the end of Reconstruction as a starting point because it marked the period when Southerners by and large controlled their own affairs again without northern interference. I follow Gaines M. Foster's cut-off point for the Confederate celebration, since the 1907 event represents the highpoint of that celebration, a time when the vindication of the Lost Cause appeared to have, in large measure, been achieved. Certainly, by 1907 the proliferation of works espousing the South and Lost Cause ideology was rapidly spreading beyond the region, exerting a heavy influence on both American culture and scholarship.³

³ Foster, 159.
The four sections of this chapter concern the spread of southern Civil War thinking outside of the region to the nation at large, and the critical role played by the ideology of white supremacy in that expansion. First, the social and economic uncertainties faced by white men in both the North and South helped create an environment increasingly receptive to reconciliation and to the transmission of southern Civil War interpretations. Second, commemorative activities themselves were illustrative of changes in Civil War memory in both regions. In the North, key memorials were representative of the ways white Northerners began to write the contributions of blacks out of Civil War history and memory. By shifting the central theme of northern remembrances of the war away from blacks, the divisive issue of slavery as the dominant cause of the war was removed, furthering sectional reconciliation and the transmission of southern Civil War memory. In the South, the tone of commemorative activity moved away from grieving and suffering over the South’s defeat. Instead, Southerners began to celebrate the memory of the Confederacy as a legacy of pride. As both sections began to consider their former opponents as equals, and as they began to marginalize blacks under the developing culture of whiteness, another key step was taken on the road to rapprochement. Third, the Spanish-American war was a pivotal event in sectional reconciliation, as former adversaries united in a common cause against a mutual enemy. Again, the role of race played a key part in how Northerners and Southerners perceived one another and how they found common ground to rally upon. Finally, the developments in Civil War historiography itself are discussed, as Civil War history began to take on an increasingly
southern flavor. Again, whiteness was central to the shaping of academic works on the war, and it cast a long shadow upon American Civil War scholarship and discourse.

**Challenges to Identity and Social Cohesion in the North and South**

The traditional social order of late nineteenth-century America was destabilized as the country underwent rapid industrialization. In particular, the continued hegemony of white males was uncertain as the traditional demarcations that defined their position within society no longer appeared solid. The boundaries which marked race, gender, and class distinctions in the past were no longer so clear as blacks, women, and working-class males stepped beyond their traditional spheres, in some cases directly opposing those who held power (for example, in labor disputes). To keep themselves in hegemonic control of society, white males needed a redefinition of social boundaries along lines that accounted for change, yet retained the traditional social hierarchy. One way of doing this was to reconfigure white masculinity in ways that blurred the economic differences within their own ranks while at the same time marginalizing blacks and women.

**Northern and Southern Uncertainties**

Even before the war northern men were faced with the unsettling challenges brought on by industrialization. Rapid industrial growth threatened to undermine the social fabric which held their society together. Nina Silber comments that white men felt their
traditional values were being eroded in part because of the divisions caused by the expanding industrial growth and consumerism of the period. As a result of an increased number of strikes, growing waves of immigrants, and economic and political corruption, Silber wrote that,

A great many Northerners in the late nineteenth century felt that their society had lost its moral center and sense of purpose. Instead of an older, artisanal commitment to skill, they saw only economic grasping or cynicism among workers and business leaders; instead of the moral foundation of marriage and the domestic sphere, they saw only a new breed of self-promoting women who had plunged into a world of public display and consumption; instead of the unity and harmony of older communities, they saw only class and ethnic conflict and community disintegration. In short, many Northerners feared that economic and power-oriented concerns had replaced human values.4

With the heart of their society seemingly under siege, northern men needed to find some way to restore a semblance of balance and order to their world. Those in socially dominant positions sought to preserve their traditional place in society against the rapid changes brought by industrialization. Many working-class men, being outside of the circles of power, sought out alternative solutions, such as joining political movements like Populism, to try and improve their situations.

In the South, efforts to modernize brought additional challenges to southern white patriarchy. The period of Reconstruction had severely strained southern masculine identity. After Reconstruction, Southerners faced many of the same social difficulties as those confronting the North, yet these problems were more acute in the South since

industrial growth itself was antithetical to southern values, long rooted in an agrarian tradition. Some Southerners, however, embraced the potential flow of wealth and mobility brought forth by increased industrialism and painted a rosy picture of the situation. Henry Grady, for instance, saw growing industrial diversity as something which would make the South stronger and enable it to stand on its own. Grady wrote of the industrializing South, "how rapidly she has adapted herself to these new conditions--how she has grown to the requirements of her larger duty--how she has builted from pitiful resources a great and expanding empire." Simply put, he saw this industrialized "new" South as "simply the old South under new conditions." It was a South that was stronger, however, for it had rebuilt and created its own economic prosperity, thus enabling it to stand on equal terms with the North:

The old South rested everything on slavery and agriculture, unconscious that these could neither give nor maintain healthy growth. The new South presents a perfect democracy, the oligarchies leading in the popular movement--a social system compact and closely knitted, less splendid on the surface, but stronger at the core--a hundred farms for every plantation, fifty homes for every palace--and a diversified industry that meets the complex needs of this complex age.

Grady could rationalize this "old South under new conditions" in economic terms, but not social. Thus, his phrasing is pernicious, since while men like Grady espoused economic


7Ibid, 11.
change, at the same time they sought to reinforce the traditional racial and gender order of southern society, keeping white males at the top, women in their place, and blacks at the bottom of the society.

Ultimately, the challenges to both regions, unsettling though they were, played an important role in healing the bitterness brought by the war. In order to respond to these challenges, different segments within northern and southern society united to preserve their economic and social conditions. Thus, the social tensions caused by industrial growth were vital factors in bringing about sectional reconciliation.

Responding to the Challenges

The ways Northerners and Southerners responded to the social challenges caused by rapid industrial growth in the late nineteenth century varied according to their circumstances. As the gap between rich and poor grew larger, those who were at the lower end of the economic spectrum sought alternatives which would give them a chance to make their voices heard, better their condition, or expand their roles within their society. Populists and labor organizations provided outlets for them to do so. These actions in turn elicited reactions from economic and political elites who sought to preserve their power and position within society. Ultimately both elite and working-class efforts to unite became critical components of sectional reconciliation. Members came together on grounds defined not by sectional differences, but by common interests. There were three major areas of social tension that threatened the dominance of white masculine values in
northern and southern society during the late nineteenth century: the increase in labor and political activism by farmers and workers; the changing roles of women; and the tensions caused by race and ethnicity. Each of these areas was crucial to an understanding of the reunification process, and the reassertion of dominant white masculine traditions in both North and South.

Labor and political activism during the late nineteenth-century intensified as a result of the growing industrial economy. For industrial laborers and farmers, in both the North and South, severe depression and economic distress often were greeted with seeming indifference by those in power, Republican and Democrat alike. The upheavals faced by working-class men who had to shift from being independent producers to wage laborers created new problems that politicians were ill-prepared to address. Many farmers turned to reform-minded groups like the Farmer's Alliance, or later the Populists, to try to gain representation for their concerns. Many industrial workers flocked to organizations such as the Knights of Labor, which organized and mobilized them, representing their concerns against the dictates of management in their various industries as well as giving them a political voice.

The activities of these organizations constituted a clear challenge to the authority of those holding the reins of power, yet the appeal of these organizations to farmers and

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laborers cut across sectional lines and helped further reconciliation between North and South. This was especially true when labor and agricultural organizations positioned themselves as alternatives to the traditional political parties, and sought to recruit members nationwide along lines of common concern rather than sectional interests. In both the North and South, Nina Silber notes, the Populists actively stressed the themes of patriotism and reunion, portraying themselves as “moral superiors to the Democratic and Republican leaders who played upon sectional politics to keep the masses of people divided and ignorant.”¹⁰ Labor unions also sought to reach across sectional lines, appealing to the “common ties of laboring men.”¹¹ Organizations such as the Knights of Labor sought to establish coalitions of workers nationwide, with varying degrees of success. Alarmed by the potential power and disruptive capabilities of these groups, especially in the case of militant strikes, the dominant class needed to find a way to preserve itself while undermining the efforts of reformers.¹²

Women comprised another segment of northern and southern societies that posed a threat to the hegemony of the dominant classes. Especially in the North during this period, many women seemed to be moving beyond the domestic sphere into non-traditional areas. Silber notes that,

¹⁰Silber, 99.
¹¹Ibid, 101
¹²Foster, 86.
Certainly by the 1880s northern women seemed far removed from some of the stricter Victorian standards of womanliness. Found with increasing frequency in the ranks of college students, laborers, and political activists, women in the North were yet a further indication of the distressing modernity that had befallen Yankee culture. As many feared, there now seemed to be little demarcation between the male and female spheres, at least among middle-class northerners.  

An example of this branching out into non-traditional areas can be seen through the activity of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU). Despite being primarily devoted to the cause of temperance, the WCTU also served as an outlet for a number of women's causes. Ruth Bordin notes that “during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, women used the WCTU as a base for their participation in reformist causes, as a sophisticated avenue for political action, as a support for demanding the ballot, and as a vehicle for supporting a wide range of charitable activities.” Women presented a challenge to white patriarchy when they did so because they intruded upon the male social sphere, and were further examples of the inability of white males to control the social environment around them.

The WCTU became the largest woman's organization of the period largely through its organizational efforts. These efforts also furthered movement toward sectional reconciliation, though indirectly. For example, the organizing efforts of the WCTU were not confined to any specific region, but like labor unions, they sought to establish chapters

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13 Silber, 86-87.

and spread their message nationwide and even internationally.¹⁵ Frances Willard, a Northerner and the organization’s president, traveled throughout the country trying to spread the WCTU’s anti-drinking message. She was its most important organizer between 1874 and 1883, and in 1881 under her direction, the WCTU launched a major and ultimately successful temperance campaign in the South. Probably the most important reason for Willard’s success in the South was that she modified her message, leaving out many of the more controversial objectives of some of its members, such as giving women the vote. Instead, she focused on “emphasizing the moral, sentimental, and domestic features of the WCTU message.” This enabled her to organize successfully a number of chapters throughout the region, and to triumph “over both anti-Yankee and anti-female prejudices.”¹⁶ Silber notes that for reconciliation purposes,

The WCTU gave women a position of power and moral authority which made them especially well-suited to bridge the sectional chasm. Because women experienced the suffering of alcohol abuse and its effect on home and family, the organization argued, there was a moral imperative for the women of the country to achieve a national bonding. Moreover, as women, they helped preserve the nation’s moral fiber and could counter the sectional power brokering of corrupt and moral politicians . . . Thus, as an organization of women, the WCTU found the moral component of the reunion message especially empowering.¹⁷

In fact, the WCTU was highly unusual for the time, because it also made efforts to reach black and immigrant groups as well, if not very consistently. Thus, the organization not

¹⁵Bordin, 88.

¹⁶Silber, 103.

¹⁷Ibid, 104.
only helped in the cause of sectional reconciliation, but it cut across racial and ethnic lines too. Despite the WCTU’s efforts to avoid controversy, many of its members championed women’s suffrage, and WCTU and women’s activism represented a threat to white male hegemony.\(^\text{18}\)

The third major challenge to the supremacy of white masculinity involved issues of race and ethnicity. In the North, waves of immigrants threatened both the cultural and political hegemony of established elites. In the South, the favorable climate for blacks under Reconstruction-era governments began to change as white political control began to reassert itself. Despite the economic and cultural contributions that both black and immigrant populations made to the country, they were viewed as a potential threat to already established groups.

It should be noted that the inflow of immigrants was not limited to the North, but was also taking place throughout the West, and to a smaller extent in the South as well—though it remained largely homogeneous in terms of immigration. The Chinese who, for example, were attracted to the United States by the gold rush, helped build the first transcontinental railroad, and worked as agricultural laborers. In the North, Chinese worked in manufacturing industries. In the South, they were brought in to work on the plantations.\(^\text{19}\) It was to the North, however, that the largest influx of new immigrants

\(^{18}\)Bordin, 76-94.

came. These new immigrants were perceived as threats to the dominance of native-born groups, and these groups clashed politically and sometimes even in open violence. economic, political, and cultural grounds. New immigrant groups were seen as competitors on economic, political, and cultural grounds. Economically, they were feared by native workers as newcomers who would degrade work conditions for native-born workers, or as job stealers who could be hired cheaply and take opportunities away from native-born citizens. Politically, immigrants were attracted to groups who would help them out, and this naturally led to opposition between them and the nativists. For example, in the case of the Irish, the Democratic Party in many northern cities rejected the nativist line because they needed the votes of the new immigrants, whereas many in the upper class establishment embraced it, and hence were allied to the Republicans. Thus, immigrants helped to polarize the political spectrum. Culturally, immigrants were considered a threat to the values and traditions of the dominant White Anglo-Saxon Protestant (WASP) culture. One reason for this stemmed from religious differences. For example, the nativists in the North were largely Protestant, while new immigrants such as the Irish were Roman Catholics. Other reasons for the nativists’ distrust of immigrants as a threat to their way of life included “scientifically” derived racial

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22. This argument was also employed by immigrant groups and labor unions against other non-white immigrant groups. For example, the Chinese faced discrimination along these very lines, as organized labor, backed by white immigrants, sought to keep them out of the work force. Takaki, 115.

23. Ignatiev, 76, 148-149.
theories, which tied into an emphasis on Social Darwinism and conceptions of "Anglo-Saxonism." In terms of sectional reconciliation, Northerners came to perceive the "threat" presented by immigrant populations as similar to the racial problem in the South, and they began to sympathize and admire the way Southerners dealt with race relations. These new sympathies provided a critical point of commonality between whites within the two sections, and greatly aided in the movement toward reunion.

In the South, the issue of race constituted the major problem. Before the end of Reconstruction, blacks had shared political power in the South through the Republican party, and increased economic growth brought them new opportunities. Thus, blacks threatened the security of white Southerners because, like women and other groups, they were stepping beyond their traditional boundaries. The growing economic status of some blacks fostered a new middle class which was both resented and feared by upper and lower class whites. As Grace Elizabeth Hale notes, "whites created the culture of segregation in large part to counter black success, to make a myth of absolute racial difference, to stop the rising.""26

White Southerners sought to defend their racially defined "spaces." Henry Grady defended the concept of blacks and whites remaining in their own separate spheres,

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25 Silber, 141.

with whites in the superior position. Although he defended black political rights, in describing his own conception of racial control Grady argued,

First--that the whites shall have clear and unmistakable control of public affairs. They own the property. They have the intelligence. Theirs is the responsibility ... Beyond these reasons there is a racial one. They are the superior race, and will not and cannot submit to the dominance of an inferior race.

And later,

Second--that the whites and blacks must walk in separate paths in the South. As near as may be, these paths should be made equal--but separate they must be now and always. This means separate schools, separate churches, separate accommodation everywhere--but equal accommodation where the same money is charged, or where the state provides for the citizen. 27

Thus, Grady presents an argument that foreshadowed the rise of segregation. However, there were inherent problems with this plan.

Hale cites white southern journalist and writer George Washington Cable, who observed that whites had no monopoly on “intelligence, character, and property.” 28 As the educated and rising black middle class showed, blacks were capable of meeting white standards. Cable observed that the demarcation points between whites and blacks were not as clear cut as people like Grady made them out to be. On a train in the South, Cable witnessed a well-dressed black woman and her daughter forced to remain in a “suffocating” car carrying prison convicts “in filthy rags, with vile odors”--while his [Cable’s] car was nearly empty--simply because they were black. Other than skin color, the woman and

27 Grady, 139-141.

28 Hale, 46.
child, in dress and behavior, could easily have passed for someone in the white middle class, and someone from that class would never be forced to remain in a crowded, foul-smelling train car containing prison convicts. Cable argued that instead of a racial divide, the more practical divisions within society should occur along class and educational lines. Hale writes, "Far from calling for the end of distinctions between people . . . Cable demanded the elevation of flexible and visibly ascertainable divisions of class over some white southerner’s immoral racial fictions." His observations, however, brought harsh criticism and were not taken seriously. While racial distinctions and tensions may have been lessened if such a stance had been adopted, the tensions caused by class differences were hardly less serious in terms of challenging traditional values and whiteness was promoted in part to obscure them.

The hegemony of white control, North and South, was thus jeopardized by the rapid changes in industry and society taking place in post-Civil War America. Those in the dominant positions needed to find a way to combat these changes in order to preserve their status atop the social hierarchy of their society. To keep their political power and sense of values intact, class distinctions, the expansion of women’s roles, and racial and ethnic differences needed to be addressed somehow. Seemingly under siege, the concepts of manliness and race which had defined the white middle and upper classes were reconfigured under an emerging culture of whiteness to answer these challenges.

29 Ibid, 44-47.
Previously linked to notions of self-control in the North, and patriarchy in the South, definitions of manliness became increasingly associated with whiteness. Gail Bederman, writing about Ida B. Wells’s antilynching campaign, noted that the conception of “manliness,” especially for middle-class white men, began to change in the 1890s. Bederman writes, “although cultural and economic changes had taken their toll, middle-class men continued to uphold manliness, for abandoning it would mean abandoning male power itself.” Ultimately, the “fixing” of racial categories played a major role in lessening the effects of class and other social differences. Hale writes that

The rise of racial thinking and white supremacist ideology throughout late nineteenth-century American culture had in part been an attempt to ground this feared mutability of identity in the seeming concreteness of blood, science, and the body. The modernity of racial “science,” then, could satisfy forward-looking white northerners while backward-facing white southerners could find assurance in resurrected and reconditioned pro-slavery polemics. As important, a new racial order could slow the national growth of class solidarity among workers and farmers and redirect the fight for women’s rights. Whiteness rather than the more specifically conceived rights as workers or as women bound potential rebels at least partially to a white male elite.31

This emphasis on difference was literally demonstrated, indeed commemorated, at the Chicago Exposition of 1893, which clearly showed how white men conceptualized their world.

The theme of the exposition centered around the twin notions of progress and civilization. To demonstrate this, the fair was divided into two areas. The “civilized”

30 Bederman, 7.
31 Hale, 46-47.
section was called "The White City," which obviously linked whiteness with civilization. Within this "city," exemplars of progress and industry were presented as hallmarks of the civilized, white world.\textsuperscript{32} Next to this "White City" was the Woman's Building, showcasing the place of women within the "advancement of civilization." The building highlighted the softness of women, their "refined" spheres in homes, hospitals, and churches, compared to the hard ruggedness of the technological and industrial spheres dominated by men. The place assigned to women in the order of society was literally demonstrated by its placement:

Its location underlined women's marginality: Not only was the Woman's Building located at the very edge of the manly White City, it was also situated immediately opposite the White City's only exit to the uncivilized Midway. On the border between civilized and savage (as befit women, who according to modern science, were more primitive than men) the Woman's Building underlined the manliness of the white man's civilization.\textsuperscript{33}

Ethnic and racial differences were showcased as well. The "Court of Honor" within the White City was organized along a path of racial hierarchy. Spectators were advised to visit the exposition's Midway, which contained "authentic" representations of uncivilized cultures. They were advised to do so only after visiting the White City, so they could get a fuller appreciation of the differences between the civilized and uncivilized world. "Visitors entering the Midway from the White City would first pass the German and Irish villages,

\textsuperscript{32} These included seven buildings which saluted advancements in manufacturing, mining, agriculture, art, administrations, machinery, and electricity. Displays of technological advancement, such as engines, warships, trains, machines, and armaments were also displayed. Bederman, 9-10.

\textsuperscript{33} Ibid, 10.
proceed past the barbarous Turkish, Arabic, and Chinese villages, and finish by viewing
the savage American Indians and Dahomans [a representation of a black African
people]." Thus, the floor of the Chicago Exposition represented a literal mapping out of
the concept of white masculine civilization. Women were placed on the margins of
society, while ethnic groups, descending from Anglo-Saxon to blacks, represented the
pseudo-scientific view that nineteenth-century white men conceptualized for themselves of
their world. The exhibit was a literal display of their power, and commemorated their
desired hegemony within their society.

**Northern and Southern Commemoration**

Daniel Sherman, in his article on commemoration in interwar France, notes that
commemoration takes place on several levels. On one level, commemorative acts provide
solace to those who have lost loved ones. They perpetuate the memory of the fallen, and
the memory of the cause for which they fought. On another level, the commemoration of
the dead also helps to perpetuate or enhance the agendas of those building the memorials
and those planning or sponsoring the activities surrounding commemorative events. In the
case of Civil War commemoration, the same tenets hold true. Northerners often tied the
remembrance of the war with the objective of sustaining Republican power. In the South,
the commemoration of the war was used to vindicate the Confederate cause. Thus, there

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34 Ibid, 10.
exist both overt and covert meanings for acts of commemoration. On a third level, the commemoration of the fallen also works as a vehicle for the preservation and transmission of social values and memory to generations beyond those who lived through the actual events. For example, in a work on Confederate memorials, Stephen Davis writes,

Preserving the details of the soldier’s courage represented a commitment not only to the past but to the future. Many apologists were concerned that the younger generation would accept Northerners’ charges that the Confederate soldier had been unpatriotic and traitorous. “We have a right,” pronounced one speaker at a reunion of Confederate veterans, “to point our children and the young people to-day to the sanguinary conflict which we passed through, and teach them that their fathers were not traitors, but brave patriotic soldiers.”

In the case of the Civil War, these aspects of commemoration shaped the direction of sectional reconciliation. The early stage of Civil War commemoration was hardly conducive to sectional reconciliation. Northerners continued to depict the Confederates as immoral traitors who sought the perpetuation of slavery. The South wanted to vindicate the righteousness of its cause as a constitutional struggle brought on by overzealous elements in the North. As time passed, however, hostilities lessened and a reevaluation of the war and its meaning began to occur. With white masculinity beginning to reassert itself, the major barriers toward sectional reunion, especially with regard to the issue of slavery, began to be removed. Eventually, the remembrance of the war began to be


celebrated as a patriotic and heroic struggle between people who were increasingly seen as equally loyal to their respective causes, namely, the preservation of the Union (North) against state’s rights (South). The argument that the war was a struggle over the emancipation of slaves began to diminish in importance as sectional reconciliation took hold. In the end, a new national collective memory of the war began to form, a memory that would incorporate much of the southern version of the war into itself.

**Commemoration in the North**

In the North, from a very early period in the war, there was considerable concern over the memory of the fallen. As early as 1861, the War Department issued directives for the proper care of the bodies of soldiers who died during the fighting. Public sentiment for commemoration was high as well. Soon after the war, a magazine article written by James F. Russling called for the creation of new national cemeteries to honor those who fell. He wrote, “If men after death are to be judged and honored according to the work they have done and the results they have achieved, then above all others should we take the memories of these men home to our hearts and lives, and embalm [them] in the nation’s

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remembrance forever and forever.”\(^\text{38}\) In 1866, Congress did authorize the creation of a
system of permanent national cemeteries to honor the Union dead.\(^\text{39}\)

_The three levels of commemoration mentioned before can be seen early on in
northern commemorative efforts. First, there was an emphasis on caring for the bodies of
the fallen and honoring the dead. Second, there was an effort by individuals and the federal
government to make sure that the Union cause was properly commemorated through the
establishment of the system of national cemeteries. Finally, there was the perpetuation of
the memory of the fallen into the future, as Russling called for the remembrance of the
fallen to enter into the hearts and lives of the people “forever and forever.”_

Northern commemoration of the war moved through two distinct periods. The
initial period of commemoration in the decades following the fighting emphasized the
continued bitterness many Northerners felt toward Southerners. Later commemorations,
however, saw a shift in northern attitudes away from recrimination and toward increasing
sympathy for their former adversaries. Using the example of three different monuments,
each of which deals with the role of blacks and slavery in the war, I show how these
memorials demonstrated the shift in attitude away from slavery’s central role in the Civil
War and helped make possible the conditions for sectional reconciliation through the
reassertion of white masculinity.

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\(^{39}\) G. Kurt Piehler, _Remembering War the American Way_ (Washington: Smithsonian Institution
Press, 1995), 51.
After the fighting in the Civil War ended, many Northerners sought to ensure that the memory of the Union cause would be preserved. With the Republicans in power, and through the efforts of the party's radical wing, commemoration of Union victory would center on the morality of freeing the slaves and emphasize the defeat of the former rebel states. The maintenance of Republican control was predicated on the continued depiction of the war as a costly, bloody conflict which caused much suffering and which was clearly the fault of the South. Historian G. Kurt Piehler noted that, "In the 'bloody-shirt' campaigns developed in the 1860s and used intermittently until the 1880s, Republicans associated both Democrats and the South with rebellion and disloyalty. During many campaign rallies, a blood-soaked shirt was waved in the air to symbolize the northern lives lost in the war." Additionally, veterans' groups, especially the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR), became politically tied to the Republican cause. In her study on the GAR and its politics, Mary Dearing wrote that "Soldiers received bounty equalization and political offices, while Radicals profited from the distinction of the veterans' favor as well as from their actual votes." Thus, sectional bitterness and opposition to reconciliation was kept up for decades after the fighting. Eventually, the passage of time brought about a

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40 Ibid, 57.

41 Cash bounties were offered by the federal government to stimulate enlistment during the war. These bounties were begun in late 1862 and ran until the end of the war. The inequalities arose because those fighting before this time were never given access to the bounties, and thus made much less money than those who received the bounties. They felt aggrieved. Mary R. Dearing, Veterans in Politics: the Story of the G.A.R. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1952), 57, 112-113.
reversal of this attitude, however, and this changed climate aided in bringing about sectional reconciliation.

This shift in attitude toward the South is easily observed through the examples of three memorials: the Freedman’s Memorial to Abraham Lincoln (1876), the Shaw Memorial (1897), and the Lincoln Memorial in Washington D.C. (1922). Through these three memorials, the clash between interpretations of the war can clearly be seen. Over time, the role of blacks in the war and the evils of slavery were increasingly downplayed, and these memorials reflect that trend.

Figure 2: Freedman’s memorial to Abraham Lincoln
The first memorial, the Freedman's Memorial to Abraham Lincoln in Washington, D.C., was built through funds provided by African Americans. However, the responsibility for selecting a sculptor was given to the U.S. Sanitary Commission, which selected Thomas Ball to sculpt the bronze statue of Lincoln. The finished statue depicted a “Moses” like figure of Lincoln emancipating a kneeling slave. On one level, the statue clearly represents the act of emancipation. Lincoln stands over the slave, released of his chains, who is about to stand. On another level, however, the fact that the slave is presented as kneeling can be read as the continued subservience of the black man to the white. Additionally, the design of the memorial did not depict the contributions of blacks as soldiers in the war effort. Frederick Douglass, who gave the commemorative speech at the dedication of the memorial on April 14, 1876, was less than pleased with the monument. However, in his speech, Douglass seized upon the moment to remind white Northerners that the memory of the Civil War as a war to free the slaves needed to be preserved. He addressed the white people in the audience:

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42 Piehler, 56.

43 Ibid, 56.
You are the children of Abraham Lincoln. We are at best only his step-children; children by adoption, children by forces of circumstances and necessity. To you it especially belongs to sound his praises, to preserve and perpetuate his memory, to multiply his status, to hang his pictures high upon your walls, and commend his example, for to you he was a great and glorious friend and benefactor ... But while in the abundance of your wealth, and in the fullness of your just and patriotic devotion, you do all this, we entreat you to despise not the humble offering we this day unveil to view; for while Abraham Lincoln saved you a country, he delivered us from a bondage, according to Jefferson, one hour of which was worse than ages of the oppression your fathers rose in rebellion to oppose. 44

Historian David Blight notes that Douglass clearly perceived the implications of what could happen if that memory of the Civil War were replaced. When the Supreme Court struck down the Civil Rights Act of 1875, Douglass saw this as a disturbing trend and linked it to a new culture of reconciliation. Blight commented regarding Douglass, that “historical memory, he had begun to realize, was not merely an entity altered by the passage of time; it was the prize in a struggle between rival versions of the past, a question of will, of power, of persuasion.” 45 In order to preserve a space for blacks within the expanding culture of white masculininity, Douglass sought to create a black counter-memory, which would preserve the identity of blacks as important members of society who had helped win their freedom and the Civil War. Blight writes that,

Douglass urged his fellow blacks to keep their history before the consciousness of American society; if necessary, they should serve as a national conscience. “Well the nation may forget,” Douglass said in 1888, “it may shut its eyes to the past, and

44 Frederick Douglass, The Life and Writings of Frederick Douglass: Volume IV, Reconstruction and After, with a Preface by Philip S. Foner (New York: International Publishers, 1955), 312-313.

frown upon any who may do otherwise, but the colored people of this country are bound to keep the past in lively memory till justice shall be done them."46

Unfortunately for Douglass, the expansion of white supremacy within the country would suppress the legacy of black contributions in the Civil War and in American life well into the future.

Figure 3: Shaw Memorial, Boston

46 Ibid, 32.
The second memorial of concern here is the Shaw memorial in Boston (1897), which commemorated the soldiers of the 54th Massachusetts colored regiment and its commanding officer, Robert Gould Shaw. The design of the memorial was unique, because its creator, Irish-born sculptor Augustus Saint-Gaudens, sought or was directed to avoid any stereotypical representation of blacks in the mural. Instead, he portrayed them as "noble patriot soldiers of the American nation." 47 Once again, there are ambiguities to this memorial depending on how the observer chooses to read it. If the figure of the commanding officer is the focus of the observer then the foreground of the mural is emphasized, showing Shaw riding on his horse. If the black troops are the focus of attention, then the background of the monument is emphasized, depicting the soldiers on the march. 48 Thus, the monument allows for opposing readings, depending upon what the observer wishes to see. Whether the monument was more favorable to blacks or not is open to the interpretation of those who view it, but if the viewer knew that the artist who did the monument was a racist, as revealed by his published memoirs several years later, it seems likely that the black troops were intentionally shoved into the background. 49 Nevertheless, the fact the black troops were depicted as soldiers bearing weapons is highly

47 Susan-Mary Grant, "Pride and Prejudice in the American Civil War," History Today 48 n.9 (September 1998), 42.


49 Piehler, 69.
significant. That image alone co-opts the racialist perspective that blacks were not capable of achieving anything significant, and stands as a threatening image for those who sought to marginalize and keep them oppressed. Such imagery might have even invoked long held fears of blacks taking control, and hypothetically, a Southerner viewing the monument might be reminded of the paranoid fears of slave rebellions long held in the South before the war.

Figure 4: Abraham Lincoln memorial, Washington, D.C

The third statue which demonstrated the hegemony of white masculinity in northern culture was the national memorial to Lincoln in Washington, D.C. (1922). This memorial, though slightly out of the period focused on in this chapter, was designed to
maneuver around the delicate topic of slavery. Sectional reconciliation had been achieved, thus the representations of slavery and emancipation that one might have expected in a monument to Lincoln were not prominent features of this memorial. By this time, segregation was established, and blacks and their history were marginalized. The victory of white masculinity was clearly demonstrated by the fact that the main inscription on the memorial specifically avoided the word “slavery,” even though Lincoln’s own speech carved in the memorial describes the war as “divine retribution for slavery’s offense.” Further, the President of Tuskegee University, Robert Moton, was invited to speak for blacks, but ironically, the blacks in attendance were relegated far to the rear section of the audience, set apart by a roadway from the white portion of the audience. It was as though Lincoln had become cleansed of anything related to emancipation. By the early twentieth-century, the process of establishing white masculine hegemony and sectional reconciliation was complete, while black counter-memories remained obscured, largely ignored or repressed by the adherents of whiteness.

Commemoration in the South

With the withdrawal of federal troops, the tone of commemoration in the South began to change. Commemorative activity shifted away from grieving and solemn

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50 Savage, 140.
51 Ibid, 140-141.
remembrances to an open celebration of the Confederacy’s legacy. The South’s actions in the Civil War became something of which to be openly proud of, and Southerners taking part in commemorative events hoped for the future vindication of the Confederate cause. Over time, some of the bitterness toward the North began to fade. The hostile rhetoric and lingering animosity between the two sides lessened, and a climate increasingly conducive to reconciliation began to form. In order to follow this shift in commemoration and its impact on sectional reconciliation, an examination of who participated in these commemorative activities and what motivated them to do so is necessary.

Central to the commemoration of the Civil War in the South were the Confederate veterans themselves. After the war, unlike their northern (GAR) counterparts, Confederate veterans did not immediately organize into region-wide groups. Though some veterans did form organizations, like the Virginians with their Association of the Army of Northern Virginia (AANVA), or came together due to circumstances like the death of Lee in the Lee Memorial Association, it was not until the 1880s and 1890s that serious efforts to form a region-wide organization began to bear fruit. The major organization of veterans in the South was the United Confederate Veterans (UCV), which would eventually take over the responsibility of shaping the legacy of the war from the Virginians. Instead of confining themselves to the ranks of the elites, the UCV was inclusive of all former Confederate veterans, and it attracted large numbers of them into the organization. Indeed, the Virginians attained neither the popularity nor the widespread influence that the UCV enjoyed. Thus, although the Lost Cause had its genesis under the Virginians, it was the
UCV and its heavily subscribed journal, the \textit{Confederate Veteran}, which quickly spread Lost Cause ideology throughout the South.\textsuperscript{52}

Though the UCV and the Virginians shared similarities, key differences made the UCV a greater vehicle for the transmission of southern memory to the general public both inside and outside of the South than the Virginians. Both groups’ interpretations of the war itself remained pretty much the same. Southerners fought for constitutional rights, not in defense of slavery. They fought to preserve their homes. The Confederacy lost because, as noted by Foster, “of overwhelming numbers not because of their own shortcomings, and, if pressed, most spokesmen of the celebration would have added that Longstreet had not helped any. They almost all enthusiastically embraced Lee, Jackson, and Davis as Confederate heroes.”\textsuperscript{53} Despite these similarities, however, the UCV reached a far wider audience than the Virginians.

Significant differences allowed the UCV to expand where the Virginians could not. The UCV did not dwell on the past as much as the elite-centered Virginians did. They recognized and addressed the changes taking place in late nineteenth-century southern society. In contrast to the Virginians’ fixation on hero worship, UCV celebrations of the Confederacy, which of course included reunions, extended the category of “hero” to include common soldiers as well as officers. They also emphasized the Confederate legacy

\textsuperscript{52} The \textit{Confederate Veteran} was actually the official journal of the UCV and two auxiliary organizations which became the USV (United Sons of Confederate Veterans) and the UDC (United Daughters of the Confederacy). Foster, 108-109.

\textsuperscript{53} Ibid, 125.
and its heroes as worthy of emulation, especially by children. The UCV acknowledged, in a white patriarchal way, the role of women as well. By glorifying the virtues of the common soldier and acknowledging the contributions of women, the UCV helped to establish a shared Confederate legacy among different segments of southern society, yet at the same time confined those segments to their traditional places.

With regard to the image of the common soldier that the UCV promoted, Foster writes that

praise for discipline and respect for private property within the Confederate ranks, commendation of the veterans’ role in rebuilding the South, and acclaim for the soldiers’ sacrifice of self for the good of society served indirectly to protect the New South. All contributed to an image of the Confederate soldier as a solid, law-abiding, loyal common man—a most desirable type in the tumultuous late nineteenth-century. The soldier was held up as a role model, a comforting image reassuring veterans of their place within society, while at the same time providing a model for emulation by the general public. In the UCV’s acknowledgement of contributions of women, the organization stressed their virtue as loyal, loving, helpful servants to their men amidst difficult times. Since many women had to step outside of the home to make ends meet, the UCV’s praise of them both “glorified the new labors that followed emancipation and reinforced traditional conceptions of female sex roles that the war challenged. The Confederate woman of the celebration, a role model for southern females as the private was for males,

54 Ibid, 120.

55 Ibid, 124.
trusted men to protect her and practiced purity, piety, and submissiveness."\(^{56}\) Thus, the UCV's influence helped to reinforce the hegemony of southern men in society along traditional lines, while at the same time directing Southerners, through the examples of the virtuous soldier and devoted woman, on how they should behave while facing the unsettling challenges of the period.

A representative example of the celebration of the Confederacy within the South occurred on May 30, 1894. On that date, Richmond unveiled its Confederate Soldiers' and Sailors' monument. As with many monument unveilings during this period, the ceremonies surrounding the event included "a parade, a poem, and a speech--all in

\(^{56}\)Ibid, 124-125.
celebration of the cause and the Confederate soldier.”

Unlike the somber, reserved commemorations that characterized early southern monument dedications, however, more than 100,000 cheering spectators attended the event. The description of the event in the *Southern Historical Society Papers* also noted the support of women in the crowd, “the majority of whom wore Confederate colors or carried Confederate flags.”

The parade itself featured as many as 10,000 marchers, including 2,000 children and 2,000 veterans, “who, fast passing beyond the brink of life, are transferring to their children and their children’s children memories of an event which will not perish in the world’s history.” Thus, both emulators and role models participated in the parade, making the event a site of commonality for them; it was a collective activity, ripe for the transmission of memories and values between generations.

The poetic part of the commemoration ceremony took place following an invocation, and the theme of both focused upon the private soldier. Dr. Hoge, the reverend who gave the invocation, summarized the private soldier this way:

The private soldier! He who heard the call his State had made to fight in freedom’s cause. Who left his home and all his loved ones there, with laughter on his lip, but with a tear-dimmed eye. Who on the march, in heat and cold of summer sun and wintry blast, still trod the path of duty with unaltering feet—who barefoot, ragged, starving, stood true to his country, firm in freedom’s cause. These privates in the ranks! These famished men! But see them when the day of conflict comes! With

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57 Ibid, 131.

58 “Unveiling of the Soldiers’ and Sailors’ Monument,” *Southern Historical Society Papers* v.22 (1894), 337.

maddening yell they spring upon the foe, and wave their flag in triumph o’er the field, or sleep there with the slain. 60

Thus, the image of the Confederate soldier presented by the speaker represented devotion to duty, self-sacrifice, and steadfastness. Again, the soldier stood as the image of solidity against the uncertainty of the times. His deprivation can also be seen as an image of moral uprightness and self-sacrifice against the materialism of a rising consumer culture in the new South. As for the poem itself, created by poet Armistead C. Gordon, similar motifs relating to the soldier’s courage, devotion to the freedom represented by his cause, and his steadfastness abound throughout. Missing from the poem, with all the talk of freedom, were, not unsurprisingly, the freedmen themselves. While women were not directly mentioned either, the cause of Virginia was represented metaphorically as a woman. Further highlighting the Lost Cause motif, the common themes of northern numerical superiority and the Battle of Gettysburg were briefly referenced. 61

The main oration was given by a minister, Reverend R. C. Cave, who defended the actions of the South in the war. He depicted the South as the victim, the weaker of the two sections, who had war forced upon it by the tyranny of the North. He associated the southern cause with English cavaliers, and portrayed the North as Puritans, even linked Abraham Lincoln with Oliver Cromwell, the representative of a tyrant to him. Cave clearly rested blame on the North, tying secession to constitutional issues, not slavery. Of course,

60 Ibid, 352.
61 Ibid, 354-358.
the merits of the private soldier were also hailed. In this speech, Cave brought up the topic of vindication as well, saying “at Appomattox, Puritanism, backed by overwhelming numbers and unlimited resources, prevailed. But brute force cannot settle questions of right and wrong.” Cave believed that the cause of the Confederacy was just, and that “the world shall yet decide... In truth’s clear, far-off light.” In other words, he believed history would eventually vindicate the South.62

Vindication from the North, however, could only come when the former enemies began to treat each other with a semblance of respect. Over time, inflammatory rhetoric began to slowly give way at least in public to speech more conciliatory in nature. Despite the tone of Cave’s oration, signs of decreasing hostility between Northerners and Southerners were growing as the end of the century neared, and veterans’ reunions were indicative of this.

Veterans’ reunions were a vital part of the Confederate celebration. At such events, veterans reminisced with one another, sharing their mutual experiences and keeping the memory of the war alive. Equally important, reunions were major social events, and the communities which hosted them were greatly affected by the veterans. With regard to sectional reconciliation, the hostile rhetoric between the two sides began to fade as the memory of the war changed. Instead of an epic tragedy filled with horror, the memory of the South’s role in the Civil War became a glorified legacy to be embraced. Veterans played a key role in establishing this change.
Confederate reunions were important events for both veterans and their surrounding communities. In the case of southern veterans, reunions were places where they could see their former comrades, catch up with one another, and reminisce about shared war experiences. They ranged in size from small local community reunions, to state-wide gatherings, to the massive region-wide annual meeting of the UCV itself. These events, regardless of size, were usually held at different sites every year. For example, in the war an individual unit’s recruits may have come from several towns, so the site of even local reunions would shift between these locales. These changes in location helped foster a sense of shared regional identity as people from different areas traveled to the reunions. As a result, various communities were linked to one another, and this in turn created ideal conditions for the transmission of shared Confederate memories between different areas. Reunions also helped bind Southerners within a shared tradition during a time of social and political unrest. By sharing the memory of their experiences during the war, reunions helped foster and preserve the collective memory of a Confederate past that anchored Southerners against the uncertainties of the present and the future. Thus, veterans helped themselves and the communities where reunions were held, bringing different communities together and uniting them around a shared collective memory of the Confederacy.  


Beyond the growth of regional identity and the transmission of Confederate memory, however, there were other ways in which reunions influenced the communities where they were held. Economics played a major role in these events. Reunions were big business and occupied much time and effort. Historian Keith S. Bohannon notes that, “Since most reunions involved hundreds if not thousands of participants, survivors’ associations and local planning committees began preparations many weeks before an event. The organizers’ myriad tasks included arranging lodging and contracting railroads to obtain discounted rates for the transportation of ex-soldiers and their families.” The amount of food alone could be staggering. Picnics, for instance, were commonplace at reunions. To prepare for them,

Local planners often canvassed their counties for weeks before an event asking for contributions of foodstuffs or money. Organizers of the 1886 combined reunion of the 5th and 13th Georgia Regiments in Upson County obtained seventy-one carcasses of pigs and sheep to barbecue, as well as “carloads of bread, cakes, chickens, etc.”

Thus reunions were both a burden and a boon to the community, as citizens donated time, effort, and money to making the reunions a success, while the influx of large numbers of visitors contributed to the local economy as well. Indeed, reunions were probably a greater boon than burden to communities, since beyond business considerations there was

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64 Ibid, 91.
65 Ibid, 90-91.
also the honor gleaned by being the host site. This was exemplified by the annual UCV reunion itself, which was fiercely fought over by different cities wanting to serve as host.  

In terms of memory transmission, however, the most important role played by veterans was educational. On the one hand the veterans sought to preserve the legacy of the Confederacy for future generations, and they wanted their version of history preserved, not that written by outsiders, meaning Northerners. Fortunately for them, on the other side of the equation was a generation that had little or no firsthand experience of the war, either because they had not yet been born or had been very young at the time, yet wanted to know what the experience was like. “The civilians, especially those too young to remember the war, came to honor the veterans and to learn from them. ‘Confederate Reunions are the finest of schools for us who didn’t arrive in time to be part of the original excitement,’ observed one young woman.” Indeed, reunions, “taught Confederate history, intensified southern loyalties, and reinforced proper behavior. They served, as one organizer summarized it, as ‘the annual festivals of the South.”’ Thus, veterans found a receptive audience for their memories. However, the memories imparted through reunion activities such as parades and picnics were far different from the actual experiences of war, so what kind of memory was being transmitted to those younger generations? If the full horror of war was given to them, it is unlikely that so many would treat memories of the

\[66\] Foster, 133.
\[67\] Ibid, 103.
\[68\] Foster, 135.
war as “exciting.” The explanation for the glorification of the war comes from the changing accounts of the veterans themselves.

Veterans helped transform the memory of the war from a horrific tragedy into a glorious legacy, and this change also aided sectional reconciliation. This change did not mean that veterans had let go of all their bitterness or that they would not get upset when divisive issues like slavery were given as the South’s rationale to go to war. In fact, such issues remained alive and were sometimes passionately defended at reunion meetings.69 Instead, over time, a refocusing of memory, at least in public, away from some of the war’s more unpleasant or controversial aspects, occurred. For example, veterans tended to embellish accounts of their actions during the war. As Bohannon documented:

Veterans of the ill-fated Army of Tennessee sometimes mentioned battlefield defeats in their reunion speeches but invariably defended the actions of their individual units. An ex-officer from the 39th Georgia recalled the May 1863 Confederate defeat at Baker’s Creek, Mississippi, by reminding his comrades how they “stood shoulder to shoulder a single regiment, and received the charge of a whole division of Federals.” Although this regiment broke and ran at Baker’s Creek, surrendered at Vicksburg, and performed poorly in several engagements during the Atlanta Campaign, the former officer insisted that “the 39th never failed to come up to the full measure of her duty... not one page of her history we would hide from view.”70

Further, official speeches delivered at reunions usually avoided controversial topics or at least treated them with care:

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69 Bohannon, 103.
70 Ibid, 93.
The oration of ex-governor and former Confederate colonel James M. Smith at the 13th Georgia's 1885 reunion was typical of the talks delivered at countless reunions. Smith spoke at length "of the affection that existed between the members, of the trials and privations they had undergone together, of the manly brotherly kindnesses that had been granted by each other" and related a number of wartime anecdotes. Speakers such as Smith seldom if ever referred to topics such as desertion, demoralization in the Confederate army and on the home front, incompetent officers, and poor battlefield performances by their units. 71

This selective refocusing of Civil War memory toward the bravery of the soldiers and away from the horrors of battle and divisive issues like race and politics, allowed the former adversaries to view each other with mutual respect, since as soldiers they endured similar adversities during the war. Foster noted that "Time and a tendency when reminiscing to downplay the war's violence and gore . . . helped center the veteran's memory on the courage and camaraderie of battle rather than on its political implications or bloody consequences." 72

The downplaying of divisive issues also led to an increased willingness by veterans on both sides to extend the hand of friendship to their former adversaries, and they began to send and invite delegates to each others' gatherings. These blue-gray reunions had the effect of furthering sectional reconciliation, as Northerners and Southerners spoke in praise of their former adversaries, addressing them as equals instead of trying to belittle

71 This avoidance of controversy by officials of the veterans' associations, however, did not mean that individual veterans remained silent on those issues. Indeed, just below the surface, most Confederate veterans passionately maintained the South's justification to go to war over constitutional issues and remained bitter toward the North's attempt to change the racial order within the South during Reconstruction. Ibid, 92-95.

72 Foster, 67.
or emasculate them.  Northerners began to respect southern martial valor and avoided rhetoric which addressed Southerners as rebels and slave-holders, while Southerners came to see their white counterparts as equally courageous. Thus, the seeds were planted for sectional reconciliation and southern vindication. Nevertheless, reconciliation between the sections may have taken much longer had it not been for one critical event: the Spanish-American War.

**The Spanish-American War and Its Role in Reconciliation**

A watershed event on the path toward sectional reconciliation was the 1898 Spanish-American War. The war sped up the process of reconciliation, as Northerners and Southerners united in a common cause against a mutual enemy. Beyond this, the ideals of whiteness were also integral to this conflict, since the enemy was portrayed as non-white. Thus, a common appeal to whiteness once again formed an area of commonality between North and South. Finally, by their support of the war, Southerners again appeared as loyal citizens to Northerners. In turn, the praise of Northerners for their former Civil War adversaries helped Southerners feel as if they had been vindicated, and that once more, they were united as equals under one nation.

The war itself will not be discussed in great detail in this thesis, but briefly, the spark that ignited the war was the sinking of the battleship Maine in Havana Harbor.

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73 Bohannon, 94-95.
(February 15, 1898). Despite the lack of evidence that Spain blew up the ship, public opinion rapidly galvanized against the Spanish, spurred on by jingoistic stories printed by yellow journalists. The United States easily won decisive land and naval victories in Cuba and Philippines, and the war soon ended. Cuba gained independent status, and Spain ceded Guam, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines to the United States.74

What was critical for the reconciliation process was the patriotic spirit with which Southerners embraced the war. A few Southerners, in fact, had longed for a chance to fight a foreign enemy, and the patriotic fervor that sprang up in both the North and South following the sinking of the Maine was precisely what they wanted.75 The South would have a chance to prove its loyalty to the country and vindicate itself. Senator Clay of Georgia, in a speech in Washington, captured the sentiments of Southerners about the war:

The people of the South are conservative, patriotic, loyal to the flag of our country and are anxious to live in peace with the world, but they are also against tyranny and oppression and human butchery, and if they must fight to preserve the honor of the nation or to relieve the suffering and distress and prevent the unjust effusion of the blood of their neighbors, they are not afraid to do so.76

Many Southerners enthusiastically volunteered to fight, and two former Confederate generals, Fitzhugh Lee and Joseph Wheeler, served during the war as generals in the United States army. Even the UCV itself considered sending former Confederate general John B. Gordon to Washington to offer the services of “old Confederates” to the cause, and

74 Piehl, 87-88.
75 Foster, 145.
76 “Clay Delivers Ringing Speech,” Atlanta Constitution, 5 April, 1898.
at their reunion they drafted a resolution of support for the war and sent it to President McKinley.77

While there were a few dissenters, the patriotic spirit displayed by Southerners was not lost on those in the North. Northerners and Southerners alike saw the war as an opportunity to free the Cuban people, and more importantly, to establish the United States in the eyes of the world. Southerners had the added concern that Northerners acknowledge their honor and treat them as equals. They wanted to “free themselves of northern suspicions of their loyalty and to establish southern honor.”78 By and large, Southerners achieved their aims. In works of popular culture, in songs, stories, and plays, Northerners praised the combined patriotism of North and South in the conflict, and they especially praised the manliness and martial valor of Southerners.79 A further example of northern responsiveness to the efforts of Southerners appeared in an Atlanta Constitution article on May 20, 1898. The article talks about growing sentiment in the North for returning captured Confederate regimental battle flags to Southerners, and cites the “fraternal spirit which the present crisis has served to engender in the hearts of the people of this country” as the rationale for Northerners wanting to do so. Among those quoted in the story was Governor Bushnell of Ohio, who, on the subject of returning the flags, stated:

77 Foster, 146-148.
78 Ibid, 148.
79 Silber, 178-181.
When the plan was broached some years ago, I am frank to say that I was opposed to it; but conditions have changed, and there is no longer any reason why the late confederates should not have their flags. This war has shown conclusively that we are now one nation. Why should we longer cherish emblems captured from our brethren? We know that the people of the south are as firm defenders of the stars and stripes as we are; but the flags which they lost are dear to them as mementoes of the struggle in which comrades and brothers, fathers and sons perished. By all means let the people of the south have their flags. This is the time to return them. We will cement in doing so the friendship which exists between the two sections, and we will show to the world that we are one great united nation in sentiment, politics, and patriotism.80

Thus, Southerners could indeed begin to feel like they were part of a reunified country, as Northerners acknowledged their honor, loyalty, and martial qualities. These were, however, not the only factors uniting Northerners and Southerners in the Spanish-American war. Race played a critical role as well.

In the war with Spain, race was another factor which united Northerners and Southerners. Nina Silber writes,

The war with Spain accentuated other features of the new patriotic consensus as well. For one, both northern and southern whites understood their patriotic reconciliation as the cohesion of the Anglo-Saxon race. The Spanish-American War seemed to confirm the natural unity of southern and northern white people. Even imperialists and anti-imperialists, who often subscribed to different racial philosophies, similarly envisioned the war as a victory for white American unity.81

Spain and its colonial possessions were non-white adversaries to both Northerners and Southerners, and the people of these regions were considered inferior. Nowhere was this more evident than in the Philippines, where a brutal guerrilla war between natives and

81 Silber, 180-181.
American forces took place following the United States’ absorption of the territory.

Despite overwhelming support for the Spanish-American War, it was the debate over annexing the Philippines that drew the most criticism from Southerners, for having faced the problems caused by “ruling” over a large non-white population themselves, they feared “that annexation would bring millions of dark-skinned people under the government of and possibly into the United States.” Most southern Congressmen in fact voted against the annexation. 82 The importance of white masculinity in the conflict was highlighted also. Silber notes that “Spanish atrocities against light-skinned Cuban women received prominent attention in the press, thereby playing up the need for a chivalric response.” Again, white males from both sections responded affirmatively to such rhetoric, and the response of American men in defense of honor was praised. 83

The Spanish-American War thus stands as a highpoint in the road to sectional reconciliation. To be sure, divisive issues continued to fester beneath the surface, but as Northerners and Southerners united to fight a common enemy, those issues faded to the background. Northerners instead praised Southerners for their loyalty and admired their martial/masculine qualities. Southerners, in turn, felt that they were finally equal participants within the country once again. Military action, however, was not the only vehicle that southerners used to gain vindication for themselves. In the realm of scholarship, Confederate ideology was about to exert its bold over Civil War history.

82 Foster, 149-151.
Civil War History and the Advent of Professional Historians

The development of southern interpretations of the Civil War, as noted in chapter 1, was begun by the Virginians. It was they who set down the original tenets of the Lost Cause, and justified the Confederacy's legitimacy. As time passed, Confederate veterans took an increasingly active interest in their legacy. Nevertheless, as historian W. Fitzhugh Brundage points out,

During the first two decades after the Civil War white southerners, despite their purported obsession with their heritage, manifested little organized interest in their past and failed to agree upon its meaning. Although certain core ideas about the region's history emerged, they remained inchoate, even contradictory. So scattered were the organizations concerned with southern history and so small were their memberships that they could not realistically propagate an authoritative collective memory for white southerners. 84

The shaping of southern Civil War history into a unified, authoritative tradition was, ironically, left to white southern women. As W. Fitzhugh Brundage notes, white southern women may have undertaken the task of becoming the guardians of southern history for a number of reasons, ranging from a natural need to reestablish the traditional roles of white womanhood within their society following the war, to a buttressing of their importance in

83 Presumably, the defense of honor referred to the honor of the United States and Cuba as well. Silber, 183.

society against “increasingly exaggerated assertions of men’s roles in human progress.” As exemplified in the prior example of the Chicago Exposition of 1893, white men increasingly linked notions of civilization exclusively to themselves, marginalizing the place of women and non-whites in the world. Despite men’s notions that they should be relegated to the domestic sphere, women in the South had long exercised control over matters relating to culture and, as Brundage writes,

The essential point is that substantial numbers of white women refused to surrender either the field of history or the realm of public culture to men. They insisted that women of culture were integral to human progress. The field of history provided one opening through which white women could revise the link between manliness and civilization. By giving meaning to the past, women claimed for themselves the work of recording and narrating the progress of civilization. Through the crafting of historical memory, they laid claim to a new source of cultural authority. Women may have been compelled to write history in part to demonstrate that they had an important position in the “civilization” promoted by white males. This did not mean, however, that southern women eliminated the traditional boundaries which defined their society, including the antebellum hierarchies of race and gender. Instead, southern women wrote southern history in a way that was consistent with their role as supporters of their men. In other words, while women took the lead in interpreting the meaning of the war, they did so in a way that “reassured white men of their manliness and authority, and of

85 Ibid, 116-118.
86 Ibid, 119.
feminine deference." Thus, their interpretation of history was not at all antithetical to the growth of white masculinity. Indeed, their writings likely fostered it.88

Southern women were thus very active in the formation of a unified Confederate tradition. Near the turn of the century, numerous women's clubs sprang up throughout the region, dedicated to both "filiation and history."89 These organizations formed a network of strength for the preservation of southern history, and with their large memberships, women exerted a heavy influence within their communities in matters of historical import, and they made their presence felt especially when views contrary to their accepted standards arose. In conjunction with this, white southern women's clubs interpreted their version of southern history as "corrected history." In their commemorative activities, they aimed to remove the "perjorative and dismissive portraits of the region and its past propagated by nonsoutherners."90 An example of their influence occurred in 1911, when a young history professor at the University of Florida, Enoch M. Banks, questioned the legitimacy of secession:

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87 Ibid, 117.
88 Ibid, 132.
89 Ibid, 119.
90 Ibid, 121.
Members of the UDC and UCV were unswayed by Banks's conclusions that "in the calm light of history" secession was contrary to the national interest and that "the North was relatively in the right while the South was relatively in the wrong." They berated the University of Florida for employing an historian who was "not fitted to teach true and unprejudiced history." In little more than a month Banks resigned. Eager to appease the custodians of the Confederate tradition, both Governor Albert W. Gilchrist and University of Florida president Albert A. Murphree hailed the banishment of an historian with such unsound views.91

White southern women thus exerted a tremendous influence on the Confederate tradition during its formative years. Ultimately, however, their influence began to wane, especially after World War I, since, as Brundage notes, "The historical connections that organized white women drew between race, gender, and "civilization" lost some of their persuasive power at a time when psychology, consumerism, and modernist culture eroded nineteenth-century ideals of masculine and feminine behavior."92 With the decline of women's groups as the guardians of southern history, professional historians came to the fore.

A major difference between the professional historians and the women's groups was that while the women influenced history within the South itself, professional historians spread southern history nationally. It should also be noted that many southern historians grew up in the Confederate tradition espoused by veterans and women's organizations, and thus they were inclined toward the southern version of Civil War history from the start. Indeed, many early historians in the postwar South counted women's groups among their key constituencies and solicited their support. Thus, their version of history was more than

91 Ibid, 127.
92 Ibid, 131.
likely in line with the Confederate tradition espoused by the women. Additionally, unlike the women’s groups, which declined as the foundation for their interpretations of the Confederate legacy weakened, historians embraced the new ways of thinking and incorporated them into their work. The key factor behind the spread of southern history beyond the region can be summed up with one word: consensus.

In an era of increased conciliation between North and South, historians also jumped on the bandwagon. Along with the growth of white supremacy, historians of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century were quick to adopt racialist themes into their writings. Historian Hugh Tulloch describes pre-revisionist Civil War historiography this way:

To put the matter with disarming crudeness—and it can be—with the fundamental presumption of black racial inferiority assumed by most white historians, the historiography of the Civil War era between 1877 and, say, 1945, falls neatly into place. Slavery, once justified on the grounds of social control, was now conceded to be an evil and southern secession was likewise conceded to be an error, because the Union was sacred and indissoluble. Because the South lost the Civil War, the war was deemed by southern historians to be a bad thing and, therefore, needless and avoidable, and the blame for its outbreak was attached to the hyperbolical fanaticism of northern abolitionists. But it was the abolitionists who, together with radical Republicans, gave racialist historians their easiest victory. To free the slave was right and proper; to go further and press for racial equality was not. On this matter, at least, both northern and southern historians could agree and forge a national consensus.

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93 Ibid, 124.
Northern and southern historians of the period agreed that the expansion of freedman’s rights was a tragic mistake. Historian Peter Novick, in That Noble Dream, notes the compromises between the two sides. On the one hand, southern historians “were in varying degrees, willing to concede that secession had been unconstitutional, and that slavery, while its evils had been exaggerated by bigoted northerners, had been wrong and held back southern development. Increasingly, somewhat grudgingly, former Confederates expressed satisfaction with the outcome of the war.” On the northern side, as the century drew to a close, historians there began to agree with their counterparts in the South that the abolitionists had gone too far, and that Reconstruction was wrong. Additionally historians of both sections easily adopted racialist theories into their way of thinking, not only because they believed in white supremacy, but because such thought was accepted at the time, both academically and scientifically. For example, the graduate research school at Johns Hopkins under the direction of Herbert Baxter “propagated a genetic theory of historical continuity” that had at its center the notion that it was the destiny of Anglo-Saxons to “expand and progress at the expense of other races, of whatever colour, red or black.”

As noted by Tulloch, two of the most dominant historians in the early twentieth-century were Ulrich B. Phillips, and W. A. Dunning, and they stand as perfect complimentary representations of the consensual racialist thinking that proliferated in this

era. Ulrich B. Phillips, a Southerner, was the foremost historian of antebellum slave studies, and he openly stated that the defining characteristic of the South was that it was, in its essence, a “white man’s country.” Dunning, a Northerner, attracted a sizeable following of researchers dedicated to studying the effects of Reconstruction in the South. At the center of their research, however, stood the premise that Reconstruction was a disaster “happily brought to an end by southern ‘redemption,’ white supremacy and ‘home rule’ for that section by 1877.” Dunning deplored the corruption of President Grant’s two administrations, and his bias against the Republicans led him to reinforce “the caricature of ‘carpetbaggers’ from the North, of ‘scalawag’ collaborators from the South, and of ignorant blacks who all came together to despoil and exploit the prostrate South.” Since both historians held in common such racialist, pro-southern sentiments, it is no wonder that their works seem to reconcile sectional differences so neatly.

Ultimately, the work of consensus historians served to further the growth of white supremacy, and aided the process of national reconciliation along its lines. The slightly modified southern historical interpretation of the war became accepted by northern historians, and collectively, historians of both sections presented a version of Civil War history that overshadowed competing narratives, most notably those which gave blacks a voice. For example, the work of black historians like W.E.B. Du Bois and Carter

96 Tulloch, 8.
97 Ibid, 11-12.
Woodson, with few exceptions, went unnoticed by the mainstream historical profession.\textsuperscript{98} It would take decades, and a long struggle by revisionist historians, to begin the movement of the profession away from the historiography established at the turn of the century.

In summation, the celebration of the Confederacy and the spread of southern Civil War interpretations aided in the process of sectional reconciliation. They did so by appealing to white masculinity in both regions, while at the same time downplaying divisive issues such as class relationships within northern and southern society. Commemorative activities helped both Northerners and Southerners establish continuity in their societies, anchoring them within a shared tradition against the social tensions brought by industrial growth. As the former adversaries began to downplay controversial issues and respect each other as equals, they moved away from the hostile rhetoric which continued to divide them and closer toward rapprochement. The Spanish-American War was the culmination of the South’s vindication as former Confederates proved their loyalty to the Union and once again were treated as equals by their northern counterparts. In turn, the war greatly sped up the process of reconciliation since former adversaries fought united against a common enemy. Finally, the establishment of an authoritative version of southern history by women, and the consensus reached by northern and southern historians on the Civil War and Reconstruction, allowed the southern version of its history to be

\textsuperscript{98} Ibid, 9.
accepted on a national level. This further aided reconciliation along racial lines, furthered the cause of white supremacy, and cast a long shadow on Civil War historiography.

The influence of southern interpretations of the war can still be felt today. This is especially true with regard to popular culture, which introduced the southern version of the war to a nation-wide, mass audience. Chapter 3 examines the part popular culture has played in both the transmission of Confederate ideology to mainstream America at the turn of the twentieth century, and the perpetuation of that ideology within American discourse well after the collective memories of those who lived through the Civil War era had faded away.
CHAPTER 3

POPULAR CULTURE AND THE SPREAD OF CONFEDERATE IDEOLOGY IN AMERICA, 1905-1939

One of the key elements that propelled southern interpretations of the Civil War beyond a regional to a national consciousness was popular culture. Depictions of the war, in print and on screen, have helped to sustain and influence the way generations of Americans have envisioned and remembered the period of Civil War and Reconstruction. Representations of history in popular culture are a significant factor in determining how historical events are remembered. As historian Jim Cullen notes in his book, The Civil War in Popular Culture,

This is the power of popular culture: to offer large numbers of people explanations of why things are the way things are—and what, if anything, can be done about it. Infuse this power with history—explanations of how things came to be the way they are—and you have a potent agent for influencing the thinking, and thus the actions, of millions of people.1

Following the fighting, the southern perspective on the war was, for the most part, developed and maintained exclusively within the region. If the sectional bitterness that remained at the close of the war and throughout Reconstruction had continued, the southern version of the war would not have spread beyond its borders. Sectional animosity diminished in intensity, though, as the passage of time and unifying events such as the

Spanish-American War fostered increased reconciliation between the former adversaries. By the turn of the century, an atmosphere increasingly conducive to the acceptance of southern views about the war began to take shape. It was in this environment that popular culture favorable to the southern interpretations of the Civil War found a niche. As these works of popular culture became commercial successes, playing to an ever-widening and receptive audience, they were able to exert their influence on American understandings of the meaning of the Civil War, and to perpetuate the southern legacy of the war.

This chapter deconstructs four works of popular culture which sustained and influenced the remembrance of the Civil War for generations of Americans after the turn of the century (1900). These works helped move the southern version of the war into the mainstream consciousness of Americans nationwide, and have exerted an influence on Americans’ perspectives on the period ever since. Two books and the movies they inspired are discussed here. First, Thomas Dixon’s novel *The Clansman* (1905)\(^2\) and D. W. Griffith’s movie *The Birth of a Nation* (1915)\(^3\) brought southern postwar themes to mass audiences in the first two decades of the century. These themes were sustained, though altered or toned down, in Margaret Mitchell’s novel *Gone With The Wind*

\[\footnotesize{\text{\(^2\)Thomas Dixon, Jr, *The Clansman: An Historical Romance of the Ku Klux Klan* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1905).}}\]
\[\footnotesize{\text{\(^3\)Birth of a Nation, prod. and dir. D. W. Griffith, 154 min., Los Angeles, CA: Republic Home Video, [1991], c1915, videocassette.}}\]
(1936)\(^4\), and in the movie adaptation of Mitchell's novel produced by David O. Selznick (1939).\(^5\) Both of these later works served as a bridge for Americans' remembrances of the war, spanning the first and last halves of the century and sustaining the legacy of the war in the minds of those who read and viewed *Gone With The Wind*. Additionally, I have chosen to base the chronology around these the dates that these works first made their appearance. The first two works center around the turn of the century and World War I, recounting the social conditions within America before the Depression. The later two works are set within the Depression and before World War II, in a climate that looked back on the past with nostalgia and before revisionist historians began to shift the story of the Civil War away from the southern perspective.

**The Clansman and The Birth of a Nation**

The creators of *The Clansman* and *The Birth of a Nation* found widespread, receptive audiences for their works in the first decades of the twentieth century. America was experiencing a period of rapid industrial growth that brought new social challenges, both of which were perceived by many as threatening to the social cohesion of American society. Thomas Dixon, Jr. and David Wark (D.W.) Griffith, through their respective

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works, tried to reinforce traditional social values as they saw them against the subversive trends they discerned within American society. An emphasis on white racial supremacy, the continuation of the traditional patriarchal order within society, and the defense of the southern Civil War legacy, now transformed into a national story, were integral components of their moralistic crusade to preserve the status quo.

Thomas Dixon’s The Clansman

Thomas Dixon, Jr., author of the Clansman was born on January 11, 1864. He grew up in North Carolina during Reconstruction and was heavily influenced by his environment. As a youth he recalled watching a session of the black-dominated legislature in South Carolina, and also remembered the excitement of hearing Ku Klux Klan riders galloping past his house in the dead of night. At home, he was raised in a stern, religious, morally stringent environment. His father, Thomas Dixon, Sr., was a Baptist preacher who held a deep respect for higher learning and a disdain for licentious behavior. These values and his father’s passion for learning rubbed off on Dixon, who, after much soul searching, would eventually become a preacher himself.6

The younger Dixon’s zeal for knowledge allowed him ultimately to move beyond his humble surroundings on the struggling family farm. Dixon worked his way

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up from a background of poverty and minimal formal education to enter Wake Forest University, where he excelled as a student and orator. At the university he also became acquainted with Woodrow Wilson, and the two shared many long, informative conversations. Upon entering the working world, however, Dixon became a difficult figure to characterize. His vocational, political, and spiritual allegiances shifted at different periods of his adult life. He vacillated in career choices, including stints as a lawyer, an actor, and a legislator. He supported the Democratic Party for decades, yet eventually came to oppose it. He started out as an agnostic, became a preacher, then turned away from a career in the church. Perhaps he was never really able to define himself, but one ambition remained clear: Dixon sought to make a difference in society, and it was as a writer where he probably had his greatest impact.

The Clansman, Thomas Dixon’s greatest literary work in terms of both financial success and articulating a social message, is a story about the Reconstruction period in the South. The Clansman was Dixon’s second novel. It was a greater financial success than his first, The Leopard’s Spots, though it incorporated many of the same themes, especially with regard to the defense of white womanhood and white racial superiority over blacks. Infuriated over any challenges to southern honor, Dixon began

7 Wilson was a graduate student, and both he and Dixon shared common interests, which included politics and the theater. Ibid, 51.

8 Dixon achieved notoriety as a preacher as well, but his writings in all probability reached a far greater audience. I am listing almost the entire book by Raymond Cook as the page references here, since they give a thorough recounting of his careers. Ibid, 33-228.
writing in order to tell the “true story” of the South. The trigger that shot him into action was a popular stage dramatization of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. Dixon felt that the South was unjustly portrayed in that play. He was also dismayed that the “southern viewpoint” of Civil War and Reconstruction history had not been adequately represented in fiction, and he was obligated to “set the record straight.”

Despite much criticism, over *The Leopard’s Spots*, it sold very well. Thus, *The Clansman* was eagerly anticipated, and it was favorably received by the reading public, selling as many as 40,000 copies in ten days. Within a few months, over a million copies had been sold.

The story of *The Clansman* centers around two families, the Camerons and the Stonemans. The Camerons, a wealthy slaveholding family from South Carolina, embody the cause of the defeated South. The Stonemans represent the victorious, though misguided North, which sought to undermine the power of the former slaveholders in the South through the policies of Radical Reconstruction.

The novel begins in a northern hospital just outside of Washington, D.C. Ben Cameron, the novel’s protagonist, lies wounded in a bed there, where he meets Elsie Stoneman, daughter of Austin. Austin Stoneman is the leader of the Radical Republicans in Congress. Cameron is a Confederate colonel and has been sentenced to death.

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9 Ibid, 105.


11 Cook, 131.
Through Elsie’s intervention, Cameron’s mother obtains a pardon for him from President Lincoln, who Dixon describes as a companionate “great heart.” The focal point of Dixon’s Reconstruction story, indeed of Dixon’s views about blacks in general, is highlighted by the differences between Lincoln and Austin Stoneman, who wanted Cameron’s execution to proceed.

In the novel, the compassionate Lincoln is contrasted with Stoneman, a man portrayed as obsessed with inflicting revenge on the South. His hatred was partly attributed to the Confederate invasion of Pennsylvania, where Lee had destroyed Stoneman’s iron mill investments, but mostly because Southerners, if accepted back into the Union as equal citizens, would represent a major threat to Radical Republican (i.e. Stoneman’s) power. It should also be noted that Dixon makes veiled references to Lydia Brown¹², a mulatto house servant of Stoneman with whom he is apparently having an interracial affair. Perhaps Dixon was simply showing Stoneman’s level of “corruption” by displaying his willingness to accept this type of (for Dixon) immoral relationship, as well as his fondness for gambling and drinking, but it seems likely that Dixon was also trying to make a case about the corrupting influence that interracial relationships could have (in his view) on men supposedly possessing high integrity. Lincoln, representing the Executive branch of government and inclined toward leniency in dealing with the

¹²The last name of Brown is rather interesting, since one can infer that Dixon gave this name to Lydia to highlight her mulatto status. The name may also reference back to John Brown, the radical abolitionist.
former rebel states, is the major obstacle to Stoneman's plan to place Southerners under the mercy of their former slaves by granting black suffrage and disenfranchising their former masters. In fact, the novel shows Lincoln as a proponent of the eventual recolonization of former slaves outside of the United States. This was a stance the real Lincoln gave some verbal support to early in the war, and Dixon used this to full effect.  

Dixon's central argument about how to deal with blacks is stated in a scene featuring a heated conversation between Lincoln and Stoneman. Dixon's Lincoln says, "I believe that there is a physical difference between the white and black races which will forever forbid their living together on terms of political and social equality. If such be attempted, one must go to the wall." Stoneman replies, "Very well, pin the southern white man to the wall. Our party and the Nation will then be safe." Lincoln answers, "That is to say, destroy African slavery and establish white slavery under Negro masters! That would be progress with a vengeance."

As the novel progresses, Lincoln is assassinated, opening the way for Stoneman, the master of Congress, to establish black suffrage in the South. Stoneman's

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13 C. Vann Woodward notes that Lincoln "knew that there were limits beyond which popular conviction and conscience could not be pushed in his time." Lincoln thus said to a delegation of black leaders (despite what he may have felt internally), "But even when you cease to be slaves . . . you are yet far removed from being placed on an equality with the white race . . . The aspiration of men is to enjoy equality with the best when free, but on this broad continent not a single man of your race is made the equal of a single man of ours . . . I cannot alter it if I would. It is a fact . . . It is better for us both, therefore, to be separated." C. Vann Woodward, The Burden of Southern History (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1960), 80-81.

14 Dixon, The Clansman, 45.
son Phil, meanwhile, falls in love with Margaret Cameron, Ben's sister. Austin Stoneman becomes ill due to overwork, and is told to convalesce in warmer climates. He goes to the village of Piedmont, South Carolina, home of the Camerons. There, through his lieutenant, Silas Lynch, a mulatto who eventually is voted in as Lieutenant Governor under the Reconstruction administration in South Carolina, Stoneman continues to bring about his plan to invert the racial order in the South, thereby keeping the Radicals in perpetual control over the nation. The Reconstruction laws are enacted, and blacks gain suffrage while their former masters suffer in poverty. Blacks take control of the state legislatures, encouraged to vote through the influence of Republican agitators promising the well-known "forty acres and a mule." Whites, meanwhile, are disenfranchised and some former slaves begin to behave haughtily toward their old masters. This suffering triggers the formation of a secret resistance movement against the Radical Republicans and their policies, which emerges as the Ku Klux Klan. Ben Cameron is revealed as the main KKK leader in the state, holding the title of Grand Dragon.

The nexus of the novel is the rape and suicide of Marion Lenoir, along with the death of her mother, both friends of the Camerons. Marion and her mother commit suicide after Marion's rape at the hands of Gus, a former slave of Ben Cameron's father now turned Federal soldier. They leap off a cliff to uphold their womanly virtue and family honor. Ben and his father discover the bodies at the base of the cliff, and Ben's father, who is a doctor, begins an autopsy on them. Through "scientific" analysis, Dr. Cameron examines the eyes of the deceased using a special magnifying lens, and
observes a "retinal image" of the killer, namely Gus, imprinted in the mother's eyes. A hunt by the Klan for the rapist then begins, and Gus is eventually lynched, preserving the honor of the dead Lenoirs. His body is thrown on the lawn of Lieutenant Governor Silas Lynch. The victims of Gus' attack become martyrs for the Klan's cause of delivering the state from black Republican rule. The drama is heightened when Ben Cameron calls the Klan to general action against the Radicals through a symbolic ritual. He extinguishes a burning cross in a cup holding the blood of the victims saying, "The Fiery Cross of old Scotland's hills! I quench its flames in the sweetest blood that ever stained the sands of Time." The cross becomes the standard for the Klan, carried to different Klan organizations throughout the state and neighboring regions as a signal to rise up.

Phil Stoneman, meanwhile, kills a drunken black soldier who has insulted Margaret Cameron by making a sexual advance toward her. His father, Austin, infuriated at both the lynching and continued Klan activities against the government and its black constituents, and suspecting the Camerons to be leaders of the resistance, seeks to have Ben Cameron arrested and executed. Ben, present during Phil's defense of Margaret's honor, allows Phil to escape and is arrested in his place, playing right into Stoneman's hands. Phil returns, however, and manages to switch places with Ben, who rides to organize a Klan rescue. Stoneman does not know the switch has taken place and orders the speedy trial and execution of Ben Cameron to commence, conveniently traveling out

15 Ibid, 326.
of town to circumvent any appeals to him. He is warned about the switch by Margaret Cameron, and races to save his son before it is too late, regretting how much the situation had gotten out of hand and acknowledging that the view of the Southerners and Lincoln toward the former slaves was the correct one. Meanwhile, the Klan launches its raid, freeing Ben and defeating the Radical forces, thus saving the day. Simultaneously, Klan action frees the state and neighboring states from black Republican rule and returns control to white Southerners. The final line in the novel is Ben Cameron telling Elsie what the victory fires lit throughout the region mean: “that I am a successful revolutionist--that Civilization has been saved, and the South redeemed from shame.”

Two themes run throughout the work. On the surface, The Clansman is a romance narrative, focusing on the common reconciliatory trope of former adversaries falling in love. A double bonding takes place, as Ben Cameron (South) falls in love with Elsie Stoneman (North), and Phil Stoneman (North) falls for Margaret Cameron (South). The more significant of these relationships, however, is that of Ben and Elsie, which shows an inversion of previous reconciliationist romance stories. Instead of the northern man marrying the southern woman, a southern man wins the hand of a northern woman. Nina Silber notes that this change empowers and asserts the masculinity of the southern

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16 Ibid, 374.
male while diminishing that of the northern, an important distinction revealing how much the social climate between the two sections had changed.\(^{17}\)

The second, and more controversial aspect of the novel, deals with the racial upheavals imposed on the South during Reconstruction by the Radical Republican controlled Congress. The leader of that Congress, Thaddeus Stevens, was the model for Dixon’s Austin Stoneman, a politically powerful though physically crippled man. In other words, although politically strong, Dixon’s Stoneman, through his infirmity, represented an emasculated Northerner. In both *The Leopard’s Spots* and *The Clansman*, “Dixon portrayed northern men, especially those who defended Radical Reconstruction and the rights of southern blacks, as weak and feminine.”\(^{18}\) Dixon’s story sets forth the notion that the giving of power to blacks was misguided and in the end dangerous to the stability of society. Such a view was in step with Dixon’s solutions for the race problem in America, that blacks either must submit to the superiority of whites or they must be removed from contact with whites entirely. Dixon advocated the old idea of colonizing Liberia with the entire black population of America, a view he represents through the words of Lincoln in the novel.\(^{19}\)


\(^{18}\) Ibid, 185.

\(^{19}\) Cook, 120.
There was much controversy when *The Clansman* was published. Critics questioned the accuracy of the historical record portrayed in the novel, most especially with regard to Dixon’s attack on Thaddeus Stevens. Nevertheless, Dixon was able to defend himself against the charges of his critics, and the work enjoyed enormous popular success. In defending himself on the subject of race, Dixon’s views on blacks were highly ironic, if not downright hypocritical. A *Saturday Evening Post* article quotes his views on blacks as a whole:

I have for the Negro race only pity and sympathy, though every large convention of Negroes since the appearance of my first historical novel on the race problem has gone out of its way to denounce me and declare my books caricatures and libels on their people. Their mistake is a natural one. My books are hard reading for the Negro, and yet the Negroes, in denouncing them, are unwittingly denouncing one of their best friends.

Further,

As a friend of the Negro race I claim that he should have the opportunity for the highest, noblest and freest development of his full, rounded manhood. He has never had this opportunity in America, either North or South, and he never can have it. The forces against him are overwhelming.

In other words, Dixon reasoned that he was helping blacks by encouraging their segregation and out migration from the United States and away from whites, because he thought they could never be equal or achieve equality within the country. Thus, even

\[20\] Cook, 127.

though Dixon wrote extremely racist works which portrayed blacks as the underlying cause of evil in society, or as misguided by unscrupulous whites, he apparently did not feel that he was a racist (though of course, by modern standards he certainly was), even making the audacious claim his efforts were helpful to blacks.

Dixon's novel achieved financial success, and for several reasons may have fostered the spread of southern Civil War memory. First, clearly racist in tone, the novel began to fit the emerging consciousness of "whiteness" that was developing in American society. It appealed to a uniform racism among whites in all regions. In portraying the Reconstruction era in the South, historian Grace Elizabeth Hale notes, Dixon painted a picture not of increased black social mobility, but of "black barbarity [released] from the bonds of white control. Desiring not just self-mastery but white domination, not just equality but sex with white women, the freedmen in this Reconstruction fiction no longer wander blindly but run rampaging through the land." This vilification of blacks allowed whites, regardless of sectional affiliation or ethnicity, to contrast themselves to an emerging blackness that could be perceived as dangerous. Another way Dixon's *Clansman* found a niche within the hardening white culture of America was through the novel's defense of white womanhood by white men against black sexuality. Tied to the terrible practice of lynching, Hale writes that this defense enhanced white masculinity and protected the sphere of men by reassuring them of their place within society:
Beginning in the Reconstruction era as white men increasingly glorified white women, the pedestal rose too high for the satisfaction of white male sexual desires. At the same time, with the emancipation of female slaves, white men found themselves less and less able to take their sexual desires to the quarters. Lynching, then, relieved these tensions and transferred the supersexual powers of the white-constructed “black beast rapist” to the sexually diminished white man even as it diminished the feared power of the white woman who now needed white male protection.  

At a time of increased social mobility and uncertainty, Dixon’s writings played into white males’ fears of losing their hegemonic position within society. Dixon’s message helped buttress white male egos against the potential threat of black sexuality and power, and reinforced patriarchal control over society in a rapidly changing environment. The message presented by Dixon defended the status quo, with women remaining subordinate to men, and blacks under both.

In terms of the transmission of southern ideological perspectives, Dixon’s narrative highlighted significant changes in the interpretation of the Civil War era. Tied to the reconciliationist nature of the times, and appealing to white male patriarchy throughout the country, the southern interpretation of the war and Reconstruction became nationalized. Instead of the North’s version of events, with Confederates in rebellion and blacks as the victims of slavery, the story began to invert in favor of the southern view. Now it

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23 Ibid, 233.
emphasized Southerners' heroism in defense of their homeland and way of life, and the emergence of white victims under Congressional Reconstruction. Sympathy for the South led to a greater acceptability of their version of Reconstruction events, and the southern viewpoint gained credence in both public and academic settings. As Jim Cullen notes, Dixon was particularly effective in presenting the South's viewpoint. He, "fused many strands of Civil War culture [I believe Cullen uses the term "culture" in terms of Civil War discourse]: [the Civil War discourse of America in] the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; academic culture (he did a few months of graduate study at Johns Hopkins) and popular taste; and older [popular] cultural forms such as fiction and new ones such as film."24 Dixon's narrative stood as a bridge in time, spanning and facilitating the forward movement of southern memories of the war and Reconstruction from the end of the fighting into the new century. It brought the southern interpretation of events to mass audiences at a time of increased reconciliation between the sections; and thus, it helped spread southern Civil War ideology beyond the South and into a national context. Academically, Dixon's work also came at a time when northern and southern scholars were trying to achieve rapprochement in the study of history, and Dixon's message tied into the racist sentiments held by scholars of both sections.25 Consciously or not, Dixon took

24Cullen, 23.

advantage of this reconciliatory climate, and brought the southern version of the Civil War and Reconstruction into popular culture. Dixon also experimented with various media to carry his message to a wider audience. He produced a stage version of the novel, which was also well received. Ultimately though, it was the adaptation of his work into film which reached the largest audience, and where it likely had its greatest social impact.

D. W. Griffith’s *Birth of a Nation*

Dixon wanted to transfer his work onto film, a new form of entertainment which opened up tremendous possibilities for the transmission of his story. He understood the inherent power of that medium to influence potentially millions of people, and Dixon felt that his work adapted on film would add an element of respectability and historical significance to art of filmmaking as well.26 Unfortunately for Dixon, most of the films being seen by the public were “low comedies, light farce, and short action sequences with little plot.”27 In short, no motion picture house was interested in filming or showing a work based on a historical subject. Undaunted, Dixon eventually found a man willing to undertake his project: D. W. Griffith.

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26Cook, 159.

27Cook, 162.
David Wark Griffith, like Dixon, was a Southerner. He was born, on January 22, 1875, in the state of Kentucky, and his father had fought for the Confederacy. Although his father died when Griffith was young, he had a tremendous influence upon the film maker. Political scientist Michael Rogin, writing about Griffith recounts that, “Although David was only ten when his father died in 1885, he would later claim that The Birth of a Nation ‘owes more to my father than it does to me.’ The many stories he had heard his father tell about wartime adventures ‘were burned right into my memory.’” Thus, the story that Dixon wrote about in his novel was both familiar and attractive to Griffith. In fact, reading The Clansman apparently awakened a latent childhood memory Dixon had of his father’s sword, which was the inspiration for the movie. In an interview about Birth Griffith recounted, “As I started the book [The Clansman], stronger and stronger came to my mind the traditions I had learned as a child, all that my father had told me. The sword I told you about became a flashing vision.”

Rogin notes that this sword stands out metaphorically as Griffith’s father, the defeated coming back reborn as a ghost to correct the injustices the South was put under at the end of the war, and to defend southern white patriarchy. In fact, the sword, in a scene later...

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taken out of the movie, actually castrates the black rapist (Gus), thus upholding southern masculinity.\textsuperscript{31} Beyond affirming masculinity, Lary May notes in \textit{Screening Out the Past}, that the plot of \textit{The Clansman} tied into the aforementioned latent racial and sectional fears held by Southerners:

The plot condemns the Radical Republicans who during Reconstruction imposed a corrupt regime on Dixie. Using the freed slaves' voting power, they disenfranchised the white citizens and unleashed a reign of terror. While none of these events actually took place, they did express Southerners' fears of what would happen when the corrupt industrial North aligned with southern blacks.\textsuperscript{32}

These fears, also held by Griffith, are evident in the film.

At heart \textit{Birth of a Nation} remains true to Dixon's original story. The Klan rides to the rescue in the end, while the main characters remain by and large unchanged. Lincoln is assassinated in both the film and the book, while the South undergoes the upheavals of Reconstruction. However, there are differences that should be noted.

The film begins with a scene that clearly sets the tone of Griffith's narrative--a slave auction in a town square. The lead in title reads, "The bringing of the African to

\textsuperscript{31}Rogin, in fact notes that Griffith seemed haunted throughout his life by memories of his father. These memories changed over time. Where once the sword had been a fond memory of his father, wherein his father played a joke on an old black, in later life this was replaced by a dark memory of a dog and a gun. Griffith stated that he doubted his father ever loved him, though he loved his father. The second, darker memory has Griffith recounting his favorite sheepdog who fell into "helpless, forbidden love with the sheep." This dog was killed by his father, who used a gun. Griffith ran from the scene, but was unable to escape the sound of the gun being fired. Rogin notes that the sword memory was present at the height of Griffith's success, when he felt on the side of his father, who was symbolically reborn in \textit{Birth} and a few of Griffith's other films. In later days, when money and fame were leaving him, the dog memory emerged and Griffith was his father's victim. Ibid, 172-174.

America planted the first seed of disunion.” The second and third scenes comprise shots of abolitionists demanding the emancipation of all slaves, and Austin Stoneman portrayed as the great, rising power in the House of Representatives. In a nostalgic shot, the movie then cuts to Piedmont, South Carolina, “the home of the Camerons, where life runs in a quaintly way that is to be no more,” foreshadowing the coming of the war, and the destruction of the antebellum way of life in the South.

While the book begins after the fighting is over, the film is set in the antebellum era, just before the start of the Civil War. Some additional characters not in the book are in the film. Phil Stoneman has a younger brother named Tod, while Ben Cameron has two brothers and an additional sister named Flora. The film has the families already familiar with one another, though not intimately, as the Stoneman sons pay a visit to the Camerons in the Piedmont. There, the “happy” life of the plantation is described in some detail, including shots of slaves working and later dancing in the slave quarters. Eventually the placid situation deteriorates and war breaks out. Both the Stoneman and Cameron families send their sons to battle. The movie recounts the first heady days of victory for the South, then, as time progresses, shows the strain on the material but not spiritual condition of those on the home front. A Union raid into the Piedmont by black

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33 I have viewed the film, but it is difficult to accurately keep track of every scene change. Robert Lang's book contains a script of the film, the Museum of Modern Art's 16mm circular print, and I have utilized this script in the chapter. The original version, Lang notes, may never be known since Griffith changed it several times. Lang, 44.

34 Ibid, 45.
guerrilla troops led by a white officer is described in some detail. These troops wreak havoc on the town, looting and pillaging, setting fire to buildings and violating the Cameron home, causing much damage to it, before they are driven out of town by a Confederate force. Again, this is a foreshadowing of events to follow.

On the battlefield, the film cuts to an especially poignant moment, in terms of both nationalizing the legacy of the war and gaining sympathy for the South. Tod Stoneman and Duke Cameron’s units face one another on the battlefield. Described as the best of friends who had promised to meet again after the war, they now meet as adversaries. Both men are shot, and die arm-in-arm as the fighting continues around them.

The war drags on to its ultimate conclusion. The deprivations of both southern soldiers and civilians deepen, and the Union brings war deep into the South, attacking Atlanta. Another Cameron son, Wade, dies as Atlanta burns. Ben Cameron, meanwhile, leads a desperate charge at the siege of Petersburg, only to fall wounded in the most dramatic scene of the film before the ride of the Klan, and certainly one of the greatest scenes of battle depicted on film up to that time. The North wins the war, and Lee surrenders to Grant--a scene left out of the novel.

The movie and book then follow each other fairly closely, but again, there are differences. Ben meets Elsie for the “first time” since in the film he possesses a picture of her given to him by Elsie’s brother, Phil, which he has carried throughout the war. With Mrs. Cameron, Elsie manages to gain a presidential pardon for Ben. As in the
book, Lincoln is described in very compassionate terms. Ben returns home in a heartwarming scene. Meanwhile, as in the novel, Lincoln and Stoneman argue again. Lincoln says, “I shall deal with them as if they had never been away,” in response to Austin Stoneman, who says of the South, “Their leaders must be hanged and their states treated as conquered provinces.”35 Lincoln is assassinated and the South comes under the power of the Radicals led by Stoneman.

As in the novel, the aspect of race is prominent in the movie. In the movie Silas Lynch is given a central role. Instead of merely following the orders of Stoneman and emulating him, eventually he seizes control from Stoneman and seeks to force a marriage between himself and Elsie. Lydia has a more visible role. In the book she is alluded to in sinister, animalistic terms, as was Lynch, but her screen character, portrayed by an actress in blackface, literally gains an added dimension of wickedness that the book cannot match. Also, the influence of Republican agitators is once again displayed, as blacks take control of state legislatures, and the promise of “forty acres and a mule” is retained in the film. In a significant scene, a session of the black legislature is reenacted, showing a picture of total chaos while the few white members in the room are helpless to do anything. The most critical part of this scene comes when the black legislature passes a bill allowing for the intermarriage of blacks and whites. Thus, Griffith depicts for the

audience what could happen if blacks were in charge, and sets up the racial conflicts to
come which lead to the film’s conclusion.

As in the novel, the critical event of the movie is the “rape” scene, this time
with Gus attacking Flora, Ben Cameron’s sister, instead of Marion Lenoir. Flora leaps to
her death off a cliff in order to escape Gus (no actual rape is depicted or alluded to in the
scene), and Ben discovers her body. Ben had previously organized the Klan in order to
resist the power of the Reconstructionists, conceiving the idea while watching two white
children hiding under a white sheet scare some black children. Now, to avenge Flora, the
Klan hunts down and lynch's Gus. The Klan deposits the body of Gus on Lynch’s front
porch and prepares for battle, and as in the novel they invoke the blood ritual and fiery
cross symbolism to inspire them. Lynch calls for reinforcements (black troops), and his
spies discover that the Camerons are in possession of a Klan uniform. Lynch’s men go to
arrest Dr. Cameron Ben’s father. Elsie goes to appeal the arrest to her father, the very
man who has given Lynch is power. Meanwhile, Phil Stoneman and some of the
Cameron’s former black slaves who had remained faithful, including the “Mammy” of
the Cameron household, manage to free the doctor and escape. They flee to a cabin
outside of town, ironically held by two Union veterans, and there they hold siege, the title
of the scene reading, “The former enemies of North and South are united again in
common defense of their Aryan birthright.”36 Lynch imprisons Elsie and her father and

36 Ibid, 134.
tries to force Elsie to marry him. Under Ben’s command, the Klan rides to the rescue, defeating Lynch’s troops and disarming them while Lynch is taken prisoner. The siege at the cabin is also lifted by Klansmen, who ride triumphantly back into town, reestablishing white control. The movie ends with Ben and Elsie, together with Phil and Margaret, enjoying a double honeymoon by the sea. The final scenes depict a portrait of heaven interspaced with shots of Ben and Elsie on the seashore. The final title screen before the last, which simply restates the name of the film, reads, “liberty and union, one and inseparable, now and forever!”

Griffith’s film made a great deal of money and revolutionized the filmmaking industry. It out-earned all films before 1934 in terms of net profit at $13 million, making it the largest money making film of the entire silent movie era. Artistically, Griffith’s innovative film making techniques receive praise from film critics even today.

Besides monetary success and pioneering film techniques, however, it is difficult to assess the overall social impact of the film. On one level, the film legitimized movie viewing as acceptable entertainment. Before Birth of a Nation, the majority of movie-going audiences largely attended the bawdy short films played at the nickelodeons. Largely catering to immigrants and the working class,
Over half the early motion pictures were made in Europe, and few presented such American motifs as the rags-to-riches story or the settlement of the West. They depicted instead, without moral judgment, poverty, premarital sex, adultery, and slapstick violence (often against people in authority). ⁴⁰

Such movies, notes Michael Rogin, broke down class and gender divisions, threatening the traditional social order. Further, in the movie houses themselves, their darkened atmosphere could be a corrupting influence on young men and women, as moral boundaries between the sexes became invisible under such circumstances. ⁴¹ For social progressives, movies thus represented an area of great concern, as morality and tradition seemed to be under assault there. Some progressives, however, recognized that movies also offered a tremendous tool to reinforce traditional standards and improve the moral climate of society. In the progressive atmosphere of the time, films started to be made not only to entertain, but also to educate:

Unlike the earlier one-reel “shorts” which merely titillated the senses, the photoplay carried a moral lesson. In this, critics saw that film might become an adjunct to libraries, schools, and museums. They argued that a wealthier clientele could be attracted, and higher prices charged, provided these films told a complete story, with a beginning, middle, and end. All dramas should portray cause and effect, which showed the ethical order lying at the core of the universe. ⁴²

Thus, film-makers began to look beyond immigrants and the lower classes for profits. To reach the middle and upper classes and survive in more expensive theater environments,

⁴⁰Ibid, 155.
⁴¹Ibid, 155.
⁴²May, 65.
films began to match the reformist rhetoric of the times. For Griffith, who considered himself a progressive, such changes were welcome. *Birth* became the most critical film in making movies an accepted form of entertainment. As Rogin explains:

[Griffith] shared the reformers’ discontent with the film present and their high hopes for its future. “Reform was sweeping the country,” he later wrote. “Newspapers were laying down a barrage against gambling, rum, light ladies, particularly light ladies. There were complaints against everything, so I decided to reform the motion picture industry.” He did so with a film that brought movies out of the nickelodeons and into the $2.00 theaters. *Birth* established film as a legitimate art, one whose appeal cut across class, ethnic, and sectional lines. The opposition between North and South in the film, as well as that between immigrant and native in the history outside it, had been replaced by the opposition between black and white. 43

By moving the film out of the lower-class nickelodeons, and finding a niche that appealed to a wider, intersectional audience, the movie gained credibility for itself, and the entire genre.

Besides legitimizing movies, however, and in keeping with the spirit of progressivism, *The Birth of a Nation* also contained a powerful message. And that message came “not from a vision of the future but [for Griffith] from a desire to give emotion to the folk culture of American Victorianism. In Griffith’s and some progressives’ minds, film was to be a great revival instrument for a threatened culture, inspiring viewers with a new instinctual strength.”44 In *Birth*, Griffith hoped to dissolve

43 Rogin, 156.

44 May, 72.
barriers that separated white groups, such as regionalism, ethnicity, and class. He also wanted to reinforce the hegemony of traditional moral values and standards, at least those held by the upper and middle classes, which involved the maintenance of the patriarchal status quo as well as the perpetuation of white racial hegemony. The movie used race as an overt theme around which these values could be reinforced.

The general public, at least on the surface, reacted favorably to the film. This was borne out by the amount of money the film generated, and the fact that moviegoers needed to patronize a comparatively exorbitant $2.00 theater rather than a nickelodeon. Several questions arise with regard to the public's enthusiastic acceptance of Griffith's movie. Why did the public react so favorably to a "historical" film over the "low brow" movies which were the standard fare at the time? Who favored or opposed the film, and why? And finally, what was the film's overall effect on American society and Americans' understanding of the Civil War?

The public was clearly attracted to Birth of a Nation, even though history, as noted before, was not standard movie fare at the time. Additionally, the act of going to the movies was still tinged with an element of unacceptableness. How did Birth gain a level of legitimacy and attract viewers into the theaters? One reason the movie gained legitimacy was the endorsement of respected, influential people, notably President Woodrow Wilson.

The private endorsement by Wilson played a critical role in the success of Birth. After the film's initial and overwhelmingly favorable viewing in front of a select
audience which included Thomas Dixon and seventy-five people, most of whom were critics from the world of the performing arts, word of the showing leaked out to the press and began to generate opposition. This opposition included respected members of the press such as Oswald Garrison Villard, editor of the New York *Evening Post*, and Moorfield Storey, president of the American Bar Association, who expressed concern over the film’s racist content. With powerful opposition like this, the chances of *Birth* being shown to the public seemed remote. With his old ties to Woodrow Wilson, Dixon sought to head off any threats to the film by gaining the approval of the President. In a thirty-minute interview, Wilson agreed to view the film privately in the White House, adding that he would be glad to help Dixon out, remembering that Dixon had successfully nominated him for an honorary degree at Wake Forest.

The film was shown on February 18, 1915, and Wilson reportedly remarked after seeing the movie, “It is like writing history with lightning. And my only regret is it is all so terribly true.” Dixon also managed to have the film shown to the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court and members of both houses of Congress. His strategy worked. With such powerful allies, any move to stop the film’s showing could be blunted. Though Dixon promised not to publicize the film’s initial showing to the President or the Chief Justice, their implied endorsement was important and word of the private screenings was used against those trying to stop the film. Raymond A. Cook relates:

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45 Cook, 170.
When the film was scheduled to make its first public appearance in New York, Dixon learned that his “sectional enemies,” as he referred to them, were planning to close the theater on opening night. At a preliminary court session less than forty-eight hours before the film was to be shown, the opposition objected so strenuously that the sheriff received a warrant to close the theater; at this point a defense attorney mentioned that the film had recently been shown at the White House. The opposition was incredulous, and a long distance call was placed to the White House. President Wilson’s daughter Margaret answered the phone and affirmed that “The Birth of a Nation” had indeed been shown there a short time before. She added that the film had been seen the following night by the Supreme Court and Congress. The chief magistrate of the city of New York therefore immediately withdrew the warrant for the suppression of the film. 46

Thus, with the nation’s leaders apparently behind the film, it was provided an air of respectability and legitimacy which cut through the opposition and erased the prior negative connotations associated with movies. 47 Of course, legitimacy was not the only reason audiences came to see the movie. The movie itself needed to be compelling, and in terms of plot, as noted above, it conformed to the reconciliationist atmosphere within the country. Griffith’s techniques in making the film were also important, however, and the way he portrayed the action taking place in the film was designed to highlight its message and persuade the viewer. The techniques Griffith used drew the viewer into the story in a way that other media could not. Additionally, Griffith employed the inherent power of film, which could potentially break down the social barriers which separated groups of people, and dissolve the distances between the viewer and the film, facilitating the transmission of, in this case, southern Civil War interpretations to a national audience.

46 Ibid, 173.

Temporal and spatial differences in *The Birth of a Nation* were overcome through the persuasive power of the medium itself, combined with Griffith’s film making innovations. Since the setting of the film was the Civil War South, for non-Southerners and an audience living well after the period in which the story took place, it was necessary to narrow the boundaries of time and regional differences. In order to bridge the temporal span between the events portrayed in the film against the memory of what took place in history, Griffith sought to place events in front of the viewer as if he or she were actually a part of those times. Close up shots, artificial lighting, a mobile camera, moving back and forth across time and space throughout the film using parallel editing, and utilization of real landscapes all helped to increase the continuity of the story, heighten the effectiveness of the drama, and highlight the believability of the action in the film.48

In turn, the historical aspects of the film seen through the eye of the camera seemed to draw the viewer into the action, into history itself, even though the person in the audience remained a safely detached spectator. Michael Rogin explains Griffith’s techniques this way:

> Movie images seen from afar allowed audiences to keep their distance, to be voyeurs instead of participants. But that protection, as in dreams, broke down defenses and opened a road to the unconscious. The size of the image and its reproducibility, the closeup and film cut, the magical transformations on screen and the film’s documentary pretense—all these, Griffith sensed, dissolved the boundaries that separated audiences in darkened theaters from the screen. The

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48 May, 72.
silent film epic, moreover, accentuated movies' visionary aura. "Words, after all, are a clumsy method of conveying thought. They close expression in so many ways," said Griffith. *Birth* used titles, to be sure, but it stood closer to music than to words. Not only were its filmic rhythms musical, but Griffith also used an orchestra to reinforce the beats and themes on screen. To watch and hear *Birth* as it was originally shown was to enter the immediate, prelogical universe of the primary processes.49

Thus, film was a powerful medium. It could overcome the boundaries of written words, touching the audience on a perhaps even spiritual level that short circuited the arguments and contradictions that run implicitly through any interpretation of history.

Indeed Griffith saw his film as not just a film about history, he saw it as a potential replacement for history itself. Film was a universal language for Griffith, and through that language, he hoped to uplift mankind, even to the point where war could be ended forever.50 Taken in the context of the time, with World War I breaking out in Europe, *Birth* can in fact be viewed as a pacifist film, since it seems to question why whites should have to fight one another when there was a natural solidarity between them.

The language provided in the film, however, was presented through the one directional lens of the director. In film, the audience watches the director's depiction of events. Thus, the challenge for Griffith was to make his film appear as an unalterable representation of the truth even though in reality it was a one-sided interpretation of

49 Rogin, 185.

50 Ibid, 185.
events that were incorporated into the movie (not that Griffith ever doubted that his version of Civil War history was in any way short of the truth). To hold the attention of his audience and to persuade them, viewers had to be drawn into the action depicted on the screen, and Griffith employed innovative techniques in his film to help them do so. For example, the usage of the “iris” helped the viewer feel as if he or she was watching the action with a kind of “spiritual eye.” With the iris,

On a darkened screen, a small dot would appear. Slowly it opened and a beam of light revealed the action. As the drama unfolded, it was as if the viewer used a spiritual eye to penetrate the truth of life . . . Once the iris opened, special lighting would show a world where the demarcations of good and evil were clear. Often heroes and heroines were bathed in light, while villains appeared dark and sinister in the shadows. The audience would have no doubt as to who was among the elect, and who among the damned. 51

Perceptually, this spiritual eye did not lie, since it replicated the viewer’s own eyes. It opened a window onto the truth, and the interpretation of the truth was viewed through the objective lenses of the camera, though in actuality it was produced through the actions of the director. 52 In turn, the darkness of the theater moved viewers beyond their physical realities and involved them in the events taking place on the screen. In such a hyperreal environment, historical events portrayed in films could be transferred to the viewer as an authentic display of actual events, which in turn could influence the viewer’s understanding of those events irrespective of temporal and spatial conditions that existed outside of the

51 May, 73.

52 Ibid, 72-75.
movie. Thus, Griffith hoped that Birth could both unify and persuade audiences, elicit a favorable response to the film's message, and thus potentially influence society.

The majority of the public reacted favorably to Griffith's film, as evidenced in terms of financial success, but to what extent did his message influence them? It was clear that Griffith's attention to historical detail in depicting the physical surroundings in the film added an air of authenticity to the movie that did not go unnoticed. For example, an article in the New York Times praised the work that went into the reproduction of Ford's Theater in the movie: "The great care that was taken by D. W. Griffith . . . to make the reproduction historically correct throws a new light on the high order of intelligence that goes into the making of better films."\(^{33}\)

The overall social impact of the movie's message, however, is difficult to measure. Did the movie affect society or simply reflect it? The plot of the movie and its action sequences clearly attracted large audiences. In terms of its racial message, however, while many white Americans may have privately agreed with some of the film's premises, the extremity of racism in the movie was difficult for many people to accept publicly. In fact, most reviewers even then made a clear distinction between the techniques used in the film and the film's content, though it should be noted that this was the standard practice of the time. When not talking about the stylistic elements of the film, but rather its historical content, Janet Saiger observes: "The writers then varied:

some thought the representations [of events] were accurate; others were neutral; some ignored the issue; and the rest regretted or challenged what they saw.” For example some reviewers openly questioned the historical accuracy of the film’s representation of the Reconstruction era. Others were angered at the misrepresentation of blacks as “either bestial or subservient to whites.” The glorification of lynching in the film was also condemned. On the other side, the defenders of the film claimed that it was historically accurate for the period it portrayed. They argued that movies merely reflected attitudes already prevalent within society, even though Griffith was clearly trying to influence and change society with his work. Some defenders even speculated that some of those who attacked the film were actually advocates of interracial marriage.

The responses of audiences also demonstrated the divergent range of opinions and passions created by the Griffith’s film. In Atlanta, movie audiences not only clapped, but stood up and cheered after watching the film. In the Atlanta Constitution, a reviewer wrote,

It makes you laugh and moves you to hot tears unashamed. It makes you love and hate. It makes you forget decorum and forces a cry into your throat. It thrills you with horror and moves you to marvel at vast spectacles . . . “The Birth of a Nation” is built to arouse your emotions, and it does it. It is designed to educate you, and it

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55 Ibid, 201-203.
does so more than many hours of studying books. It is not designed to arouse your prejudices, and if you are fair-minded and not predisposed, it will not do so.\textsuperscript{56}

However, other viewers, and even some Southerners, had a different take on the movie’s message. For example, in New York City a crowd of whites and blacks bought tickets to the movie in order to start a demonstration against the film. Police and detectives in the audience, anticipating such a demonstration quickly intervened and arrested two of the leaders. One white man, a leader of the demonstration named Howard Schaeffle, threw eggs at the screen while being apprehended, shouting the words, “Rotten, rotten.” He later told police he did this because, “I am a Southerner and a libertarian, and I believe in the education and the uplifting of the negro.”\textsuperscript{57} African American groups also united against the film. They tried to either remove questionable scenes from it or ban the film altogether. Although some scenes were later removed, black protests on the whole were hampered by the fact that even outside the South many movie theaters would not allow blacks inside. For direct action to work, access to theaters was necessary; many movie houses were, however, not accessible to blacks, and given the racial atmosphere of the time, their protests went largely unheeded.\textsuperscript{58}

\textsuperscript{56}Ned McIntosh, “‘Birth of a Nation’ Thrills Tremendous Atlanta Audience,” \textit{Atlanta Constitution}, 7 December, 1915.


What is clear was that there was no social consensus on the film’s underlying racial message, as Griffith and Dixon had hoped, even though many whites may have silently agreed with it. The film was an enormous financial success, but though it gained tremendous notoriety and the endorsement of influential people, the overall impact of the film on American society and on individual memories is difficult to measure. Organizations such as the Ku Klux Klan obviously benefited from the film. Even here, however, there was a much broader spectrum of prejudice than simple white/black divisions, since the new Klan (differentiated from the first Klan that rose up during Reconstruction in the South) also preached hatred of Catholics, Jews, and immigrants. Additionally, the emerging culture of segregation nullified the more extreme racial “solutions” espoused by Dixon and others who shared his sentiments, such as the colonization of blacks to another country. Thus, whites did not react to or necessarily feel as strongly threatened by blacks as the movie suggested they should.

The film was mostly successful in reinforcing the traditional hegemonic values held by many white American men and in perpetuating Confederate ideology within the national discourse on the Civil War. In a society undergoing unsettling changes, white men could buy into the movie’s patriarchal and racial themes which legitimized their worldview and presented a racially unified image of themselves. Moreover, the blame

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59. The Klan used the film as advertisement for its recruiting efforts. Ibid, 39.

60. Hale, 144.
for the evils of Reconstruction and racial tension in American society was placed squarely on blacks themselves, giving added weight to the practice of segregation. Grace Elizabeth Hale notes that through the plots of the novel and film, "both the white South and the white North have slipped free from any last traces of moral obligation to the ex-slaves. The fall from plantation grace, the loss of racial ease that made segregation the only possible future, have been African Americans' fault all along." At the same time, however, the movie also galvanized the very segment of the population that it sought to undercut. Already under attack in an extremely adverse climate, blacks found in Birth a rallying point around which they could organize and unite. Thus, the overall impact of the film on early twentieth-century American society was not entirely what its director had hoped, despite what the movie’s financial success would seem to indicate.

In terms of the legacy of the Civil War, the movie found a niche in, and added its weight to the reconciliatory, increasingly nationalistic white culture spreading throughout the country. Combined with the patriotic fervor that would explode when America entered World War I, one can make a case that the movie effectively aided the reconciliation process by bringing the southern interpretation of the war a nationwide audience that was increasingly sympathetic to it, and by framing that interpretation to fit a theme which emphasized intersectional unity. Further, the air of legitimacy the movie gained through endorsements by influential figures encouraged the diffusion of the

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61 Hale, 79.
southern interpretation of the Civil War and Reconstruction into the mainstream culture. Does this mean viewers of *Birth* absorbed the racial premise of the movie into their understandings of the Civil War? To some extent audiences, especially white males, probably did, but perhaps they did so because they already were inclined to do this. It would be easier to measure a film's impact if it had gone *against* the popular trend and still done well. However, as the range of opinions expressed in reviews of the film showed, few people fully embraced the extreme racial positions of Griffith and Dixon. In terms of national perspectives on the Civil War era, Griffith’s film and Dixon’s novel had their greatest impact as vehicles for the transmission and perpetuation of Confederate ideology into the national discourse. They brought an updated version of southern history into the twentieth century and transmitted it to a mass audience which incorporated or rejected the imagery described in the novel or acted out on screen into their collective understandings of the Civil War. And, as the sales figures show, moviegoers found the film entertaining. Still, many people nationwide must have thought about the southern version of the war at some level. Thus, the southern memory of the war was refashioned to fit into a reconciliationist narrative in print and on film, and transmitted across both time and region to mass audiences, most of whom at least on some level recognized and perhaps internalized elements of the southern version of events.

A final point about the movie is that it appeared in an environment of prosperity and progressivism. As such, *The Birth of a Nation* reflected a forward
looking, hopeful society. Gerald Wood notes that “In the early twentieth century the consensus was that America had endured the economic downturns after the Civil War, the labor unrest of the 1870s, and the agrarian discontent of the 1890s in order to usher in a new era of industrial expansion and plenty.” 62 Though the film and the novel that inspired it recounted the terrible uncertainties created by the Civil War and Reconstruction, their narratives foreshadowed a better future. In the same vein, Americans in the early twentieth century viewed the world around them with a sense of optimism. According to Wood, Americans saw themselves as “special, isolated, and privileged—a people defined by the nineteenth-century rural virtues of hard work, individualism, voluntary cooperation, optimism, and the mission God had apparently given to those living under democracy.” 63 Americans were secure in their overall identity, despite challenges to social positions caused by industrial growth, and even the divisions of the past began to be interpreted in a better light. Wood makes the further point that “Birth of a Nation captures this prewar sense of hope and progress; the Civil War was viewed by Griffith, as it had been by Dixon, as a means of recovering America’s natural unity in order to create a better future, a future still believed in by filmgoers in 1915.” 64


63 Ibid, 132.

64 Ibid, 132.
In this climate, a movie like Birth could flourish, since it reinforced and played into the social environment of the time. The worst of the past seemed remote, and for many the suffering of those times was seen as a necessary prologue to the prosperity of the present. In spite of challenges to gender and race, America's future looked bright. The optimistic portrayal of heaven at the end of the film matched the popular opinion of many people that Americans were living in a period of unending prosperity under a united America that would last forever.

**Gone With The Wind**

The representation and interpretation of the Civil War changed over time, and popular culture mirrored these changes. The attitudes of people who went to see Gone With The Wind were much different from those held by pre-Depression audiences who read The Clansman or saw The Birth of a Nation. Nevertheless, southern interpretations of the war continued to enter the mainstream consciousness of Americans and influenced the way Americans perceived those times. Gone With The Wind was a work, in print and on film, which perpetuated and helped shape the discourse on the Civil War in popular culture from the mid-1930s on.
Gone With The Wind: The Novel

Like Dixon and Griffith before her, Margaret Mitchell was a Southerner. Born on November 8, 1900, she grew up in an upper middle-class home in the city of Atlanta, Georgia. Her father was an attorney who struggled through the depression of 1893 to maintain the family's standard of living. Her mother, as Jim Cullen notes, was a critical guiding figure for Mitchell:

Mitchell's mother, May Belle, seems to have been a pivotal figure in her daughter's life; an ambivalence toward mothers and motherhood suffuses GWTW [his abbreviation]. A convent-educated Irish Catholic, May Belle Mitchell was also president of Atlanta's most militant suffrage group. Her political commitments were matched by a sense of social and familial duty, which she sought to transmit to her daughter. The duality between feminist self-assertion and traditional self-abnegation became a crucial tension in the novelist's life and work.65

Mitchell was a woman with a strong sense of independence. From an early age she displayed something of a rebellious streak. She was unconventional in that she had a brief working career (1922-1926), becoming a journalist for the Atlanta Journal. She started writing Gone With The Wind in the early 1920s, Cullen notes, "at the very moment that the southern literary renaissance burst into full flower ... Robert Penn Warren, Alan Tate, Stark Young, and, of course, William Faulkner all arrived on the scene, crisscrossing poetry, fiction, criticism, and history."66 In fact, after Gone With The Wind was written,

65 Cullen, 71, 73.
Thomas Dixon himself wrote Mitchell a letter commending her work, and she sent him a cordial letter in reply.67

_Gone With The Wind_ became the best selling novel in American history. It was an extension of previous representations of the southern Civil War viewpoint in fiction, but there were significant changes. The novel centers around Scarlett O'Hara, a young strong-willed southern woman facing the upheavals of the Civil War and Reconstruction. The story is situated around two locations. One is Scarlett’s home of Tara, a plantation in the Georgia countryside. The second is Atlanta, Margaret Mitchell’s home city, which in the novel is a large southern town (or very small city) undergoing great tribulations and transformations. Of course, these situations of trial and change for Atlanta were brought about by the war. Tara, too, is subject to the same situation and both locations are an integral part of Scarlett’s story. The main storyline of the novel revolves around the romance between Scarlett and Rhett Butler, a Charleston-born blockade runner for the Confederacy with a shady background.

The novel takes Scarlett from the quaint antebellum lifestyle of the plantation through the hardships caused by the war and Reconstruction. Her stubborn nature, which Mitchell intimates stems from the Irish side of her personality, helps her survive her

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67Mitchell’s letter recounted that as a child she put on a play (herself) dramatizing one of Dixon’s works, “The Traitor.” One can infer that she probably had admired Dixon’s work, at least when she was young. Richard Harwell, “A Striking Resemblance to a Masterpiece”: _Gone With The Wind_ in 1936,” in _Recasting: Gone With The Wind in American Culture_, ed. Darden Asbury Pyron (Miami: University Presses of Florida, 1983), 44.
tribulations. After a long courtship and several setbacks, Rhett finally manages to win the hand of Scarlett, largely through his material possessions and masculine attributes. In Rhett, Scarlett finds a kindred, fun-loving, and mischievous (if not downright scandalous) companion, but she believes that she really loves Ashley Wilkes, who is a symbol of the southern aristocracy of that era. Scarlett’s independence and strong will, which allow her to overcome the hardships at the end of the war, however, become negatives as she tries to build a comfortable life for herself. She oversteps the conventions of southern society, opening her own business and associating with northern carpetbaggers, thus losing her respectability in the eyes of Atlanta society, her family and friends. Meanwhile, with the birth of Bonnie, Rhett’s and Scarlett’s child, Rhett moves to regain a measure of respectability for himself and his daughter, embracing southern society and repudiating Scarlett’s actions. In the end, after several plot twists, Scarlett comes to the conclusion that she really does not love Ashley, who has become a shattered figure because of the war, unable to stand on his own. She comes to this realization too late, however, as Rhett rejects her, and Scarlett is left to ponder her future saying, “I’ll think of it all tomorrow, at Tara. I can stand it then. Tomorrow I’ll think of some way to get him back. After all, tomorrow is another day.”

Three areas stand out in the novel which concern the representation of the Civil War in popular discourse. First, for most of the novel, Mitchell’s portrayal of southern
womanhood is different from that depicted in earlier works. Second, though racist elements are a central aspect of the work, the subject of race is not presented in the same way that Dixon and Griffith portrayed it, especially with regard to white class divisions. Finally, the way Americans interpreted the war underwent another shift, in relation to the social climate, and Mitchell's novel reflected this. Each of these elements influenced how audiences responded to the story of Gone With The Wind, and also affected their understanding of the legacy of the Civil War itself.

Examining the depiction of women's roles in Gone With The Wind, the central character is Scarlett, and her actions stand in contrast to the other characters around her. Scarlett tries to fit the mold of the typical southern woman, yet she defies convention. She is simple to understand and relate to because of her insatiable desires and her determination to survive and prosper. She is also an extremely complex figure, however, a conflicted character who tries to negotiate the acceptable boundaries of her society while fulfilling her need to step beyond those boundaries to achieve what she wants. The exemplars of southern womanhood in the novel are Scarlett's mother, Ellen, and Melanie Wilkes, Ashley's wife. These women work to maintain the virtue of their households, and practice the highest levels of chaste behavior in their daily lives. They uphold and defend the standards of their society, willing to defend the honor of their men in war and peace, though Ellen dies before the war ends. One of the most illustrative examples of the traditional southern woman contrasted with Scarlett comes during the Confederate ball scene, where the women in attendance are asked to contribute their jewelry to the
cause. Scarlett, recently widowed by the death of her first husband, Charles Hamilton, whom she never truly loved, “donates” her wedding ring for the contribution basket. Melanie, seeing Scarlett’s “sacrifice,” takes her own wedding ring off and places it in the basket as well, even though it was an invaluable possession to her. Tradition, honor, generosity, and deference to southern manhood while running the domestic side of family life are what Ellen and Melanie represent. Scarlett, by contrast, is self-absorbed, selfish, independent, and uncompromising.

These very self-serving qualities, however, allow Scarlett to survive and even thrive amidst the devastation brought on by the war. Scarlett’s apparent lack of virtue enables her to remarry quickly, and for money, which allows her to pay the exorbitant taxes placed on Tara under Reconstruction. She also opens her own business, buying a sawmill, which moves her out of the traditional southern woman’s role as manager of domestic affairs and into the purview of men. Scarlett’s move out into the world of men was not looked upon well. In the end, however, Mitchell does not allow Scarlett to remain outside the bounds of southern social conventions. She ultimately reels Scarlett back within the sphere of southern womanhood by having her cross too far over the line, where she must then face the consequences of her actions. Scarlett’s ties to northern carpetbaggers leads to her ostracism by her southern friends and neighbors. In fact, the women of standing in Atlanta rally around Melanie, who defends tradition and is

69 Mitchell, 124.
representative of the old mores of the antebellum South. Scarlett’s insistence on keeping her sawmill open and checking on it every day eventually gets her into trouble as well, since she needs to travel through a dangerous shanty town area and is assaulted and almost raped. Her second husband (whom she also does not love), a member of the newly formed Klan, which most of the southern men of standing in the story have joined, and he dies in a raid undertaken to avenge Scarlett’s assault and defend her honor. Scarlett finally gives in to Rhett’s advances, marrying him and enjoying an even more decadent existence, but this does not reconcile her with the women in Atlanta society.

In the end, when she loses the love of Rhett, whom she finally realizes is her true love, Scarlett needs to step back to deal with her loss. She makes the decision to return home to Tara, the place from which she acquired, and hopes to regain, her strength. The last line of the novel reflects the conflict within Scarlett and the South in general. There is a need to go forward, while still looking back to traditions and a nostalgic past. Mitchell thus rescues Scarlett from her uninhibited ways, and returns her back within the bounds of traditional society. Perhaps Mitchell indirectly saw herself in Scarlett’s role, since she herself seemed so unconventional. Nevertheless, like Mitchell, Scarlett could not cast off the society from which she came. Mitchell’s Scarlett at the conclusion of the novel returns home, and thus traditional womanhood, though challenged by Scarlett, wins out in the end.⁷⁰

⁷⁰Hale, 267-268.
Like previous southern narratives, *Gone With The Wind* could not escape the issue of race. In terms of racial depictions, Mitchell portrayed black characters differently than Griffith and Dixon. In part, this was due to the culture of segregation within which she lived and wrote. Dixon and Griffith sought to use white fears of potential black power over whites to promote their progressive platforms in defense of tradition, patriarchy, and white racial hegemony. Mitchell, by contrast, lived in a society that had, for the most part, effectively separated blacks from whites in the social mix. There was no real fear of blacks overtaking whites in terms of social and political control, and her narrative reflected this. She does maintain the racial inversion portrayed in Dixon’s and Griffith’s works, that blacks had been placed on top in the South after the war through the force of northern arms, and that southern whites were victims under the evils of Reconstruction. The blacks in *Gone With The Wind* were not the evil, scheming, lustful characters who sought sexual or political power over whites. Instead, in the segregated society of the time, Mitchell’s blacks, as Grace Elizabeth Hale points out, often lacked any agency to influence the narrative at all. “In fact, Mitchell so completely erases black Southerners--creating characters that are at least representations of representations--that the internal logic of *Gone With The Wind* provides no possibility of black subjectivity at all.”\(^7\) Further, “the character of the slave/ex-slave, denied even the faintest glimmer of agency, exists in Mitchell’s novel only to magnify and reflect the

\(^{7}\)Ibid, 265.
identities of her white southern characters."\textsuperscript{72} Thus, when characters such as Mammy appear in the novel, they are only extensions of their white masters, or representative stereotypes of slaves/ex-slaves. For example, when Ellen dies, Mammy, whom Scarlett has always seen as a pillar of strength, is as lost as anyone left on the devastated plantation, saying, "Oh, Miss Scarlett, now dat Miss Ellen's in de grabe, whut is we gwine ter do? Oh, Miss Scarlett, effen Ah wuz jus' daid longside Miss Ellen! Ain' nuthin' lef' now but mizry an' trouble. Jes' weery loads, honey, jes' weery loads."\textsuperscript{73} Thus, the burden of the ex-slaves is passed on to their masters, who then have to take care of them too. Unlike the blacks who relish power in \textit{The Clansman} or \textit{Birth}, those in \textit{Gone With The Wind} are either insolent, misguided, or dependent on their former masters. Mitchell's physical and personal descriptions of blacks, like Dixon's and Griffith's, remain derogatory, and at times even hostile. For example, blacks are described through the usage of animalistic terms such as dogs or monkeys, though it should be noted that this stands in contrast to the threatening ape-like and primeval descriptions of blacks and mulattoes used by Dixon. The ferocity and wildness of blacks as described in the earlier works is missing, but so is the ability of blacks to shape their own destiny or exist independently of their former masters. In the final analysis, Mitchell reinforces some of the traditional stereotypes of blacks, but does not give any significant

\textsuperscript{72}Ibid, 262.

\textsuperscript{73}Mitchell, 275.
agency, positive or negative, to her black characters at all.

With whites, however, Mitchell’s story represents an important departure from earlier works of southern fiction, and this is based on her depictions of class. In Gone With The Wind Mitchell sought to undermine some of the earlier myths of the romanticized, aristocratic South. To do so, her main characters, with the exception of the Wilkes family, had qualities which lent themselves more to the middle and lower-classes than the wealthy, aristocratic, large plantation owners. Instead of featuring the aristocratic southern planter in the narrative,

Mitchell’s actual descriptions reinforce these characteristics: aristocrats and aristocratic values are the exotic products of peculiar local circumstances. Unrealistic dreamers, her aristocrats lack life and vitality. She characterizes them alternately as ethereal, wraith-like, ghostly, and almost physically transparent.74 Mitchell’s aristocrats are unable to adapt to changed circumstances, and in large part they are hopelessly lost when the war ends. Unlike Dixon and Griffith’s works, which seem to glorify the large plantation owner, Mitchell gives voice to other white Southerners:

While mostly interested in stressing the roughneck origins of her backcountry planters, Mitchell also includes yeomen in their original state in Gone With The Wind. “The Troop,” the country cavalry unit is full of them. Containing almost no rich planters, it consists mostly of hunters from the backwoods, swamp trappers, crackers, and horror of horrors, even some poor white trash, although Mitchell adds they would have been few, and wittily, they would have been above the average of their class.75


75 Ibid, 189.
Scarlett’s father Gerald is not an aristocrat, even though he owns the slaveholding plantation of Tara. Unlike most of the aristocratic planters who have inherited their wealth, he is a self-made man, an Irish immigrant who has worked his way upward, both financially and socially, from nothing. As noted by Darden Asbury Pyron, Mitchell stresses social mobility, “ambition, ruthlessness, amorality, selfishness, and disregard of the commonweal are hallmarks of her backcountrymen. While open at the top, her social order is equally open at the bottom, and no claims to birth or manners can prevent the lazy or altruistic from collapsing back into white trashdom.”76 For Mitchell, as long as someone white is willing to work hard, upward mobility is open to him or her. In other words, Mitchell’s narrative fits the work ethic and values of the middle class.

This emphasis on middle-class attributes in the story was important, both in terms of Mitchell’s attempted debunking of the aristocratic planter’s dominance within southern fiction and in legitimizing the legacy of segregation itself. As Hale notes,

What Mitchell brilliantly managed to do was both expose the Old South’s faults and weld whites’ mythic sense of the past and its nostalgic power to the white southern present and future. *Gone With The Wind* encapsulates even as it finishes the plantation romance, cementing finally the genealogy of modern southern whiteness, itself a middle-class production, in the service of the new racial culture of segregation. Mitchell highlights the class cracks in the Old South image within a new historical narrative that fuses that flawed aristocracy to a contemporary white southern middle class that corrected its deficiencies.77

76 Ibid, 189.

77 Hale, 261.
In the South and later nationwide, therefore, middle-class readers were able to relate to the values presented in *Gone With The Wind*, which reflected their own ideals. The novel can be seen as serving the role of a kind of fictive history, linking a new, middle-class, updated vision of the antebellum South and its imagery with modern Southerners who could then measure that reformulated nostalgic past against their conditions in the present and the future. Given the uncertainties presented by the Depression, the ability to relate to a time when hard work and social mobility were attainable must have provided some comfort.

In terms of overall racial impact, Hale notes that “Mitchell, then, like her segregated society, acknowledged no black contribution to the region at all . . . the white southern middle class alone, those pragmatic and forward looking folks, and not northern whites or southern blacks, will bear the burden and rebuild the region.” Looking through the exclusionary viewpoint that *Gone With The Wind* displays, the interaction between the two races and their influences upon one another are diminished. Blacks do not get the credit for building the South that they deserve; thus, the ability to marginalize them becomes easier to rationalize, lending support to a culture that upheld segregationist practices.

Mitchell’s shift away from the nostalgic aristocratic planter tradition, combined with the social atmosphere within America at the time, influenced the way Americans interpreted the novel and perhaps shaped their understanding of the Civil War as well.

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78 Ibid, 261.
Probably the most important way the novel meshed with the social climate of America was that, depending on one’s reading of it, *Gone With The Wind* provided a glimmer of hope, one that garnered strength from the past and mediated against the uncertainties of the present and future. Through Scarlett, Gerald Wood concludes,

Mitchell was aware of the sense of regret and loss that goes with having a secure and beautiful past, but she also respected the courage and resilience that it takes to live for the future. *Gone With The Wind* is consequently ambiguous to the end; it values both recognition of the past and strength for the future.  

Despite this positive reading of Mitchell’s novel, however, the narrative is ultimately unclear about to interpret the romanticized southern past. *Gone With The Wind* affirms the past while downplaying it. It challenges the romanticized South but never escapes it. This ambiguity led many to see the novel differently from what Mitchell intended. Mitchell complained, “It’s hard to make people believe that North Georgia wasn’t all white columns and singing darkies and magnolias, that it was all so raw and new.” Nevertheless, that romantic southern past was so strongly ingrained in many American’s imaginations that Mitchell’s attempt to move away from it was lost on many readers. The ambiguity in the plot allowed them to see what they wanted to see.

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79 Wood, 131.

80 Ibid, 186.
Gone With The Wind: The Movie

The possibilities of Margaret Mitchell's story led David O. Selznick, a movie producer and owner of Selznick International Pictures, to purchase the rights to make a film version of the novel for a then unheard of sum of $50,000. It was an unusual purchase since at the time of the deal Mitchell had not written (nor would she ever write) any other works, and the book had not yet been released to the general public. Selznick, however, saw the potential of making a film version of the novel and undertook the enormous task of transforming Mitchell's work into a movie. 81

In terms of its influence on the viewer and his or her understanding of the southern Civil War legacy, the film's plot stays very close to the narrative presented in the book. There are, however, significant points where film and novel differ. There are also areas of difference between Selznick's film and earlier efforts to bring the Civil War to the movies, namely Griffith and Birth.

The surface differences between the two films are easy to recognize, since they revolve around technological changes in the medium itself. Most obviously, Griffith's work is a silent, black-and-white film. Selznick's movie is in color and has sound.

81 The background story behind the making of the movie is fascinating and can be found in the introduction cited here: Sidney Howard, Gone With The Wind: The Screenplay, Edited and with an Introduction by Herb Bridges and Terry C. Boodman (New York: Dell Publishing, 1989), 4-5.
elements that add extra dimensions to **Gone With The Wind**. **Birth** seems more
documentary and historical, the audience must read the scene titles, and the black and
white medium makes the movie seem like a memory set in the past. The story of **Gone
With The Wind**, by contrast, may have appeared to viewers as closer to the present
through its use of color. To use a popular cliché, the past seems to “come alive” for the
viewer, who feels less disconnected since the outside physical world is also perceived in
color. Both films attracted large audiences beyond the scope of the novels which inspired
them. However, they differed in two other important respects: their treatment of race and
gender and the differing objectives of their producers.

Concerning race and gender, **Birth of a Nation** had stringent divisions that were
far stronger than those in **Gone With The Wind**. The violent portrayals of blacks and
their “sinister” characteristics, as set up by Griffith with respect to the inversion of white
society in the South under Reconstruction, has already been examined. Griffith’s movie
did not use any black actors in key roles, instead relying on white actors in blackface.
Michael Rogin points out that Griffith sought to strengthen systems of difference in his
film, rigidly enforcing the oppositional social relationships within society at the time:
white and black, male and female, good and evil.\(^{82}\) By 1939, the racial climate had
changed somewhat. In the more liberal atmosphere of the New Deal blacks found greater
opportunities for employment. This was even true in movies, where, although blacks

\(^{82}\) Rogin, 180.
remained stereotyped, they were at least in films as blacks, rather than having white actors portray them. Although Margaret Mitchell denied blacks agency in her story, she was much more careful than Griffith or Dixon not to come across as blatantly antagonistic to them. Selznick, unlike Griffith, did employ black actors in Gone With The Wind, and to avoid the protests that plagued Griffith, he removed the more racially objectionable scenes from the film, especially all references to the Klan. Because of this, black reactions to the film's production and their response to its release were mixed. On the one hand they praised the expanded role of blacks in the movie, especially the acting of Hattie McDaniel, who won an Oscar for her portrayal of Mammy. On the other hand, blacks remained stereotyped and in servile, demeaning positions. Malcolm X remembered seeing the movie as a teenager and was embarrassed by Butterfly McQueen's portrayal of Prissy, saying, "When Butterfly McQueen went into her act, I felt like crawling under the rug." It should be noted that blacks did secure one significant victory during this period, though not in relation to Gone With The Wind. Led by blacks, and with the support of liberal white activists, an attempt to remake Birth of a Nation (not by Griffith) was shut down. Thus, in the political climate of expanded

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84 Ibid, 146-147, 137.
black inclusiveness in the general culture and increased liberal activism, Selznick needed to moderate the racial tone of his film.

As noted earlier, for Griffith Birth was a medium for his progressive message reinforcing white traditions and morality. It was meant to educate and reinforce both the racial hegemony of whites and the ethical standards of the time. In terms of gender, a woman like Scarlett, who was independent minded and opportunistic, was not what Griffith wanted in his movie. For Mitchell and Selznick, however, this was different. Mitchell herself reflected Scarlett in that she moved outside of the traditional boundaries of southern womanhood. In her novel, Scarlett does the same. She is a survivor who for the most part does not need the protection of white men to uphold her honor, though Mitchell does not quite grant full liberty to her. Selznick’s aims, while keeping in line with Mitchell’s story, were much different from Griffith’s as well. Film was a medium to entertain and turn a profit, not necessarily to educate or reform society. Thus, a character like Scarlett was welcomed in his movie, and could have a degree of freedom to which Griffith would have objected.

Differences between Gone With The Wind and earlier films were not the only significant areas of contrast to consider. Subtle differences between the novel and film changed the tone and later interpretation of each. Probably the most significant underlying difference between the novel and film rests on the objectives of their creators. Mitchell and Selznick approached their subject matter very differently. Mitchell wanted to tell a southern story. Her book was mainly directed at ordinary white Southerners,
though obviously she enjoyed tremendous success outside the region. Selznick, though, was a Northerner, born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. His interests were much more focused on the bottom line. The commercial success of the film was critical for Selznick, especially since by the end of production the movie cost $3,900,000, an enormous sum in 1939. His film had to fit the interests of not only Southerners, but also the tastes of the rest of the nation.

Another area of difference between the novel and movie was the way each treated their ending. Mitchell’s book leaves her ending open to interpretation. The ambiguity of Scarlett wanting both to look ahead while still looking behind at the comfort of Tara leaves the reader free to infer either hope or uncertainty for her. The more positive reading, as mentioned earlier, was that the novel could be interpreted in such a way that the past is a place of security and strength which a person can use to face the uncertainties of the future. In Selznick’s movie, however, the past is clearly preferable to the future. Instead of trying to debunk the trappings of nostalgia for the Old South, Selznick brings them to the fore as memories of a bygone era. Gerald Wood writes that, “Consequently, Scarlett’s problem is not as Mitchell depicts it--an internal struggle between traditional morality and opportunism; rather, it is external--how to return to the

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‘charm and grace’ of her past.” Selznick’s depiction of the closing scene also reflects this. The tone of the scene is clearly on the side of hope, since he thought the original ending was “terrifically depressing.” This hopeful outlook also was reassuring for people living through the Depression, and the reception of the film was mediated by the social environment around it.

The social impact of Gone With The Wind, both novel and film, is difficult to quantify, but considering the enduring popularity of each up to the present, one can infer that their influence on the way Americans view the Civil War is great. They both became tremendous financial successes, as Griffith’s and Dixon’s works were. Both works probably also appealed to people who were living through the trials of the Depression.

The social climate of late Depression America itself was a major factor behind the success of Gone With The Wind. Both novel and film touched a receptive chord with their viewers. For example, Scarlett’s assertion that she would “never go hungry again” and her ability to overcome dire circumstances would have found great sympathy among audiences in the Depression era. Historian Thomas H. Pauly noted that what the public saw in a movie like Gone With The Wind was a nostalgic representation of something that was both desired, yet lost. In the movie, a nostalgic longing for the agrarian way of life is emphasized, something that for those living through the

87 Wood, 131.

88 Howard, Gone With The Wind: The Screenplay, 9.
Depression, had long been under attack by the changes brought on by industrialization. Additionally, in *Gone With the Wind*, audiences could look back to a time that stressed "self-reliant individualism and family unity," especially in the fictionalized stable social order of the antebellum South. In the Depression, no doubt many Americans felt that values such as individualism and family were endangered by the dehumanizing effects of rapid industrial growth.\(^{89}\)

In summation, popular culture helped bring the southern interpretation of the Civil War to a mass audience, and perpetuated Confederate ideology within American discourse. The works of Dixon and Griffith capitalized on an increasingly hardening culture of whiteness within America, and they used that culture to sell their version of Confederate history to a receptive audience. Additionally, the story told by Dixon and Griffith furthered the cause of white supremacy and patriarchy, appealing to the common bonds held by white males within American society and downplaying their socio-economic and sectional differences. Their works also came at a time when Americans had a hopeful outlook on the future, and Dixon and Griffith also shared that optimism, presenting an idealized version of white racial patriarchy they hoped would develop in the future.

The works of Mitchell and Selznick, however, came in a very different climate. America was suffering through the Depression years, and gone was the earlier optimism

at the time of Dixon's and Griffith's works. Nevertheless, the works of Mitchell and Selznick also were able to transmit Confederate ideology into mainstream America. They did so by striking a sympathetic chord with their audience, many of whom, as they suffered through the Depression, probably looked back with nostalgia at an era that was long gone, especially in the scenes set in the antebellum South. In the face of uncertainty and social upheaval, audiences living in the Depression were likely able to identify with the stories of hardship during Reconstruction, as poverty accompanied by a sense of helplessness was an common experience in both eras. On a final note, although Mitchell and Selznick toned down the racial elements within their work, they also denied blacks agency to determine their own lives in their stories. Thus, the work of Mitchell and Selznick retained and perpetuated southern stereotypes of blacks, and also upheld the southern interpretation of Civil War history.
Epilogue

The legacy of the Confederacy continues to make its presence felt within American Civil War discourse today. Although it has largely fallen out of favor within the realm of scholarship, as noted earlier, many Southerners adhere to it as a part of their heritage. In my thesis I have tried to trace the Confederate legacy as it moved from the realm of collective memory into the arena of ideology and discourse. Whether I succeeded or not is up to the reader, but in a small way, I feel that this work can at least be of value as a starting point for those looking to study the Lost Cause and its influence upon American society. There are many directions another researcher can head off into from here.

In my limited experience with this topic I have found that there is no shortage of source material to look at. Indeed, one can be fairly overwhelmed by it. For me, it would perhaps have been wiser to take a more narrowly defined approach to the material. Nevertheless I came away from the experience with an even greater appreciation of the subject, and a higher admiration for those toiling in the historical profession than I ever had before, and I am not referring to the reconciliationist historians of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century here.

How might another person interested in Civil War history use this thesis? I believe, again, that this thesis is most valuable as a primer, to introduce another researcher to the topic in a broad way. Though my thesis has discussed the transformation of Confederate thought, from memory into ideology and discourse as its core, that process
could not have been discussed without examining the role that race, masculinity, identity, and honor played in the establishment of that discourse. There are, of course, many topics that I did not discuss, or discussed too briefly, such as the counter-memories and narratives put forth by blacks against an expanding culture of white supremacy. Once again, there are many ways to go from here.
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Figures

Fig. 1. Monument House.com. “Jefferson Davis Memorial” URL: <http://www.monumenthouse.com/richmond/monument/3089> (20 September 2002)

Fig. 2. Library of Congress, American memory section. “Freedman’s Memorial to Abraham Lincoln. URL: <http://memory.loc.gov/npn/det/4a00000/4a05000/4a05500/4a05594r.jpg> (23 September 2002)

Fig. 3. Library of Congress, American memory section. “Shaw Memorial” URL: <http://memory.loc.gov/npn/det/4a20000/4a25000/4a25000/4a25021r.jpg> (2 October 2002)

Fig. 4. Library of Congress, American memory section. “Lincoln memorial” URL: <http://memory.loc.gov/npn/gsc/5a02000/5a02000/5a02022r.jpg> (2 October 2002)

Fig. 5. Library of Congress, American memory section. “Confederate Soldiers and Sailors monument, Richmond, VA.” URL: <http://memory.loc.gov/npn/det/4a20000/4a23000/4a23000/4a23051r.jpg> (2 October 2002)