Gettysburg College Journal of the Civil War 2013

Abstract
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Introduction

It has been an honor to serve as the editors of the Gettysburg College Journal of the Civil War Era in our final year at Gettysburg College. We were pleased and impressed with both the quality and the number of submissions to the journal this year. Of the twenty-two pieces of scholarship submitted for publication this year, it was an extremely difficult decision to only select six of them. We would like to profusely thank our associate editors, Tricia Runzel ('13), Andrew Bothwell ('13), Valerie Merlina ('14), Katelyn Quirin ('14), Heather Clancy ('15), and Julian Weiss ('15), for their dedication, particularly when working one-on-one with the authors to prepare their essays for publication. We would also like to thank our faculty advisor, Dr. Ian Isherwood, for his invaluable guidance.

The six essays included in this issue are not only stellar examples of historical writing, but also embody a diverse representation of topics related to the Civil War Era. Our four academic essays begin with “An Apology for Confederate Poetry,” by Elizabeth Elliott ('13), an exploration of often ignored Confederate bards and their political and cultural significance. The next academic work is “Charles S. Wainwright: The Development of Loyal Dissent from 1861-1865,” by J.J. Beck ('13). This microhistory utilizes the diary of Colonel Charles Wainwright of New York to follow the development of a loyal dissenter fighting a war for a cause in which he does not believe. The third academic work is “Ole’ Zip Coon is a Mighty Learned Scholar: Blackface Minstrelsy as Reflection and Foundation of American Popular Culture,” by Cory Rosenberg ('12), which as the title suggests, traces the cultural impact of blackface minstrelsy from the antebellum
period well into the 20th century. Finally, the fourth academic essay, another microhistory entitled “Earning the Rank of Respect: One Woman’s Passage from Victorian Propriety to Battlefront Responsibility,” by Lauren Roedner (’13), focuses on Civil War nurse Harriet Eaton’s struggle to adjust to the new reality for Victorian women amongst the horrors of war and gender oppression. Interspersed between these longer works are a book review and a historical essay. The book review, written by Lincoln Fitch (’14), discussed the recent text by Meghan Kate Nelson, Ruin Nation. And the historical essay, written by Ryan Donnelly (’15), deals with a more traditional military subject, the importance of Culp’s Hill during the battle of Gettysburg.

Overall, this journey has been highly rewarding. We are honored to have been a part of this journal’s development, and are looking forward to the publication of future issues.

Sincerely,

Rebekah Oakes and Tiffany Santulli

Co-Editors
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Bob Dylan’s 2006 album *Modern Times* sold over three hundred thousand copies in its first week of release. Critics and fans alike praised the legendary song writer’s uncanny ability to compose lyrical folk rock songs reminiscent of his classics from the 1960s and 70s. “More frailer than the flowers, those precious hours,” sings Dylan about two-thirds of the way through the slow-moving track number 4, “When the Deal Goes Down.” But compare those words to lines from “A Rhapsody of a Southern Winter Night,” an 1860 poem by South Carolina native Henry Timrod:

\[
A \text{ round of precious hours.}
Oh! \text{ here, where in that summer noon I basked,}
And strove, with logic frailer than the flowers…\]

Timrod’s name is never once credited on the album jacket. Scott Warmuth, an Albuquerque disc jockey, discovered the similarities after he performed a simple Google search of the song’s lyrics.\(^2\) At once a public outcry ensued that demanded Dylan explain himself for what many regarded as an egregious act of plagiarism.

Perhaps it never crossed Dylan’s mind that anyone would notice his “borrowing” in the first place. A *New York Times* op-ed piece commenting on the controversy described Timrod as “some guy we never heard of.”\(^3\) Few Americans today know that this man was not only one of the

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1 Lines 54-56, in *Poems* (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1860), 69.
Civil War’s most respected poets, but one who had earned the unofficial designation of “Poet Laureate of the Confederacy.” Why have Timrod and his fellow Confederate poets, who produced an unprecedented amount of work during the four years of the war, been consigned to the dustbin of history? The answer is two-fold. Modern literature surveys, desiring to construct a progressive and democratic American canon, have found it easier to forget or suppress pro-slavery and pro-secession works than to analyze their merits. Secondly, Confederate poetry is commonly dismissed as jingoistic, sentimental rhyme, devoid of all serious literary or historic value. This is an unfair portrayal. Confederate writers found in verse a form of self-expression well-suited to combat notions of Southern intellectual inferiority. Refusing to restrict poetry to the domain of beauty, these poets, both good and bad, learned to harness even the most banal images for the service of their emergent country.

Henry Timrod, Confederate Poet
(Source: Library of Congress)

The subject of Confederate poetry deserves a book-length analysis. Because of the sheer volume of literary material produced in the South during the Civil War, historians are bound to uncover interesting pieces forgotten in dusty archives and on endless rolls of microfilm. Richard Barksdale Harwell, one of the earliest scholars to become interested in the study of Confederate publications, wrote that “an adequate critical evaluation of the whole literature of the Confederacy… must await the day when Southern librarians and historians have succeeded in locating more adequate files of these Confederate periodicals.”5 Recent works such as Michael T. Bernath’s *Confederate Minds* (2010) have begun to reflect how accessible the source material is, but Confederate poetry remains an understudied field.

Harwell, ironically, had a fairly low opinion of Confederate poetry himself. In the introduction to his bibliographic finding aid for Southern wartime literature, he wrote, “Confederate poetry as represented in the titles of contemporary publications can most kindly be described as undistinguished. It often set out to be little more than doggerel – and almost never was.”6 Indeed, these sentiments have found plenty of company: the near-universal consensus by historians is that the vast majority of Civil War poetry, both Northern and Southern, is sub-par. Aside from rare exceptions like Walt Whitman, Ritchie Devon Watson found that “the poetic landscape of the Civil War is a metaphorical wasteland, an artistic terrain of shocking banality.”7 In Watson’s view, both sides were so obsessed with being

5 Richard Barksdale Harwell, *Confederate Belles-Lettres: a Bibliography and a Finding List of the Fiction, Poetry, Drama, Songsters, and Miscellaneous Literature Published in the Confederate States of America* (Hattiesburg, MS: The Book Farm, 1941), preface.
“right” that they were unable to dissociate their work from their prejudices and reflect on current events with dispassionate irony. What Whitman did differently was “his refusal to allow his poem to be a vehicle of propaganda and his concomitant rejection of simplistic moral distinctions between ‘good’ Northern soldiers and ‘bad’ Southern ones.”8 Thus, his egalitarian classics such as “Bivouac on a Mountainside” and “The Wound-Dresser” have become the darlings of American poetry anthologies. And with Whitman representing one of the only glimmers of light on the Northern side, what redemptive value could the South offer? Randall Fuller’s survey of Civil War literature, From Battlefields Rising, seems to answer that question quite clearly: no mention is made at all of the literary contributions of Confederate publications.9

Some of the modern distaste for Confederate poetry arises not from a blanket condemnation of the region itself, but from the different purposes served by verse in the nineteenth century. Poetry in that time was commonly read from magazines on street corners, quoted in church sermons, and recited by children in schools. Southern poetry was rhetorical in purpose, created for public oratorical performance, and frequently “declaimed by the poets themselves.”10 History, not personal intimacy or psychology, was the dominant literary model. Nineteenth-century poetry tended to “turn art’s moral light on public matters and private deeds,” using sweeping and romantic narrative structure to honor important stories.11 There is also little colloquial speech in Civil War-era poetry to give it a unique flavor; lines

8 Watson, Jr., Normans and Saxons, 201.
11 J.D. McClatchy, Poets of the Civil War (New York: Library of America, 2005), xviii.
such as “Sister, hark! Atween the trees cometh naught but summer breeze” from a late Confederate poem called “All is Gone” use the antiquated language of traditional English literature.\textsuperscript{12} The distinctions we make today about what constituted “high” writing and “low” (popular) writing would not have been recognized by nineteenth-century readers.

However, it is not only a generational gap that causes us to dismiss Confederate poetry as “barren reading.”\textsuperscript{13} Historians and literary critics are frustrated with it because they want to condemn it morally. It seems offensive to us, even disturbing, that poetry printed in widely accessible, every-day periodicals could buy so fully into the myths of the Southern aristocracy, with its praises of the sanctity of white womanhood and the trivialization of human bondage.

\begin{quote}
\textit{And Sumner, snarling poodle-pet
Of virgins past their prime;
And even the sluts of Women’s Rights –
Tray, Blanche, and Sweet-heart, all –
Are yelping shrill against us still,
And hunger for our fall!}\textsuperscript{14}
\end{quote}

This poem appeared in the most prestigious Southern literary magazine of the time, the \textit{Southern Literary Messenger}. Its crude language ("snarling poodle-pet;" "sluts"), dispensed without any touch of irony, would scarcely be permitted in a modern publication. Its blatant condemnation of Union martyr Charles Sumner forever prevents it from being tolerated by a Northern audience. The Shakespearean reference (the dogs “Tray, Blanche,

\begin{footnotes}
\item Lines 75-80, \textit{Southern Literary Messenger}, February 1861, 100-103.
\end{footnotes}
and Sweet-heart” from King Lear) sounds more like pre-school mockery than a serious literary allusion. But despite (and perhaps because of) these things, the poem is endlessly fascinating to behold. The biting language and relentless insults encapsulate the combination of anger, fear and excitement Southerners were feeling on the eve of secession. “A Ballad for the Young South” is a second-rate poem by literary standards, but through it we see the emergence of a uniquely Confederate style.

Like Southern prose literature, Confederate poetry was inflamed by Romantic literary tropes. Literary critic J. D. McClatchy points out that Confederate poets “rhapsodized about knights and cavaliers and paladins, terms that drew a romantic scrim over the realities.”15 However, the “realities” of Southern life during the war period – marches, battles, enlistment, struggles on the home front – were all summarily addressed in the poetry of the latest newspapers, magazines, and periodicals. From Susan Archer Talley’s “Battle of Manassas” to John R. Thompson’s “England’s Neutrality” to Alethea S. Burroughs’s “Savannah Fallen,” Southerners demonstrated a remarkable capacity to use poetry as an outlet for rhetorical reaction to almost every significant aspect of the war.16 Especially within a leisured agrarian class, poetry could be produced quickly and was appropriate to read during both good and bad occasions. And while the Confederate version of this art was colored too often by melodramatic effusion, elegies and rallying cries became the energy-filled backdrop “against which stronger poems were illuminated.”17

15 McClatchy, Poets of the Civil War, xx.
16 These poems are reprinted from their original sources in William Gilmore Simms, War Poetry of the South.
17 McClatchy, Poets of the Civil War, xvii-xviii.
We need look no further for these “stronger poems” than in the collected works of Henry Timrod, “Poet Laureate of the Confederacy” and anonymous muse to Bob Dylan. Born in 1828, Timrod’s life was marked by a series of tragedies, including the loss of his only son.\(^\text{18}\) He could not enlist in the Confederate army due to poor health. The decline of the Confederacy after 1863 seemed to mirror his descent into poverty and tuberculosis, which claimed his life only two years after the war’s end. Nevertheless, Timrod was a prolific poet and one of the few future Confederate writers that gained widespread praise in the North before the war. One 1859 article from the *Charleston Courier* discussed how thrilling it was that Timrod’s poetry was published in Boston, saying that “we believe it will not only confirm an individual reputation, but add greatly to our best and sectional literature.”\(^\text{19}\) The thematic focus of Timrod’s work shifted once the war began, as he abandoned his usual verse on the beauty of nature for poetry more martial in style.\(^\text{20}\) While Timrod still constructed lovely images honoring the Southern landscape, his wartime poetry integrated the aesthetic with another domain: political urgency. Paul Hamilton Hayne, one of the Confederacy’s most celebrated poets, revered Timrod as a crusader against anti-Southern intellectual prejudice, writing that “the objection [to Timrod’s poetry in the North] is that the majority of his pieces, and the ablest, deal with Confederate topics, and praise Confederate heroes.”\(^\text{21}\) Though the stress of rebellion would eventually accelerate the poet’s death, Timrod “found in the crisis of the war an intensity of artistic purpose that made his Civil-War era poems some of his strongest.”\(^\text{22}\)

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22 Barrett and Miller, “*Words for the Hour,*” 15.
Timrod wrote several powerful poems about fiery Southern patriotism during the first two years of the war. The few works of his that do occasionally surface in modern American poetry anthologies ("Ethnogenesis," "A Cry to Arms," "Charleston," and "The Cotton Boll") all date from this period. "Ethnogenesis" is perhaps the best "call-to-arms" poem produced by the entire Confederate literary circuit. The title proclaims the birth of both a new nation and a new race "out of the infinite regions of the night."²³ Here, Timrod enlists imagery as a weapon to fight for the Confederacy. Line 24, "The snow of Southern summers!" is a metaphor for cotton, one of the most iconic symbols of Confederate independence. This cotton "snow" is portrayed as being immeasurably warmer than the frozen water that blankets the North every winter. Appealing to a slaveholding South, the "kinder, gentler snow will help the South, along with the rest of a more amenable, milder climate, win the war."²⁴ The poem builds up to a closing line that posits the South as a positive, moral force for good that is defined by "Strange tropic warmth and hints of summer seas." Modern readers conscious of the injustice of slavery will likely object to Timrod’s sunny treatment of the "slave crop." However, suppressing the poem blinds us not only to its structural and lyrical merit, but also its interesting illumination of the complex Southern attitudes towards secession. Whereas Joseph Brenan was inspired by belligerence to write "A Ballad for the Young South," Timrod was drawn to a beneficent vision of gentleness and prosperity with "Ethnogenesis."

²³ Line 3, in Simms, War Poetry of the South, 7–11.
The best Confederate poets, including Timrod, Paul Hamilton Hayne and William Gilmore Simms, were highly involved in crafting a unified vision for Southern poetry that was to be reflected in the elite literary magazines of the day. Timrod and the rest revered Edgar Allan Poe, whose literary career flourished in the South before his death in 1849. Hayne, for example, referred to Poe as “that mystic bard whose ‘Raven’ broods.” But while Poe’s work was marked by a “transcendental concern with romantic aesthetics,” Confederate poets were also driven by Romantic nationalism. (Ironically, Poe was “explicitly hostile to the notion that literary works of a writer such as himself should be viewed as a badge of honor for that writer’s nation.” Poe himself lamented, “We… often find ourselves in the gross paradox of liking a stupid book the better, because, sure enough, its stupidity is American.”)

Notable Confederate publications such as the Southern Illustrated News, De Bow’s Review, the Southern Presbyterian Review, and the Charleston Mercury joined with scores of other small-scale papers to create a thriving environment for Poe’s hated “badges of honor.” The expressed purpose of the Southern Illustrated News was to “forever [chase] out the catch-penny papers of Yankeedom, [so] that the South may see ‘There’s life in the old land yet!,’ – that industry and perseverance do not belong solely to Yankeedom.” It was a treasure-trove of literary and artistic contributions from prominent Confederate men and women. The first issue of 1863 boldly declared, “Our special agent in London is now negotiating

25 Southern Illustrated News, July 4, 1863.
28 Southern Illustrated News, October 4, 1862.
with THACKERAY, DICKINS, and WILKIE COLLINS for novels, to be written expressly and solely for this paper.”\textsuperscript{29} The magazine was also printed on such bad paper that all but a few surviving copies have disintegrated.\textsuperscript{30} Unrealistic expectations and poor funding aside, the News predicted “the dawn of a new day of Southern letters, a day when the anthologies would abound with the noble thoughts and exquisite poetry of the old classic literature of England.”\textsuperscript{31} The News sustained itself by embracing liberality; indeed, one newspaper declared, “If an article is accepted [to the News], the author only has to name his price, no matter how high, and he instantly receives a check for that amount.”\textsuperscript{32} Another newspaper from Charleston enthusiastically reported that “the News is well printed on good paper, has a clever salutatory, and a thrifty, promising look.”\textsuperscript{33}

An extended analysis of the \textit{Southern Illustrated News} is necessary because of how aptly it and similar magazines reflected changing Southern morale. One notable work by Paul Hamilton Hayne called “The Southern Lyre” was put to print in the magazine only days before its editors were aware of the outcome of the battle of Gettysburg. “The Southern Lyre” is a sort of “roll-call” of Confederate poets, directly naming individuals like Timrod who he believed helped contribute to the rebel nation’s military successes. The poem is not a great one, containing hackneyed constructions such as “whiter than the snow” and “warm as sunshine.” Still, the heroic language with which he celebrated the poets reflects the vitality of

\textsuperscript{29} \textit{Southern Illustrated News}, January 3, 1863.
\textsuperscript{32} \textit{The Weekly Raleigh Register}, March 25, 1863, col. E.
\textsuperscript{33} “The News from Richmond,” \textit{The Charleston Mercury}, September 12, 1862.
Confederate nationalism; Southerners were clearly thinking hard about how to remedy their perceived “intellectual inferiority to the North.”\textsuperscript{34} The first stanza of the poem reveals that Confederates had no doubts about winning the war, even at the eve of its turning point:

\begin{quote}
\textit{No longer shall the darksome cloud}
\textit{Of Northern Hate and Envy shroud}
\textit{The radiance of our Poets proud.}\textsuperscript{35}
\end{quote}

Other poems that lacked the stylistic sophistication of Hayne’s and Timrod’s work nevertheless reflected similar displays of political and social consciousness. This is the first stanza of a poem written by an anonymous poet, called “Enlisted To-day:”

\begin{quote}
\textit{I know the sun shines, and the lilacs are blowing,}
\textit{And summer sends kisses by beautiful May –}
\textit{Oh! to see all the treasures the spring is bestowing,}
\textit{And think – my boy Willie is enlisting to-day.}\textsuperscript{36}
\end{quote}

Full of sweet and simple images like “summer sends kisses,” and “the lilacs are blowing,” this poem at first glance seems utterly superficial, without any redeeming innovation in form or rhyme. However, the successive stanzas, which describe the disorienting pain felt when families were broken up by the war, grant this poem its historical significance. For all of their unquestioned racism and hostility towards Northern culture, it can still be said that Southerners loved their children.

\textsuperscript{34} Michael T. Bernath, \textit{Confederate Minds: The Struggle for Intellectual Independence in the Civil War} (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 220.
\textsuperscript{35} \textit{Southern Illustrated News}, July 4, 1863.
\textsuperscript{36} In Simms, \textit{War Poetry of the South}, 63.
Post-Gettysburg Confederate poems, such as Margaret Stillings’s “The Buds That Fall,” show how verse was quick to reflect the changing sentiments of a society increasingly haunted by death.\(^{37}\) The editors of Southern periodicals themselves began to perceive poetry as a sort of barometer for the success of the war, lashing out at so-called “bad” submissions because they seemed to prove the South could not intellectually sustain itself. On August 6, 1864, *Southern Field and Fireside* wrote this message “To Young Writers:”

> Stop writing: not for your own amusement and improvement, but for publication... Lay your MSS [manuscripts] carefully aside and when you have arrived at a greater maturity of mind and cultivation, revise and correct them.

George Bagby of the *Southern Literary Messenger* declared on his editor’s page that “weak little compositions by turns pious, pathetic, and romantic... are not, as a general thing, desirable for magazines. Such tender and sentimental trash had better be burned.”\(^{38}\) The *Southern Christian Advocate* implored poets to “send us no more poetical effusions, until, if they are real poets, they have pruned them thoroughly, or have submitted them to good judges, and they have recommended their publication.”\(^{39}\) To combat the Union with their poetry, writers needed to show up to battle with sharper weapons.

Perhaps that is what James R. Randall had in mind when he submitted his poem “At Fort Pillow” to the *Wilmington Journal* on April 25, 1864. It is amazing how soon Randall’s piece was published after the actual Fort Pillow incident, which occurred on April 12. Stanza 12 reads:

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38 "Editor's Table," *Southern Literary Messenger*, October 1864, 315.
39 Reprinted as "Literature in the South," *Southern Field and Fireside*, May 18, 1864, 3.
With steady rifle, sharpened brand,
A week ago, upon my steed,
With Forrest and his warrior band,
I made the hell-hounds writhe and bleed.

The poem is colored by violent imagery that describes every movement of a Confederate soldier under the command of Nathan Bedford Forrest. The line “I sought the white man, not the black,” directly predicts the charges that would be made by the Union that Fort Pillow was a massacre. Six stanzas later, the speaker is moved to an almost bloodthirsty ecstasy:

Throbbing along the frenzied vein,
My blood seemed kindled into song –
The death-dirge of the sacred slain,
The slogan of immortal wrong.\(^\text{40}\)

Randall has an ear for alliteration (“death-dirge” and “sacred slain”), and the image of the throbbing vein is quite elegant. While the inclusion of words such as “steed” and “immortal” betray romantic influences, this is a remarkably well-crafted and original poem. It is almost hard to believe that clever images can come out of such repugnant subject matter. The intense psychological vitality of this piece, as well as its sound construction, should rightfully save the poem from being dismissed as mere “trash in rhyme.”

The surrender of the South in 1865 sounded the death knell for Confederate poetry, but the remnants of it lingered on for just a little bit longer. *War Poetry of the South* was a collection released in 1866, beginning with Henry Timrod’s “Ethnogenesis.” The volume was published in New York, indicating at least some nominal Northern acceptance of it. In the

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\(^{40}\) Simms, *War Poetry of the South*, 210-213.
introduction, William Gilmore Simms indicated his belief that Confederate poetry was substantial enough to be subsumed into “the national literature:”

*Now that the States of the Union have been resolved into one nation, this collection is essentially as much the property of the whole as are the captured cannon which were employed against it during the progress of the late war. It belongs to the national literature, and will hereafter be regarded as constituting a proper part of it, just as legitimately to be recognized by the nation as are the rival ballads of the cavaliers and roundheads, by the English, in the great civil conflict of their country.*

The passage even discusses the potential for publishing more volumes in the future, as many other poems had to be cut out due to length. However, Simms would soon be disappointed. Six years after Henry Timrod’s death, Paul Hamilton Hayne remarked at how quickly the greatest Confederate poet was forgotten by the re-united country: “While hastily examining the volume, a gentleman came alongside, and asked which book I was purchasing. I answered, ‘Timrod’s Poems, by Paul Hayne.’ ‘Timrod! Timrod!’ says he, ‘I never heard of him.’”

One hundred and forty years later, identical quotes were being recorded in articles commenting on the Dylan plagiarism controversy. Nobody knew who Henry Timrod was and nobody cared.

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41 Simms, *War Poetry of the South*, v.
Walt Whitman himself had predicted that out of the Civil War “a great literature will yet arise… those scenes – era compressing centuries of ‘native’ passion, first class pictures, tempests of life and death – an inexhaustible mine of the historic drama, romance … of peoples to come.”\textsuperscript{43} Whitman’s prophecy was never fulfilled, a sentiment that has been echoed by numerous historians from Richard Harwell to Edmund Wilson. But how could there have been no “inexhaustible mine of historic drama” present when poems with odd-ball titles like “England’s Neutrality” could find a captive audience? The creativity of certain Southern poets proves that the South was not merely “a stagnant and isolated backwater.”\textsuperscript{44} Because Confederate poets stretched beyond aesthetic beauty to reflect on how the

\textsuperscript{43} In Lynn Clyde Surles, \textit{Voices From Lincoln’s Time: “Bill Herndon” and Other Poems} (Hubertus, WI: Belman Press, 1997), ii-iii.

\textsuperscript{44} Bernath, \textit{Confederate Minds}, 6.
popular mind reacted to and dealt with the events of the war, “we can forgive
the muse who, in her fervor, is sometimes forgetful of her art.”

Poetry achieves meaning by suggestive description, and Southerners
were certainly suggesting a great deal of things in the thousands of poem
circulating around the Confederacy during the Civil War. Confederate
poetry was ubiquitous, enjoying popularity “unprecedented and almost
certainly never to be equaled thereafter.” The greatest flaw of Confederate
poetry was not its literary quality. Indeed, the editors of the *Southern
Literary Messenger*, the *Southern Literary News*, and the rest knew what
poetry was good and what was not, though it took them until the South was
losing to finally admit this to their readers. Rather, Confederate poetry has
been ignored for its content, which is arguably its most fascinating virtue.
This field will continue to be side-stepped by academia because the subject
matter cannot be reconciled with progressive modern views, and aversion
will only increase with time. Though it may have been wrong to keep from
crediting Timrod, Bob Dylan actually did the poet a service by using his
lines. For a brief moment in 2006, a man who had once formed a significant
part of a region’s epic struggle held the interest of the American people once
more.

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45 Simms, *War Poetry of the South*, v-vi.
46 Bernath, *Confederate Minds*, 182.
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An Unsettling Civil War – A Review of *Ruin Nation*

Lincoln Fitch

*Book Review*

Meghan Kate Nelson in *Ruin Nation* elegantly reminds the reader of the devastating impact of the Civil War on the American landscape and the transformation that ensued. The war irrevocably ravaged cities, homes, forests, and the bodies of soldiers. *Ruin Nation* delves into this destruction and the immense repercussion on Americans. Furthermore, it offers a reintroduction to the terrifying cost of the Civil War and ruination’s profound significance in understanding that war. As Nelson writes, “Without its [the Civil War’s] ruins, we cannot fully understand the terrifying nature of wartime violence and the complex and contradictory nation that it created.”47 By systematically dissecting these ruins, Nelson offers a profound understanding of the cost of the Civil War.

In this work, Meghan Kate Nelson utilizes a profound array of sources in crafting her narrative. A network of scholarly sources establishes the foundation upon which her argument is built. These sources corroborate the claims made by the author. Although these sources are frequently referenced in footnotes, they are rarely quoted directly. Instead, she relies upon a vast array of primary sources to create the shape of her argument. These give personal and tangible evidence to support her thesis. Images are frequently used in order to give the reader a visual experience of the war’s ruination. First hand experiences recorded in diaries and letters by both commoners and significant figures bring ruination directly to the

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reader. In this way, the author balances social history with political history. This moderate approach offers a multi-dimensional view of the effects of ruination that holds onto the voices of ordinary people without neglecting the crucial figures.

*Ruin Nation* methodically analyzes the preeminent canvases upon which the ruination of the war was fashioned: cities, homes, forests and men. Hampton, Chambersburg, and Columbia provide distinct and compelling examples of the war’s cost to cities and the vast implications of that cost. These acts of devastation began a national questioning of the nature of warfare, the justice of retribution, and who was responsible for ruination. In light of this immense ruination, many Americans reconsidered the efficacy of war policy. Nelson examines both the physical damage of ruination inflicted on these cities and the lasting psychological damage. Additionally, this book looks at the distressing ways in which the war landscape confronted homes. Homes frequently stood in the path of the great demolishing agent that was the Civil War. They were ransacked, pillaged, used as cover, and strategically destroyed. In this way, the war invaded the most sacred space of privacy. Similarly, the war laid waste to Southern forests. Forests were desolated by battles, the transportation of troops, and the construction of camps, earth works, shelters, and places of recreation. The war also irrevocably wrecked the bodies of men and their notions of masculinity. These wounds put soldiers’ “masculinity in peril.” They upset the gender dynamic as demonstrated in the illustrations of a woman with her arm around her husband’s waist and the woman driving the stagecoach next to her maimed husband. Despite some government assistance, it was difficult for handicapped men to find work, which further
undermined their role in family and society. The ruination of men’s bodies upset the cult of domesticity that dominated 19th century homes and brought about a reorganization of gender roles. Nelson’s book astutely analyzes the ways in which the ruination of cities, homes, forests, and men’s bodies during the war led to transformation afterwards.48

This work is but an introduction to the vast devastation that the war caused. Therefore, more analysis on other areas of ruination including rivers, social structure, financial, and commercial interests would have given a deeper understanding of the multi-faceted costs of the Civil War.

Importantly, the immense death toll of the war and the psychological implications caused by the empty chair at the dinner table deserve the attention of scholars. The death toll of war often becomes a disembodied number that utterly fails to grasp the gravitas of the cost. Nelson makes a strong case of the effects of war ruination, yet the transformation it enables is not made clear. Therefore, more sources commenting on the effects of ruination distanced from the war would cement these claims. Despite some minor limitations, this book is a profound work that offers a more disturbing, more authentic understanding of the war to both the scholarly community and the public.

Too often the true costs of the Civil War have been maligned in the name of unity, national identity and reconciliation. Meghan Kate Nelson reminds us of the vast significance of the war’s devastation. The war demolished cities, homes, forests and citizens and left ruins in their stead. These ruins were a physical reminder of the enormous cost of this war and they force historians to consider unsettling questions about the “nature of civilized warfare, the legitimacy of retribution, the taking of responsibility, the relationship between domesticity and privacy, the necessity of destruction in the construction of landscapes of war, the unstable ideal of American masculinity, and the authenticity of modernity.”

By annihilating these markers, we have suppressed the difficult issues of war in favor of a polished narrative of reverence and unity.

Due to the desire for national reconciliation, public aversion to traumatic sites, and nature’s growth over the last 150 years, much of the disturbing ruins of the Civil War have been erased. In their stead we have

49 Ibid, 239.
the pristine battlefields and a tidied up Civil War – a war of heroism and bravery that brought us closer together as a nation. Gone are the severed limbs, the mangled bodies, the devastated forests, the pillaged homes, the ransacked cities, and the battlefields strewn with the dead and dying. American history needs to uncover the unsettling realities that have long been ignored.

The perplexing and infamous General Dan Sickles lost his leg to cannon fire at Gettysburg and sent it to U.S. Army Medical Museum to be stored. Throughout the rest of his life he took frequent pilgrimage to visit his leg and remember what the war had cost him. Like Dan Sickles, we as historians of the Civil War must visit the painful, dark, difficult and disturbing costs of our neat little war.
Charles S. Wainwright: The Development of Loyal Dissent from 1861-1865

J.J. Beck
Academic Essay

Charles S Wainwright had participated in all three days of battle at Gettysburg. He witnessed his close friend and compatriot General Reynolds struck down on the first day. On July 5th, 1863, Wainwright traveled to what would later be known as Pickett’s Charge. Upon seeing the battlefield scattered with the bodies of the dead and smelling the stench of bloat, he lamented: “There was about an acre or so of ground here where you could not walk without stepping over the bodies, and I saw perhaps a dozen cases where they were heaped [sic] one on top of the other”.50

Two months after the Battle of Gettysburg, Wainwright reflected on those fateful days in July and the causes of this “vile” war. Sitting in his tent near the Culpeper Courthouse on the Rappahannock, Wainwright attempted to understand how abolition had come to dominate the Union war aims and why so many men had perished for the freedom of blacks. The radicals of Congress, Wainwright wrote, “did not want to see the Union restored without the abolition of slavery”.51 He believed that abolition was a stance taken by a select few “who had negro on the brain”.52 Wainwright was bitter that his men and others had died for those he believed to be inferior to the white race. He was positive that President Lincoln had been heavily influenced by the Radical abolitionists. This was, according to Wainwright,

51 Ibid, 283.
52 Ibid.
a calculated plan to win over the masses of the Union and coerce them into favoring emancipation. Tirades against African Americans and the Lincoln Administration came to dominate his thought. Believing that Lincoln was no longer waging war just for the Union, Wainwright became conflicted. His representation of racial stereotypes and changing purpose of his diary revealed a simmering anger towards the Lincoln Administration and African Americans, yet he continued to fight for the Union. Forced into continued service by the cultural paradigms of Victorianism, Wainwright put his life in peril for a cause that no longer aligned with his political values. Wainwright clung to battle because resigning was not a choice. Cowardice and desertion were unforgiveable offenses that hurt not only the man but his family as well. Apart from this, Wainwright’s attachment to his duty and role as a head of household necessitated his continued participation in the war. Yet, despite his anger with the war, Wainwright fought valiantly.

A loyal dissenter held a complicated set of beliefs that evolved as political and military events shifted and changed. Wainwright’s displeasure with Lincoln and the Radicals was typical of any Democrat in 1861, but this displeasure matured into hatred after Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation. Wainwright was representative of a larger trend of Democrats in the Army of the Northern Potomac. Democrats from Maine to Pennsylvania felt betrayed by the proclamation. The war had completely changed, and soldiers used Lincoln and African Americans as a target for their hardships. Good men were now dying for the freedom of individuals who they viewed as unworthy. In response to these feelings, Wainwright’s rhetoric mirrored other loyal dissenters. His language targeting Lincoln and the radicals became more spiteful after the Fall of 1862, and he began
to see the President as an abolitionist who was controlled by the Radicals. Wainwright’s discomfort with Radial Republican values translated to intense racism against African Americans.

The purpose of Charles Wainwright’s diary deserves special attention. When he first enlisted, the diary was only to be used as a way to recount memories of the war. Originally, the leather bound book would only be used to recount mundane events of his day. The army was at a standstill and as a result the diary entries served as way for Wainwright to reflect on the immediate events of that day. Reflections on personal beliefs or the future were markedly absence from these early entries. Included in these early pages were meetings, meals, and the state of his unit. Although a Democrat, commentaries on race and politics were initially scarce. Perhaps Wainwright’s ability to display and talk of his discontent with the president in the public sphere served as his outlet for political frustration. Wainwright still fully believed that the war was being fought for Union. “Union” had a specific definition in the 1860s, and in order to understand what this word meant to Wainwright, it must be deconstructed.

Loyalty and sacrifice to the Union were the hallmarks of a good Victorian soldier. Union is a word that has fallen out of use, but in the 1860s it evoked an emotional appeal to duty and patriotism. Gary Gallagher in *The Union War*, defined the term as an ideology essential to all Americans. The word represented a country that was united in its defense of democracy and destined for prominence on a world stage. In the mind of the common man, Union was proxy for linguistic, historical, and cultural factors that defined

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the United States. By this token, the true historical Union these men were fighting for was steeped in revolutionary legacy. Union was synonymous with the great experiment the founding fathers embarked on in 1776. To fight for Union was to fight for the continuation of this legacy and this experiment.55

In his well-received work, *For Cause and Comrades*, James McPherson argued that the legacy of the American Revolution motivated men like Wainwright to arms. Fighting this war was the great test of his generation.56 McPherson argues that many soldiers were seeking to participate in the great crusade that would define their generation. The ancestry of the Revolutionary War pulled these men into the military ranks. McPherson believed that the men fought to show that they were worthy heirs to the legacy of the American Revolution. Wainwright left home to defend the experiment of democracy and the rule of law.57 He acted out of a need to prove his worth in the eyes of history. The United States represented a hope for the world: democracy not ruled by kings or oligarchs, but a country governed by the people where the ruler was subject to the demands of the populace. Wainwright’s Revolutionary heritage was a motivating factor in enlisting.

Although scarcely noted in his dairy, Wainwright’s home state of New York played a crucial role in creating and shaping his views of the Union. Dutchess county, New York, was steeped in the patriotic tradition.58 The men in this county were the progeny of the citizens who carried out

55 Ibid, 47.
57 Ibid.
the American Revolution.\textsuperscript{59} Wainwright’s grandfathers on his mother’s and father’s side participated in the war. As a result, he inherited membership to the Sons of the American Revolution, and this imbued Wainwright with a sense of duty that transcended state boundaries.\textsuperscript{60} Because of the familial ties to the Revolution, he fought for the Union that the forefathers had helped to free and keep whole. The urgency of the war was felt throughout the town. On the day Fort Sumter was attacked, Dutchess County began assembling money and men to send towards the war effort.\textsuperscript{61} This sense of immediacy helped define what Wainwright termed as political duty. To Wainwright specifically, the term duty originally meant “acting intelligently” in the face of adversity but this definition would change.\textsuperscript{62} Logically, if the town where Wainwright had spent all his life believed it patriotic, moral, and intelligent to fight for the Union, then Wainwright would adopt these principles readily. These values were not unique to New York, but rather they represented the Victorian values that dominated society.

Men throughout the Union were fighting for a moral imperative. At the forefront of thought was the ideal of the United States as a singular entity and the male as a courageous sufferer. The secession of the South had been an injustice to not only the Republic, but also to the memory of the heroes who fought in the American Revolution. This sense of injustice shaped the duty that permeated the male mind, especially the mind of Wainwright. This service was to be fulfilled courageously. The Victorian male championed stoic fighting for a noble cause.\textsuperscript{63} In this war, Wainwright

\textsuperscript{59} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{60} Charles Wainwright, \textit{A Diary of Battle}, xxi.  
\textsuperscript{61} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{62} Charles Wainwright, \textit{A Diary of Battle}, 193.  
\textsuperscript{63} Ibid.
viewed fighting for the Union as the noblest cause, and suffering for this cause was to be a welcomed exaltation of duty.\textsuperscript{64} This stoicism in the face of death was characteristic of the Victorian culture that overshadowed society in the 1860s and scorned cowardice. Men who exhibited weak traits were cast out by their peers. Many soldiers deeply feared being perceived as cowardly. During the Civil War, the term coward became synonymous with being dishonorable, unpatriotic, and weak.\textsuperscript{65} Men considered cowards were ostracized from their unit and shamed. At Williamsburg, Wainwright would fulfill the Victorian stereotype of the courageousness in the face of battle.

Wainwright engaged in his first battle at Williamsburg in 1862. When reflecting on his first time under fire, Wainwright pondered why he had not felt fear or anxiety when he was shot at.\textsuperscript{66} He found that his pride overtook his fear and that upon “seeing the dead and wounded” he felt nothing but indifference.\textsuperscript{67} He acted in a cool calculated manner. When speaking of the dead, Wainwright stated, “I had no more feeling for him, than if he had tripped over a stump and fallen; nor do I think it would be different it had been my brother.”\textsuperscript{68} This anecdote works to explain his overall indifference to death on the battlefield. Fighting for the noble cause of Union also defined an important party line for the Democrats (soon to be War Democrats) of which Wainwright was a staunch supporter.

Wainwright’s own beliefs were heavily influenced by periodicals and Democratic party ideology. The culture of the Officer Corp in the Army

\textsuperscript{64} Frances M. Clarke, \textit{War Stories: Suffering and Sacrifice in the Civil War North} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 12.
\textsuperscript{65} James M. McPherson, \textit{For Cause and Comrades: Why Men Fought in the Civil War} (New York, Oxford University Press, 1997), 77.
\textsuperscript{66} Charles Wainwright, \textit{A Diary of Battle}, 56.
\textsuperscript{67} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{68} Ibid.
of the Potomac revolved around political stances and literature. The officers read whatever periodical was available based upon their geographic location and political ideology. Wainwright was informed by the Democratic Party. He would define his political ideology through *The New York Times* and *New York Tribune*. He utilized these papers to give shape to his political ideology. For example, during the Peninsular Campaign, Wainwright stressed his impatience when waiting to receive the paper.\(^6^9\) The newspapers defined Wainwright’s political ideology and he was not able to divorce his own beliefs from those of the party.

Immediately after succession and into the first days of the war, the Democratic Party attempted to regain ideological stability by reformulating its policy. The new party line distanced the Northern Democrats from the Southern Democrats.\(^7^0\) These politicians believed the actions of the South were a declaration of war against democracy and majority rule.\(^7^1\) Similarly to Wainwright, the opinion of writers in *The New York Times* portrayed the South as creating an illegal and unnecessary war.\(^7^2\) These papers supported the call of men to war. Wainwright, while reading the *Baltimore Herald*, supported the large call for draftees in New York in 1862.\(^7^3\) He believed that this new round of drafting would “draw the most efficient and best men” to the Union cause.\(^7^4\) Wainwright found ideological comfort in these papers. They informed his political posturing and enabled him to command

\(^{69}\) Charles Wainwright, *A Diary of Battle*, 59.
\(^{70}\) For more on the reformulation of the Democratic Party in 1860 see Mark E. Neely’s *The Union Divided*.
\(^{73}\) Charles Wainwright, *A Diary of Battle*, 93.
\(^{74}\) Ibid.
a working knowledge of the upper echelons of command. Periodicals all had agendas and Wainwright bought into these agendas without question. This inability to separate reality and politics was shown specifically in his commentary on the John Fitz Porter Trial.

In 1863, Wainwright commented heavily on the court martial of McClellan’s right hand man, John-Fitz Porter. All of Wainwright’s knowledge of the case was read from Democratic periodicals. He believed that the court was purposely stacked against Porter. In the eyes of Wainwright, the trial was being used as a proxy to strike at McClellan. Believing this, he attributed the majority Republican tribunal to partisan motivates, but these men were known not to rule along party lines. Even so, Wainwright ignored this commonly known fact. He believed that Republicans would rule along party lines and convict Porter, a Democrat, because of his party. This small instance in Wainwright’s diary represented a shift in the usage of written language. Wainwright was subtly commenting on the biased political proceedings of this trial. This also revealed that men relied heavily on the lines of their party to inform them of stances to take on key issues. Wainwright showed skepticism towards and even suspicion of Republicans. Porter was ruled guilty, but was later acquitted in 1879. Partisan rhetoric would continue to inform Wainwright’s political ideology throughout the war and affect how he operated within the army. This was a watershed moment in the purpose of Wainwright’s diary; for the first time it was being utilized as a reflective tool for Wainwright’s political beliefs. This shift set the stage for subtle racial critiques to begin surfacing in his writing.

75 Ibid, 161.
76 Ibid.
77 Ibid.
Wainwright’s political ideology and the print cultural surrounding the War Democrats were mutually reinforcing. Political cartoons utilized by *The New York Herald* and *The New York Times* often likened Lincoln to a pompous Baboon. Wainwright seized this commentary and employed it within his diary.\(^{78}\) Although critical in nature, this does not constitute loyal dissent. Prior to the Emancipation Proclamation, it was still considered appropriate to openly criticize President Lincoln’s policies on the war. In addition to this, Democrats both on the field and in office had no reason to believe that Lincoln was fighting for anything besides Union, law, and the constitution. Loyal dissent is defined by those in power. Lincoln produced a closed hegemonic relationship between himself and the Democrats. Dissent in society was therefore defined by the Republican Party line. Wainwright

\(^{78}\) Ibid, 109.
used explicit language when talking about the Democratic Party and the Republican Party. Employing the word “good” or “just” was directly referring to the ideals of the Democratic Party and the opposites to the Republicans and African Americans.

Wainwright’s change in mess cooks was an excellent anecdote to explain how language portrayed his increasingly polarizing political and racial beliefs. Soldiers grew attachment to their cooks and Wainwright was no different. He had grown fond of his French cook. Throughout 1861 and 1862, Wainwright was happily served by the Frenchman, but, when he received a job at West Point, Wainwright was left with an African American cook named Ben. Preconceived notions of African American food affected Wainwright’s opinion on the matter. He believed it was repulsive and not fit for a white man to eat. Without even tasting the food, Wainwright had stated that “it is hard work coming down to nigger grease.” Wainwright was reflecting on more than just taste. He was using the food as a way to comment on racial stereotypes. Describing the Frenchman’s food as “really good” and “veritable artiste,” Wainwright was commenting on more than the cuisine. This food was western in nature. It fit the palate of a White middle class officer; Ben’s food, associated with decidedly negative abrasive adjectives, was below Wainwright. This subtly commentary revealed a good deal about Wainwright’s increasingly racial and stereotypical views. He further commented that by the end of the summer, his contraband had learned nothing of cooking. Wainwright’s use of the word “contraband” opens another avenue of linguistic analysis.

79 Ibid, 209.
80 Ibid.
81 Ibid.
Contrabands had been a part of the Union war effort since the beginning, but Wainwright was silent about them in his diary until he was displeased with them. The term contraband meant the confiscation of goods during a time of war. Runaway slaves that were taken by Union and put to work as servants earned this title.\(^\text{82}\) However, the term contraband implied ownership, which reinforced the second class nature of these runaways.\(^\text{83}\) Men had trouble divorcing themselves from the racial prejudices that they were imbued with. Soldiers like Charles Brewster chose to fight these tendencies, but men like Wainwright embraced them more readily as the war continued.

An excellent example of the relationship between a contraband and a Union officer were the letters of Charles Brewster. Brewster believed in abolition and the civilizing process, but with this came a set of preconceived notions about African Americans. Brewster adopted the doctrine of equality, but in his letters he still insisted on calling his African American servant David a contraband.\(^\text{84}\) Although he was attempting to embrace abolitionist ideology, Brewster’s prejudice was still evident in his letters: “I have got a contraband though I believe I wrote you that before. He is quite smart for a nigger though he is quite slow”.\(^\text{85}\) Brewster continually held to the stereotype of blacks being mentally inferior, even though he believed that these people should be freed. Although not an abolitionist by any means, Wainwright shared similar views with Brewster on African Americans. Utilizing the term contraband more often, Wainwright’s diary was slowly becoming a


\(^{83}\) Ibid.

\(^{84}\) Charles Harvey Brewster, *When This Cruel War is Over*, ed. David W. Blight (Amherst, Ma: University of Massachusetts Press, 1992), 78.

\(^{85}\) Ibid, 81.
confessional for his dissatisfaction with African Americans at large. His displeasure with Ben was just one of many instances where Wainwright used racialized language as a proxy to attack the Lincoln administration. He transferred the mistakes and stereotypes of the contraband policy into critiques of Lincoln. This worked the opposite direction as well. Wainwright’s anger at Lincoln for his policies caused the implementation of racialized language against African Americans in his diary. Wainwright’s opinion of contrabands was a conduit to understanding his displeasure with the war. During the opening of the Peninsular Campaign, Wainwright seemed angered at the entrance of contrabands into the service of the Union: “Neither have we taken any prisoners, but lots of ‘contraband’, as runaway niggers are now called.”86 It is clear that Wainwright was unhappy with the amount of contrabands taken and the lack of Confederate prisoners. This was a war for Union, but when the army liberated slaves Wainwright felt the war aim was slowly being bastardized. Still, his views of race were scarcely mentioned in his diary before the Emancipation Proclamation. Post 1862, issues of race were discussed with more vibrant and intense language.

Prior to the Emancipation Proclamation Charles Wainwright wrote in his diary: “For one, I shall wish myself at home if the war is to be turned from its original purpose into an abolition crusade, and I believe most of the army have the same feeling.”87 This was the language of the War Democrats. It was politically and racially charged. Wainwright viewed the African Americans as a threat to the white working class hierarchy. Many Northern held similar sentiments. Abolition was not a moral question, but an

86 Charles Wainwright, A Diary of Battle, 32.
87 Ibid, 74.
economic one. In his study of the American working class, David Roediger commented on the complicated relationships between the white workers and slaves. The white working class was self-conscious of the terminology employed towards their socioeconomic condition. The term “servant” and “hireling” were close to the definition of slave. White workers did not want to be associated with the slaves because they believed them to be of a lower class. If abolition occurred, white workers were afraid of being considered in the same socioeconomic class as freed slaves. Although Wainwright was an officer and upper class farmer, he held these fears as well. At heart, he was a white supremacist and understood the troubles of the white working class. Wainwright’s anger towards the Proclamation was rooted in a deeper sense of racial awareness and superiority. The Proclamation had completely changed the aims of the war both at the individual and government level. Other men on the front echoed Wainwright’s frustration with the president. The meaning of the war had changed completely post 1862, and this changed the nature of Wainwright’s diary from a recounting of daily activities to his private confessional.

To this point the character of Wainwright has been developed extensively. He derived meaning for fighting from the patriotic character of his home in New York and from the War Democrat political platform. Retaining these values became more difficult as the war raged on. Wainwright lost many men under his command, but the death of General Reynolds of the Iron Brigade was a painful. Reynolds and Wainwright had been close friends throughout the campaign against the South. Reynolds was

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89 Ibid, 49.
killed on the first day of battle at Gettysburg, and Wainwright witnessed his corpse being transported off the battlefield. Although he does not tangibly express sadness, he notes Reynolds’ death. Throughout his diary, Wainwright rarely mentions death or those whom he knew being killed. He makes explicit mention of Reynolds. Three months after his death, Wainwright continued to reflect on Reynolds. It was this death that called Wainwright’s fight for Union and patriotism into question. The diary becomes a place of struggle for Wainwright. He grappled with Victorian expectations of courage and his own political beliefs. What had Reynolds died for? Wainwright’s heart would tell him the Union, but his brain would tell him abolition. It was this dichotomy that deeply disturbed Wainwright. Questioning the deaths of comrades was not a part of the common discourse in the diary. These questions moved to the forefront of Wainwright’s mind and the lack of answers and understanding began to manifest itself in vibrant, prejudice diary entries.

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90 Charles Wainwright, A Diary of Battle, 233.
Intense racial language was employed by Wainwright in 1863 before his first trip home. His white servant, John, was resigning his position. John and Wainwright had a friendship that transcended servitude. Wainwright valued the hard work and loyalty of John. His servant would be up at day break tending to the horses and preparing Wainwright’s uniform.91 Specifically, Wainwright stated that John did not have a single lazy bone in his body. Although of a lower socioeconomic class, the respectful and grateful language Wainwright employed to describe his servant revealed favoritism towards white servants. Wainwright feared that in John’s stead he would have to hire “a wretched nigger” whose “laziness, lying and dirt

91 Ibid, 201.
of negro surpasses anything that a white man is capable of.” Wainwright goes on to apply his own experiences with African Americans to the entire race. He believed that all African Americans were naturally incompetent and could not function with the same mental capacity as even the dimmest white male. These assumptions and stereotypes are far more intense than the language originally employed to describe Ben, the contraband cook.

Wainwright believed that the call for abolition had extended the war indefinitely. As a result, he and many other officers began to privately vent their anger against African Americans and the administration. The diary had transformed from a mundane record keeping device to a complex political and racial narrative.

Wainwright originally had no intention of using his diary as a sounding board for his political and moral conundrums. Originally he admitted that his diary was merely to remember his participation in this great war. However, with the Emancipation Proclamation and Republicanism becoming the dominant discourse, Wainwright began to utilize his diary in a reflective manner. The diary post-1862 became a confessional for Wainwright. Frustration with the changed war aims caused many soldiers to turn to their diaries to voice their secret displeasure. Wainwright would grapple with what constituted treasonous thoughts and whether or not to publically voice his opinions. He was now fighting a war for abolition, which ran counter to his own beliefs. Wainwright and many others would continue to fight loyally for the Union cause. It was in his diary, that Wainwright felt safe to voice his own unfiltered views of the war. Censure was rife during this time period and the diary offered Wainwright reprieve

92 Ibid.
from being considered a traitor in the public sphere. The War Democrat position against abolition had led to the public believing they were in bed with the Copperheads. Wainwright’s fear of being termed a Copperhead further reinforced his reliance on his diary.

The Copperhead movement was started by Clement Vallandingham. The movement was a reaction to the Civil War. Vallandingham had called for peace and compromise with the South, but this movement pushed the limits of acceptable dissent in the Union. Reacting to the State of Union Address in 1861, Vallandingham blamed the Federal government for the Civil War and believed that if successions were given, the South could re-enter the Union without bloodshed. The first sect of the Democratic Party to agree with Copperhead policies were the Maryland Democrats. They adopted the policy of appeasement in late 1861. Out of spite and shame, another Democratic Party was formed in opposition to the Copperheads in Maryland. They called themselves the War Democrats and repudiated the platform of the Copperheads. Although the two parties were ideologically opposed, they came together in an attempt depose Lincoln in 1864. It was this union of Copperheads and War Democrats that forced Wainwright to hide his political ideology.

Among the Democrat and Republican circles, the word Copperhead came to have a highly negative connotation. This meaning was derived from the political policies of the party, as well Republican slander. Prior to the election of 1864, McClellan had been chosen as the Democratic

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95 Ibid, 9.
96 Ibid, 79.
97 For a strong counter narrative on the influence of the Copperheads see Frank L. Klement’s *Limits of Dissent*. 
Party nominee for president. The Democrats, working in conjunction with Copperheads, elected John Pendleton, a Copperhead, to be his vice President. This proved disastrous for both parties. Republicans took this opportunity to reinforce the similarities between Copperheads and War Democrats, in the process both were labeled treasonous and disloyal. These connotations stuck. In addition, Copperhead deserters in the Appalachians had armed themselves in resistance against the federal government. This brought more negative press to the War Democrats. Having a Copperhead on the ballot put War Democratic views in danger of being considered treasonous. Public opinion of the Copperheads was captured by an enraged Ambrose Henry Hayward in a letter home to his wife: “I say let the war go on until every traitor Copperheads and all are made to kneel at the Goddess of Liberty.” Hayward goes on to postulate that if Vallandingham were to come before Congress the soldiers would kill him. This tirade coupled with Republican slander turned the meaning of Copperhead into traitor. The public viewed Democrats and Copperheads as the same, as a result Wainwright was pushed to confide, shape, and cope with his political ideology only with the use of his diary.

Wainwright’s ability to express himself in the public sphere had been made taboo, but he continued to hold to a potentially treasonous viewpoint of anti-abolition and anti-Lincoln. Wainwright was a loyal dissenter who operated within the bounds of acceptable, private government criticism. A traitor would have deserted the army, but a loyal dissenter

100 Ibid.
continues to serve regardless of ideological conflict. This begs the question, how and why did Wainwright continue to fight in a war that was running counter to his political ideology? Wainwright was not alone in his dissent from the Lincoln administration; many others shared similar views. Among these men was Charles Biddlecom. In her book entitled *No Freedom Shrieker*, Katherine Aldridge analyzed Biddlecom through his letters to his wife Ester. Biddlecom and Wainwright were different snakes with the same venom. Much like Wainwright, Biddlecom felt betrayed by the change in war aims. His racial rhetoric intensified and he questioned the purpose of the wide spread, senseless death. He entered the war because of his family ties to the Revolutionary War and the social pull of Victorianism. His motivations help explain Wainwright’s decision to continue to stay in the war. Biddlecom expressed his thoughts more openly in his letters than Wainwright did in his dairy. When comparing the two men, the silences in Wainwright’s diary come to light.

Within Wainwright’s diary, his family was scarcely mentioned, but they were a primary factor in his decision to keep fighting. In 1864, Wainwright received leave to go home for two weeks to visit his ailing father and see his family. When Wainwright arrived, he noted that his father had survived the sickness, but showed concern for both his future and the future of his farm. While Wainwright was gone, his father was running his farm, and if the farm’s primary caretaker passed away income would drop heavily. This was one of the first times Wainwright had mentioned

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102 Ibid, xi.
104 Ibid, xxi.
his father or the farm within his diary. Biddlecom’s letters were much more emotionally charged than Wainwright’s diary. The language which Biddlecom employed revealed unbridled passion for his wife and intimate compassion for his children. Writing to his wife Ester, Biddlecom often mentioned his longing to see her and often signed his letters “still your faithful husband.”\(^{105}\) Biddlecom also admitted openly to being homesick to his wife which represented a longing to be by her side in order to help with the managing of the household.\(^{106}\) Although Wainwright was much more reserved, his reluctance to involve his family in his dairy spoke volumes about his compassion. Wainwright was fighting for his family’s well-being, the same way Biddlecom was. However, the absence of Wainwright’s family from his diary revealed that he was trying to separate his home and the war. The two spheres of life, although equally important, needed to be sequestered to different spheres in order for Wainwright to cope with the war. His decision to stay in the war was affected by his family who relied on his monetary support. Not only this, Wainwright and Biddlecom fought for a Union that they believed in and one that they wanted to raise children in. This harkened back to the Revolutionary tradition that both soldier’s grandparents fought for. Biddlecom and Wainwright also shared a common belief in duty as the supreme test of patriotism.

When comparing Biddlecom’s letters to Ester and Wainwright’s diary it was evident that the two men handled the term of duty differently, but each dissenter cited it as a reason to remain in the war. In the most emotionally charged letter, Biddlecom sent to Ester he described his

feelings on duty. Biddlecom openly proclaimed that his duty in this war was originally to protect Union and Constitution, but the sanctity of this duty had been violated by the war itself. Biddlecom proclaimed, “I am no freedom shrieker. I am a peace man.” Freedom shrieker was derogatory term used against men who were too vocal in regards to their anti-slavery sentiments. Biddlecom was not fighting this war for the freedom of African Americans, in fact he was not even sure why he was still fighting. Pride was driving Biddlecom. He refused to bring disgrace to himself or his family by being labeled a coward during this time of war. The fear of being labeled a coward was delineated by his opinion on deserters. Deserters, according to Biddlecom, had not done their duty. They had abandoned the ideology and experiment the founding fathers had embarked. The thought of committing such an act was unfathomable to Biddlecom as it would be for Wainwright as well. Freedom shrieker was never mentioned in Wainwright’s diary, nor did he ever express fear of being called a coward, but Wainwright was privately a freedom shrieker and questioning the war to the same degree Biddlecom was. However, much like Biddlecom, duty bound Wainwright to battle.

Wainwright’s opinions on deserters can be used as a proxy to understand his inner feelings on duty. Wainwright witnessed numerous desertions during his time in the Army of the Northern Potomac. According to Wainwright, the president was too lenient when pardoning these men. Deserters were cowards and deserved to be shot, according to Wainwright. Biddlecom’s fear of being termed a coward revealed that the term was not used lightly. Wainwright’s hatred for men who abandoned their duty was

108 Ibid, 192.
109 Ibid.
110 Ibid, 178.
obvious, and as an officer, Wainwright was predisposed to judge these men even harsher. Based upon these sentiments, one can see that Wainwright held duty to the army as one of the most important factors in the war. Wainwright was silent about his motivations for staying in the war after the proclamation, but analysis of Biddlecom and the deserters revealed that duty bound Wainwright to the Army of the Northern Potomac until Appomattox. Biddlecom and Wainwright were each entrapped into staying with the army, regardless of their ideological concerns with the aim of the war. These men utilized these motivations to continue to find meaning in fighting a war with aims that did not align with their own.

Charles Wainwright found meaning in loyal dissent. He represented a contingent of men whose opinions had been relegated to political obscurity during the Civil War. At first glance many individuals would believe that these men had been betrayed by their government. They were labeled traitors, Copperheads, and freedom shriekers, but these men found meaning in a war that was ideologically opposed to their goals. They silently obeyed and carried out the orders of their superiors to ensure the preservation of the Union. All the while, these men privately dealt with extreme frustration and internal suffering. These loyal dissenters, like Wainwright and Biddlecom, had been torn away from their families for a war whose meaning had been changed from Union to abolition. Although the war aims had changed ideologically, duty, country, and family enabled Charles Wainwright to fight for a government and operate within an army that promoted African American freedom as its top priority. His words and thoughts, although vulgar, offer a glimpse into how loyal dissenters created individual meaning out of a national war for supposedly inferior race.
Wainwright would survive the war without a single wound. He attended the Grand Review in Washington, DC. It was here the eastern and western armies mustered and marched before the president for the first time. After the review, Wainwright would ask a Miss Woosley why she felt so strongly towards Sherman’s army. Miss Woosley stated, “the army of the Potomac marched past just like it’s commander (Meade), looking neither right nor left, and only intent on passing the reviewing officers properly; while Sherman’s officers and men were bowing on all sides and not half so stiff.”  

In perhaps one of the most telling comments Wainwright would make throughout his entire diary, he replied, “[you have] paid the greatest compliment to the Army of the Potomac I have ever heard.”

111 Charles Wainwright, A Diary of Battle, 530.  
112 Ibid.
Bibliography


Ole’ Zip Coon is a Mighty Learned Scholar: Blackface Minstrelsy as Reflection and Foundation of American Popular Culture

Cory Rosenberg Academic Essay

“We Challenge all the “MILK-AND-WATER” Bands in the city to begin to equal them... as Ethiopian Dandies of the Northern States...As Southern Slaves!”

“Ethiopian Operatic Troupe...Extra Attraction for the Benefit of Brudder Bones.”

“We Confess a fondness for negro minstrelsy...’Uncle Ned’ goes directly to the heart and makes Italian trills seem tame...God Bless that fine old colored gentleman...”

These lines from 19th century playbills and publications are but a modest sampling of the overflowing panoply of hyperbolic and enthusiastic writing about the most popular of 19th century entertainments: the minstrel show. As a predecessor to vaudeville and 20th century variety entertainment, the minstrel show blazed trails theatrically, musically, and culturally. It was also undoubtedly one of the most hurtful, damaging, and long-lived progenitors of the racist attitudes and concepts that plague American society to this day. How did such a spectacle arise? What drove men, white and black alike, to don the burnt-cork visage and ragamuffin regalia of the minstrel show delineator? Perhaps most importantly, one should ask why the minstrel

113  Minstrel Playbills, University of Virginia,  http://utc.iath.virginia.edu/minstrel/mibillshp.html
114  Minstrel Playbills  Pierce’s Minstrels
115  Dwight’s Journal of Music, “NEGRO MINSTRELSY,” July 24th 1852
show remains such a potent force in American cultural memory (if only tacitly) and what such an entertainment meant not only to audience members and performers, but also to those being portrayed. While ethnicity is undoubtedly a primary motivator in the creation of these entertainments, it is just as clear that gender, regionalism, class, and self-ridicule also contributed materially to the atmosphere of the minstrel stage. The broad variety of reactions, engendered by this entertainment in African American and White communities alike, attests to the multi-faceted and problematic nature of the minstrel show, and more specifically, to the creation of a space wherein groups of various ethnicities, genders, social classes, and political ideologies, were both brought together and rent asunder; where enmity and amity were verse and chorus of the same song.

“Every Time I Turn Around”

Black-face minstrelsy as understood in the modern sense began with a dance. The encounter itself is now the stuff of legend. As the story goes: at some point and in some city in the early 1830’s (the location and exact date are lost to the ages) Thomas Dartmouth Rice (a musician about whom little is known) saw a black stable hand perform a song and dance for the entertainment of those passing on the street. The peculiar nature of the song, coupled with the performer’s limp, was viewed as remarkably funny by T.D. Rice who decided to adapt it for his own stage performances. Rice took the not-unprecedented step of donning black-face makeup (a mixture burnt-cork and water) and a comically ill-fitting suit to perform a caricatured version of the stable-hand character. Rice was not only a smash success in America, but also in Great Britain where he toured in 1836. Despite the fact that chattel
slavery had been abolished throughout the British Empire in 1834, the black-face character proved a resounding hit, setting off a minstrel craze which ran parallel to, if not always in synchrony with, American minstrelsy. Perhaps most revealing of the amorphous and multiform nature of early black-face performance practice is the fact that some of Rice’s most acclaimed black-face work would be performed upon his triumphant return to New York City in an 1854 stage adaptation of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*\(^{116,117}\) The modern reader will be forgiven for presuming that such a belabored and idiosyncratic spectacle should have died a quiet death, a passing fad among many to be relegated to the dustbin of history; and yet it persisted, as reported in the *New York Tribune*:

… Mr. T.D. Rice made his debut in a dramatic sketch entitled “Jim Crow,” and from that moment everybody was “doing just so,” for months, and even years afterward. Never was there such an excitement in the musical world; nothing was talked of, nothing written of, and nothing dreamed of, but “Jim Crow.” The most sober citizens began to “wheel about, and turn about, and jump Jim Crow.” It seemed as though the entire population had been bitten by the tarantula; in the parlor, in the kitchen, in the shop and in the street, Jim Crow monopolized public attention. It must have been a species of insanity, though of a gentle and pleasing kind.\(^{118}\)

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117 The lame stable-hand that rice impersonated would lend his name not only to Rice’s character, but to future legislation informed in part by minstrel-show understandings of the nature of African Americans: he was called Jim Crow.

118 *New York Tribune*, June 30\(^{th}\) 1855.
II. “The National Art of Its Moment”

Black-face minstrelsy grew from the work of a lone performer to a defined style of theatrical entertainment. It had its own tropes and mores, its own set of specialized tunes and jokes (many of which became familiar to repeat audience members), and formed the basis of a definitive culture of inexpensive entertainment at a time when a national American culture had not yet coalesced. In an era before mass communication, such tropes created, for the first time, a homogenous popular culture in all settled regions of the country. An out-of-town visitor to a big city could sing a tune or share a joke he heard at the minstrel show secure in the knowledge

that the reference would not be lost on his urban audience.\textsuperscript{120} This was just one of many levels of “belonging” which the minstrel show created. While foremost in the retrospective view was the creation of a White “in” group, which made itself distinct from African American culture by inhabiting and mocking it, in the mind of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century viewer, this “in” group existed alongside several others. While minstrelsy was popular on both sides of the Atlantic, the American minstrel show of the 1840-50’s comported itself as a distinctly New World entity. What the Monroe Doctrine did to establish the New World as a hemisphere theoretically free from the fetters of European colonization efforts, the minstrel show did to establish music of this continent as a creative force free from the fetters of European musical dogma. This nationalist aspect of the minstrel stage is lost in most popular assessments. For the first time in the history of Anglo-American relations, a cultural output of the New World became a sensation in the Old. This shift of cultural focus laid the foundation of the present understanding of the United States as a land of creativity and innovation in the field of popular entertainment. This shift did not go unnoticed in the days of its occurrence, as reported in the \textit{New York Tribune} of June 30\textsuperscript{th} 1855:

\begin{quote}
Why may not the banjoism of a Congo, or an Ethiopian, or a George Christy, aspire to a musical equality with delineators of all nationalities?...As absurd as may seem negro minstrelsy to the refined musician, it is nevertheless beyond doubt that it expresses the peculiar characteristics of the negro as truly as the great masters of Italy represent their more spiritual and profound nationality.\textsuperscript{121}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{120} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{121} \textit{New York Tribune}, “The Black Opera”, June 30\textsuperscript{th} 1855.
This is one of many examples of minstrelsy functioning as a doubled-edged sword; it ridiculed one extreme of the social ladder by mocking African Americans, it ridiculed the other by mocking “effete” English tastes in opera and theatre. While many would assert that the minstrel show was merely a means of racial domination, it was often rather a burlesque of European theater which used Black characters as instruments of ridicule.\footnote{Robert Winans, \textit{Inside the Minstrel Mask}, (Hanover, NH, 1996), 142-175.} It is precisely this targeting of both English theatrics and uneducated African Americans that defined the minstrel show as a working-class entertainment. What culture of dominance reinforcement there was on the minstrel stage (and there was plenty) came as the result of deriding those of a higher class than the audience (whom they despised) and those of a lower class than the audience (whom they disdained). In this way, the minstrel show served as the daytime television of its day, a mix of info-tainment, mediocre drama, and low-cost programming designed neither to edify nor to ennoble, but rather to entertain and appeal to the working class whose viewership could be sourced as a source of income.

Of particular note is the fact that the above quoted article, an appeal for the respect of the institution of blackface minstrelsy, appeared in the \textit{Tribune} one of New York’s leading anti-slavery newspapers. This type of praise for minstrelsy among those whom one would expect to despise it is not altogether absurd. Indeed, the minstrel show was the essence of what we have come to term “popular entertainment”. The name is somewhat misleading in that it need not be entirely populist; that is, it does not necessarily arise directly from the will of the masses. It is often something created by a set of elites and marketed to the masses who then embrace
it. While the function of the masses is appetitive, rather than creative, the masses are, by virtue of their expendable income (and the ability to decide where to spend it), an indissoluble part of the popular culture (and minstrel-show) industry. Thus the minstrel show represented a meeting of commercial interests and public tastes while not exactly functioning as a perfect metric of either. It was however; a site of such heavy investment in the representation of supposed “blackness” that it revealed itself to be, in the words of Eric Lott: “a crucial place of contestation, with moments of resistance to the dominant culture, as well as moments of supersession...[it is] a principal site of struggle in and over the culture of black people.”123 The burnt-cork mask was, after all, sharply distinct from the donning of standard theatrical make-up. In playing any theatrical role, the actor assumes the body of a character; in applying the burnt-cork, the actor assumes not only the body of a character, but of a race. This effect was particularly pronounced because of the absence of black performers from the public stage in the United States for much of the 19th century.

In an outstanding assumption of creative agency, white performers across the nation took up the mantle of “blackness” and interpreted, at least in part, what that meant for thousands of audience members across the nation. Ironically enough, this earned them the admiration of many (including the author of the Tribune piece quoted above) for what were purportedly accurate depictions of black life in the United States. The reception of the minstrel show varied greatly across the nation and throughout the run of its popularity; even individual authors demonstrated evolving views of this, the most popular entertainment of the age.

III. “The Basest Scum of the Earth”:
Varied Reactions to “The Old-Time Nigger Show”

Among modern audiences, black-face minstrelsy engenders a wide array of reactions. Americans, as a people with a troubled history of race relations, are often uncomfortable with implementations of black-face in modern entertainments. This discomfort is evidenced by the sharp decline in minstrelsy after the 1930’s. By the 1960’s, minstrel show characters were seen but rarely, and then usually in stage shows for various charitable organizations and the occasional high school talent show.¹²⁴ Today such classic films as *Holiday Inn* are often broadcast on television with references to minstrelsy edited out. This is in sharp contrast with the situation in Great Britain, where minstrelsy was also immensely popular but racial integration was less violently contested. A British television program, *The Black and White Minstrel Show*, brought a black-face minstrel show to thousands of eager viewers until 1978.

The seeds of the American discomfort with black-face makeup as a theatrical trope were sown in the 19th century. Reactions to this entertainment were as diverse then as they are in the present day. Great figures of American society were swept into the current of this theatrical madness that held the nation’s firm attention. It was, at the time, entirely unclear what the destiny of American creativity would come to resemble. As people from all regions of the country and social strata participated, either actively or as audience members, in the creation of American entertainment culture, the forces of European classical music, American rural tropes, and folk musics of the

world gathered to form a mighty confluence which set the stage for the later dominance of world entertainment by American artists. While the full complexity and long range impacts of these factors were not visible to those alive to see them, the strong emotions engendered by black face minstrelsy leant themselves nicely to public reviews.

In his anti-slavery newspaper *The North Star*, no less a luminary than Frederick Douglass laid bare his feelings on the matter of minstrelsy:

> We believe he [the editor of a rival paper] does not object to the “Virginia Minstrels,” “Christy’s Minstrels,” the “Ethiopian Serenaders,” or any of the filthy scum of white society, who have stolen from us a complexion denied them by nature, in which to make money, and pander to corrupt taste of their white fellow citizens.\(^\text{125}\)

> It is not surprising to see an abolitionist, particularly one as progressive and well-read as Douglass, scoff at the very notion of minstrelsy. Douglass here points out the grave insult of having white men perform in black face when black men were neither permitted on most stages nor allowed to sit in the same sections of the theater as whites (presuming they could secure entry to a theater at all). Douglass, in a tone of derision and sarcasm, describes minstrel hits such as “Ole Zip Coon”, “Jump Jim Crow”, and “Ole Dan Tucker” as “Specimens of American Musical Genius”. For Douglass, the minstrel show represented nothing less than the laying bare of the racist attitudes and postures that ran the country in often unquestioned prejudice. Here, writ large, was the white man’s impression of the slave, the northern black dandy, and black women as bumbling dogsbodies, ill-educated bunglers, and promiscuous nags respectively. These attitudes are

\(^{125}\) *The North Star*, 27 October, 1848.
particularly telling in complement to the legalized stratifications of race throughout the nation. As Chief Justice Roger Taney explained in his opinion on the Dred Scott decision that the nation having been founded by white men was under the jurisdiction of a Constitution “...by them, and for them and their posterity, but for no one else.” It was in this nation then, one which legally was designed only to enfranchise the white man and ensure his continued prosperity and protection under the law, that men like Douglass recoiled and still others reveled.

Samuel Clemens (known popularly by his pseudonym Mark Twain) was a life-long fan of the minstrel show. Although a racial progressive in his later years, Clemens invariably referred to minstrel shows as “The Old-Time Nigger Show”; a term not in common use even in the 19th century. His writings reflect upon minstrelsy both openly and symbolically to reveal white reaction to the phenomenon of minstrelsy. His popularity as an author both then and now, reflects the acceptability of these convictions among white members of society at the time and evidences a passion for minstrelsy not unique unto himself. “The genuine nigger show, the extravagant nigger show” was “the show which to me had no peer” and “a thoroughly delightful thing.” Clemens was not at all conservative in his praise, later adding in his autobiography that if the minstrel show of the 1840’s could return in its former “pristine” condition that he would have “but little further use for the opera.” Clemens explained that the minstrel show’s success rested on

126 Paul Finkelman, Defending Slavery, (University of Tulsa, Tulsa, OK, 2003), 136.
128 Ibid.
129 Twain goes on to relate an anecdote wherein he told his mother and a maiden aunt, both devout, church-going women, that he would take them to see missionaries from Africa in an edifying lecture being given at a local theatre. He instead took them to a minstrel show where they are said to have laughed louder than anyone in the theatre having never heard the tired old jokes before.
the artfulness of the burlesque of black styles of dress and speech. These combined in an effect that the master of 19th century comedy described as “Funny-delightfully and satisfyingly funny.” Shortly after completing *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Clemens toured the country to give a series of readings, usually of the dialogues between Huck and Jim which featured black face dialect, to eager audiences in an atmosphere and situation not unlike the minstrel show. This curious dichotomy, between the progressive message of the book and the overt and sweeping borrowings it made from the minstrel show is a valuable problematizer of our view of 19th century attitudes towards race and politics. What by our standards appears a contradiction of racist source material and a book promoting inter-race understanding was in the 19th century a neatly presented article, part and parcel of 19th century “progressive” views of race. Those who were progressive by 19th century standards (Lincoln for example) may have believed in emancipation without necessarily believing in racial equality. Furthermore, those whites who did have a kind attitude toward blacks often did so out of a sense of sentimentality and romanticism rather than justice. Not unlike the Orientalists of the same age, who raised a “mysterious other” to a lofty pedestal of interest and study, 19th century readers could view the character of Jim with pity and understanding, wishing earnestly for his emancipation but not necessarily for his equality.

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Berett and others observed that *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, is comparable in format to a minstrel show, with an exposition of songs and comic dialogues, followed by a series of novelty scenas, and closing with a wild burlesque. Surely the dialogue between Jim and Huckleberry is the product of an author who spent much time in the minstrel theatre. Their frequent misunderstandings and under-educated philosophizing is representative of the essence of minstrel show comic dialogue.

131 Eric Lott, 30-35.
The tropes of the minstrel show were so ingrained in white society that references to it could be found in the most polite and unexpected of locations. An obituary and comment on the observation of the Sabbath in *The Maine Farmer* of February 21, 1850, laments the passing of a local black gentleman with a line clipped from Stephen Foster’s *Old Uncle Ned*: “Old Barber Johnson-God Bless him for ‘he has gone where the good niggers go,’ used to say…”132 *Dwight’s Journal of Music* among scholarly entries and comments on the opera remarks “We confess a fondness for Negro Minstrelsy…” describing it as music that “...goes straight to the heart.”133 A later edition lauds the supposed models of minstrelsy: “The only musical population of this country are the negroes of the south...”. Still others were less complimentary describing the banjo (the definitive instrument of minstrelsy and an instrument which stood in as a musical symbol for blackness’ in the Victorian imagination) as being “not as classical an instrument as the lyre of the ancients- that the metrical compositions of the colored race and their imitators fall a trifle beneath the standard of excellence at which custom has rated the poets of antiquity...”134 The piece goes on to explain that:

The homeliness, truthfulness of these compositions, established their popularity. There was nothing facetious in them; they filled a void in public amusement which was beginning to be sensibly experience, and from their very naturalness appealed to the sympathy of the multitude”135

This contemporary account of minstrelsy is revealing in that, at least in some organs of the popular press, the minstrel show was regarded as an accurate

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132 *Maine Farmer.* Feb. 21 1850.
133 *Dwight’s Journal of Music*, 24 July 1852.
134 *Dwight’s Journal of Music* 3, July 1858.
135 Ibid
representation of the music of southern blacks. The artifice of Northern white men in burnt-cork makeup seems to have avoided consideration as far as this publication was concerned. Of further note is the fact that these extracts come from a nominally apolitical publication in the abolitionist stronghold of Boston on the eve of the Civil War. So deeply absorbed in the convention of authenticity was this publication that the piece later posits, as if in confusion, that visitors to the South no longer hear the merriment of the minstrel stage but rather sad and plaintive melodies. The explanation they offered is not that the minstrel show had misinformed them, but rather that the slaves had altered their style of music radically since the early days of minstrelsy two decades before. The fundamental intellectual disconnect of this theory from reality, contrasted with the more enthusiastic view of Clemens and the more critical view of Douglass, demonstrates the wide variety of reactions to this entertainment. This broad range of acceptability continues to this day in the implementation of minstrel tropes openly on the European Continent and in Great Britain (where Morris dancers still appear in black face) and the tacit use of minstrel comedy and music in modern American cultural productions (one need only think of the frequent use of blackface in Warner Brothers cartoons). While the great authors and orators of the 19th century began our process of engagement with the hydra-headed problems of blackface performance practices, the deep hold that minstrelsy has on both the American imagination and the development of later comedy and music in this country evidences the fact that we are far from slaying the beast altogether.
The minstrel show should not, however tempting the prospect may be, be pigeonholed into a narrow category of repression and racism. While those aspects remain relevant ones with which modern readers can and must engage, the minstrel show was a far more multifaceted creation. While seemingly a simple, one-way mockery of men too disadvantaged to defend themselves, the minstrel show actually functioned as a powerful public critique of white culture. The ruse is rather elegant in its multi-layered aspect: white men, in black face and exaggerated clothing, emulating black men emulating white men. It is this secondary layer (secondary only in public perception as it is arguably the operative function of the minstrel show) that is often overlooked. White audiences of minstrel shows were
(willingly or not) laughing partially at themselves. Thus the minstrel show performer is part impersonator, part confidence man; always careful to make the audience look the other way (towards the Southern plantation) while the real work of the plan unfolds (mocking of white society). It is part of the fascination and nostalgia that has surrounded the minstrel show from Samuel Clemens to the modern day, audiences love being fooled by a skilled performer. It is why the minstrel entertainer and his cousins, the snake oil salesman, and the carnival barker, occupy a perennial place in the American popular imagination. One need only consider the lyrics of Henry Clay Work’s hit “Kingdom Comin’” to gain an understanding of the multiple targets of minstrel show satire:

Say, darkies, hab you seen de massa, wid de muffstash on his face,
Go long de road some time dis mornin’, like he gwine to leab de place?
He seen a smoke way up de ribber, whar de Linkum gunboats lay;
He took his hat, and lef’ berry sudden, and I spec’ he’s run away!

De massa run, ha, ha! De darkey stay, ho, ho!
It mus’ be now de kingdom coming, an’ de year ob Jubilo!
He six foot one way, two foot tudder, and he weigh tree hundred pound,
His coat so big, he couldn’t pay the tailor, an’ it won’t go halfway round.
He drill so much dey call him Cap’n, an’ he got so drefful tanned,
I spec’ he try an’ fool dem Yankees for to tink he’s contraband.136

While racial stereotypes are upheld in this piece through the simple world view of the narrator and the use of stereotypical black face dialect, the real target of the jibes here is the master who serves in this instance as a stand-in for an entire class of slaveholding Southerners. The appearance of the master is roundly mocked, starting with his mustache (frequently viewed as a foppish affectation in the 1860’s) and ending with his ill-fitting coat

136  Henry Clay Work, *Kingdom Comin’*, (Firth, Pond & Co, NY, 1861).
and bulging stomach. The most clever of the barbs is saved for last. It is suggested that when the Federal forces arrive, the Master will attempt to use his sunburnt complexion (a mark of poverty in the eyes of a 19th century audience) to allow him to pass for a former slave. Although presented in a fashion which denigrates the intelligence and agency of the contraband narrator, this song, written before the Emancipation Proclamation was issued, allowed audiences to explore what it felt like to find liberty after a lifetime of bondage. Tragically, the humor rests upon the then absurd notion of a world wherein whiteness was not automatically an advantage in society.

Of course, part of the effectiveness of this ruse was the subtlety with which it selected its target; very often, the show did not directly mock whites of the working class (that is, the audience member’s own class) but those of the upper class. In the sharply divided world of 19th century class rankings, an upper-class gentleman of New York was as alien a figure to the lifestyle of a working man as was a plantation slave. The use of characters like Zip Coon, an urban dandy with pretensions of grandeur, was a subtle means of poking fun at the working class audience whose aspirations of social climbing (fed by the works of rags-to-riches schund authors of Horatio Alger’s ilk) were no less ridiculous than a swell of a man like Zip trying to impress his white neighbors.

In the same way that the illusions of social-mobility fostered so lovingly by the working-class could be gently mocked by transmutation of the key-figure into a black man, so too could the entire process and art of theatre be subjected to the minstrel show’s irreverent treatment. Indeed, burlesque of foreign theatre custom had been central to the minstrel show from the onset. British plays and stage practice were regularly lampooned
as were individual singers, actors, and musical groups. The minstrel show
turned its eye to the progressive Hutchinson family singers, Jenny Lind, and
the grand opera. At a time period in American history when opera was not a
particularly popular pastime among the working class, sophisticated parodies
of the works of contemporary greats such as Verdi and Donizetti were
receiving rave reviews on the minstrel stage.\textsuperscript{137} These burlesques were often
topical in nature and so responsive to trends in theatre that some minstrel
burlesques would mock European musical groups that were yet to make an
American debut.\textsuperscript{138} This process managed not only to reinforce a sense of
belonging among the working-classes (the sense of being a member of an
“in” group mentioned earlier) but also to chastise the larger white society to
which the audience member belonged. The very act of having high-drama
satirized by men assuming a black identity was, at the time, an intrinsically
funny sight. At a time when black men could neither, to paraphrase Booker
T. Washington, earn a dollar in the factory nor spend it in the opera house,
a farce of “blackness”, a skin tone used as a social code for being ill-suited
to a refined environment, was being used to both enhance and deconstruct
a sense of “working class“whiteness”, a social code for both cultural
dominance and awkward pretensions of upward mobility.

The same topical eye that was cast to musical matters found a
counterpart in the use of language in the minstrel show that used the same
 technique of the aforementioned“elegant ruse” as did the other portions of
the show. Mock orations, delivered in “black dialect” were a popular part
of the opening portion of the minstrel show. Often centering themselves

\textsuperscript{137} Winans, 160-1.
\textsuperscript{138} Ibid. Jenny Lind, a Swedish operatic soprano was dubbed “Leather Lungs Lind” on the eve of
a triumphant tour underwritten by P.T. Barnum.
around discussions between two musicians, “Bones”, and “Tambo” and their long-suffering straight-man “The Interlocutor”. The Interlocutor was often called upon to give a speech, lecture, or sermon which ostensibly mocked the childlike world view of slaves and their inability to speak in an educated manner. Naturally the content of these presentations also lent itself handsomely to the mocking of fads and pretenses in white society at large making the use of language in the minstrel show but another double-edged blade in the minstrel arsenal.\(^{139}\) The use of mocking speeches was kept so well in step with the changing times that by the early 1850’s male performers in minstrel shows were appearing as black women to deliver malapropism-laden entreaties in favor of woman’s suffrage.

These commentaries used the artifice of black-face makeup to further separate the speaker from the audience. In so doing, the minstrel performer inhabited a space entirely separate from that of his audience, marking anything which he would say as less than serious. Like a court jester, the minstrel performer served as a designated satirist of all things effete and bombastic while never causing offense by virtue of his lower station in life. In this tenuous economy of satire and commentary, the minstrel performer’s use of language combined with his special sense of “otherness” allowed audiences to simultaneously laugh at themselves, while reaffirming that the fact that they did not inhabit the lowest rung of the social ladder; merely the second lowest.\(^{140}\) It was this sense of security which increasingly dominated the undertones of the minstrel show. As the nation underwent its greatest trial, the Civil War, the minstrel show used a reductive world view to give its

\(^{139}\) Ibid/ Mahar 59-62
\(^{140}\) Annemarie Bean. *Inside the Minstrel Mask*, (Wesleyan University Press, Middletown CT, 1996), 86-90.
audience the illusion of control in an otherwise unstable world. By reducing new immigrant groups to small caricatures and blaming other regions of the country for the social problems of the day, minstrel groups were able to use mockery of whites as a builder of cohesion and solidarity that made white men feel more secure with their place in the world: “Though he did not offer an antidote for their problems, the Old Darky provided a temporary diversion, a reassuring certainty that whites desperately needed and clung to.”

V. “Miss Lucy Long”: Gender on the Minstrel Stage

One of the most maligned groups in the delineation of minstrelsy (and still one of the most ignored) is women. Constantly portrayed as objects free of subjective agency (not altogether uncommon in 19th century American conceptions of womanhood but, for special reasons to be explicated, especially objectionable in this case) women on the minstrel stage faced a level of ridicule similar to that faced by ethnic minorities. Much like the ridicule of African-Americans which functioned as the main attraction of the minstrel show, the ridicule of women was multi-layered and multi-targeted. Aspects of the portrayal of women including casting choices, costuming, lyrics, and behavior combined to influence the audience’s perception of individual characters and women as a social class.

One of the striking features of female characters of the black-face minstrel stage is the fact that female actors were not permitted to play them. In a practice hearkening back to the days of Elizabethan theater, almost all female characters on the antebellum minstrel stage were played by men in woman’s clothing. This signified a cooption of narrative agency as it represented white men having the sole authority of how black women

141 Ibid., 105.
looked and sounded in Northern minstrel entertainments. These “women”
are often described as brash and audacious or as having little value to the
male characters with whom they shared the stage. Take for example the most
famous lady of the minstrel stage: “Miss Lucy Long”. Lucy Long was the
central character of a song by the same name which was the most popular
finale piece of the minstrel age.\footnote{See Winans.} The lyrics ran in part:

Miss Lucy she is handsome,
Miss Lucy she is tall,
to see her dance Cachuca\footnote{a Spanish dance similar to the Bolero},
is death to niggers all

~

And if she prove a scoldin’ wife,
as certain as she’s born,
I’ll tote her down to Georgia,
and trade her off for corn!\footnote{Bean, 247.}

Although Miss Lucy is prized for her good looks and dancing ability, it
would appear she has little subjectivity, agency, or utility beyond these
decorative aspects of her being. The comment in the second verse, promising
to trade her for corn if she proves too much of a scold, is indicative not
only of comically exaggerated views of the value of women (although these
are based firmly in the true sentiments of the day) but also of the power
of agents of personal destiny which white men saw in themselves. Most
curiously of all, for a song with literally dozens of verses about a character
which we know to have been represented on stage as part of the standard
presentation of the song, the actor playing Lucy was never allowed to speak.
In a final symbolic theft of agency from this woman (and by representative
extension all women) robs her of her voice while having her engage in a
grotesque pantomime for the amusement of the audience.¹⁴⁵

Other women were represented on the stage, representing various racial lineages in the tortured lexicon of the day. Representations of a “mulatto wench” were common as they introduced a character, who by virtue of being partly white in the 19th century imagination, was an appropriate object not only of attention, but of sexual desire. It has been observed that one of the functional aspects of transvestitism on the minstrel stage was the creation of a safe place of sexual fantasy. In creating a false object of sexual desire who was neither a member of the race nor the gender being portrayed, the minstrel show proffered up a world which existed only in the imagination and a world in which, therefore, the rules and strictures of Victorian society did not apply. This creation of an object of musical/sexual desire was eventually honed into a delineation of a separate female character portrayed by a man. This character was “nearly white” with a fine tenor singing voice and known by the 1860’s as “the Prima Donna”.¹⁴⁶ For the first time, members of the white working class had a means of fetishizing and admiring non-white women in a safe space which also offered distraction from this taboo exercise of desire by reinforcing their notions of ethnic and gender superiority.

In line with the taste for topical humor, the minstrel show would use these female characters and verses about them to ridicule the woman’s suffrage movement which was struggling in the mid 19th century. The movement was challenging long-held notions of the necessity of male leadership and male agency in the management of a nation. It was also challenging fragile male notions of superiority in the home and in society at

¹⁴⁵ Lott, 160
¹⁴⁶ Bean 248
large. This is evidenced in the following sample of verse from the 1850’s:

When woman’s rights is stirred a bit
De first reform she bitches on
is how she can with least delay
Just draw a pair of britches on

It is clear here that the ulterior motive that men sense in the suffrage movement is the cooption of male authority (symbolized of course by the britches). As woman’s fashions changed and bloomers were introduced later in the century, this fear would come once more to the fore. The understanding of gender binary with one sex clearly superior to the other was so ingrained in the minds of the Victorian Age that woman’s suffrage could not be portrayed as a bid for equality, but rather as an attempt to reverse the social order entirely. A similar feeling of fear regarding the upsetting of social order was found in the heart of the antebellum North as well leading to the fear that freed black slaves would come north and seek superiority over their white neighbors. The treatment of women in pieces such as Stephen Foster’s “Oh Susannah!” among others evidences a view of women as objects rather than determiners of their own lives. Although couched in sentimental terms, these songs represent the curtailed sphere in which a woman could operate and make her own decisions, often focusing solely on the inconvenience or sadness of the male narrator rather than the view of the titular subject of the song. As William J. Mahar explained: “However much blackface comedy demeaned and insulted African Americans, its usually sentimental and often hostile values reinforced the limitations on freedom and equity for American women even more.”

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148 Mahar, 328
VI. “Gentlemen Be Seated!”

The minstrel show was a complex and nuanced form of entertainment. Generalizations and firm conclusions are difficult to make due to the ever-changing and multifaceted nature of the show; yet certain common themes and tropes still present themselves. The last of the minstrel players having long since gone to meet his reward, he is no longer here to discuss with us his motivations, his impressions, and his purpose as a performer. More than likely, the kind of hermeneutic interpretation being performed upon the show by modern scholars problematizes the matter far beyond the view of the average performer. The performers were, foremost, attempting to make a living. This does not excuse the content of their shows, but it does underscore their motivation. It is clear that the minstrel show, while not a sensitive gauge of public sentiment, often adjusted its program in an attempt to best please that most fickle of beasts, the general taste.

The one great certainty of the minstrel show is its long-lasting and cross-cutting popularity. For 80 years beginning in the 1840’s, the minstrel show was a major force in American entertainment until it was eventually supplanted by vaudeville. While geared specifically to white working-class males, it found fans in all classes and stations (Abraham Lincoln and Queen Victoria, it should be noted, were fans149). With a panoply of characters representing caricatures of African Americans and women in varying degrees of reprehensibility, the minstrel show electrified the American imagination. It found ways of reinforcing white (and particularly white male) feelings of superiority by providing these stage representations of the class of Zip Coon’s and Jim Crow’s with a then-humorous set of foibles. It is

149 Bean, 122
also clear that this ridicule of race and this portrayal of characters was found utterly unacceptable by some members of the African-American community (Frederick Douglass, a master wordsmith, would not throw about a term such as “the basest scum of the earth” without careful consideration). The subject matter of the show of course expanded its purview beyond the African American community and used the aspirations and flaws of these characters to seat white society firmly, if indirectly, as the target of much of the humor and ridicule. This further informs the treatment of women on the minstrel stage, who received perhaps the worst treatment of all through a combination of racism and misogyny.

It has been suggested (by Lawrence Levine among others) that one lens through which the minstrel show should be understood is that of white guilt coming to terms with an inherent flaw in the vision of American exceptionalism. The flaw of course was the existence of a class of chattel slaves in a nation founded on the ideal of liberty. The minstrel show, in reinforcing attitudes of racial and gender superiority, excused this imbalance in the minds of the audience. So long as African Americans and women could be portrayed as helpless and hapless buffoons, there was no reason to extend to them basic civil rights. 150 In the words of Lawrence Levine, the minstrel show had a functional role in “distancing whites from their personal responsibilities in their tragic perversion of American principles.”151

This curious cocktail of music, commentary, dance, and burnt-cork has long since left the spotlight. In the United States, black-face is now a byword for racism, and yet, a careful analysis reveals this view to be miopic

150  Mahar, 330
151  Lawrence Levine, Black Culture and Black Consciousness, (Oxford Univ. Press, 1997), 444-5.
at best. The performers inhabiting the black-face roles, while assuming the form of another race, were almost universally understood to be whites in disguise (although the material they presented was purportedly authentic). Period advertisements regularly displayed the performers both in and out of black-face that the audience might wonder at the remarkable efficacy of their disguises. This adoption of black-face therefore was not exclusively about the adoption of black bodies for the purpose of maligning them, but also the adoption of a performative shape wherein the performer was not accountable for his actions. Just as the introduction of white men representing black female characters created a sterile and safe means of interaction between white men and representations of black women within 19th century society, the burnt-cork visage allowed performers a safe space to lampoon the failings of their sociopolitical climate.

Blackface comedy, while assuredly a racist and demeaning construction, heralded the beginning of an age of American satire. This notion of the creation of a safe imaginary space where progressive society could be skewered by men feigning ignorance is the basis of later popular forms of social commentary. Stephen Colbert’s long-running use of the character of a hapless neo-conservative pundit is a fine example of the modern expression of this phenomenon. Blackface minstrelsy also represented the cooption and alteration of art forms taken from the societal periphery, an action which has defined American popular music for much of the last century (Jazz, Blues, Rhythm and Blues, Rock and Roll, and Hip-Hop all represent African American cultural constructions which later gained acceptance in white society, usually after their forms were taken up by white artists).
The minstrel show is often damned wholesale, when it is given consideration at all. It was certainly reprehensible. Aspects of it most assuredly reinforced and informed racist attitudes which haunt us to this day. And yet, it is also a basis of modern American popular culture and music, having started the trend of cultural cooption and public ridicule in a safe-space which defines much of our pop-culture today. It is therefore neither to be glorified (and those remaining today who look back on it with nostalgia are, thankfully, very few) nor relegated to history’s dustbin. To ignore a fundamental aspect of American cultural history would indeed be dangerous; allowing the negative aspects of it to once more impinge upon our society. It is only through an honest appraisal of this meeting and rending point of rich and poor, black and white, men and women, that any healing of the deep scars left by a racially troubled age can begin. Many would suppose that a form so contradictory, so convoluted, so ridiculous would not and could not have found the success it did. When laid against the backdrop of the divisive society of the 1850’s which, within a decade, would tear itself apart with musket and ball, the contradictions and convolutions of the minstrel stage seem right at home. In some ways, they still are.
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*E.P. Christy* original sheet music courtesy of Gettysburg College Special Collections

Camptown ladies,

Oh Lud Galls

Ole’ Zip Coon

Jump Jim Crow

all Firth, Pond & Co. New York, 1850-1861


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Brigadier General George S. Greene’s position on Culp’s Hill during the Battle of Gettysburg is arguably the crucial lynchpin of July 2, 1863. Had this position at the barb of the fishhook defensive line fallen, Confederate General Robert E. Lee and his army would then have been positioned to take Cemetery Hill, thus breaking the curve of the hook on the Union right. This most likely would have sent the Union into retreat, leaving the direct route to Washington unguarded. (Diagram 1) Fortunately, valiant efforts were made by men like Generals George S. Greene and Henry H. Lockwood in order to preserve the Union Army’s possession of the hill and, as a result, preserve the Union itself. While leaders distinguished themselves during the Battle of Gettysburg with exceptional decision-making and ingenuity, the battle for Culp’s Hill also embodied the personal cost these decisions made, as evidenced by the experience of Marylanders who literally fought their neighbors.
Culp’s Hill was under siege on July 1, 2, and 3, throughout the entirety of the Battle of Gettysburg. It was a strategic position, both in its proximity to the Union supply lines along the Baltimore Pike, and in the defense of the hook along nearby Cemetery Hill. The Union troops were under the command of Major General Henry W. Slocum while the Confederates were part of Major General Edward Johnson’s Third division. Lt. General Richard S. Ewell’s inaction on July 1 gave the five upstate New York brigades under Brigadier General George Sears “Pap” Greene, holding Culp’s Hill, much needed time to better their defenses.\footnote{William A. Frassanito, \textit{Gettysburg: A Journey In Time} (Gettysburg: Thomas Publications, 1975): 129-130.} They had been
left undermanned by the decision to move several divisions to reinforce
the western side of the hook. One key aspect of the Union defense was the
implementation of earthen breastworks along the north ridge of the hill from
the base of the hill, near Spangler’s Spring, up the hill towards the north.
The breastworks were the idea of General Greene, a West Point engineering
graduate. On July 2, 1863, Greene was in charge of the Union troops on the
eastern slope of Culp’s hill. The breastworks were completed by noon, and
stretched across the hillside.\textsuperscript{153} Colonel Charles Candy of the 66\textsuperscript{th} Ohio then
formed a support line running southwest from the right rear of Greene’s
137\textsuperscript{th} New York, facing the lower hill.\textsuperscript{154} The implementation of Candy’s
earthworks would appear useless at first because General Thomas Kane’s
second brigade arrived and took a defensive position upon lower Culp’s
hill, thus putting Candy’s men behind the frontline. Later these defenses
became crucial as a fallback position, as the Union forces would later retreat
from lower Culp’s hill. By noon on July 2\textsuperscript{nd}, just over 8,600 Union troops
defended Culp’s Hill in a line stretching about a half mile from the north
crest of the hill to Spangler’s meadow.\textsuperscript{155} The building of breastworks was a
key decision in giving the Union men a psychological as well as a strategic
advantage over the Confederate soldiers. While the battle was delayed,
trench building gave the men something to do to keep them busy, and the
sound of their construction was noted to provoke anxiety in the CSA troops
waiting down the hill. Lt. Randolph McKim of General Steuart’s Brigade
reported that despite some skirmishing by the 1\textsuperscript{st} North Carolina earlier in the

\textsuperscript{153} John A. Archer, \textit{Culp’s Hill at Gettysburg: “The Mountain Trembled”} (Gettysburg: Thomas
\textsuperscript{154} Ibid., 25.
\textsuperscript{155} Ibid., 26.
morning, the regiment remained mostly in waiting, listening with growing apprehension. He said:

Much of my time after nightfall had been spent on the front picket line, listening to the busy strokes of Union picks and shovels on the line, to the rumble and the tramp of their troops as they were hurried forward by Union commanders and placed in position. There was therefore, no difficulty in divining the scene that would break on our view with the coming dawn. I did not hesitate to say to both Ewell and Early that a line of heavy earthworks and guns with infantry ranks behind them, would frown upon us at daylight. I expressed the opinion that even at that hour, 2 o’clock A. M., by a concentrated and vigorous night assault we could carry those heights, and that if we waited until morning it would cost us 10,000 men to take them.156

The breastworks were formed by filling in the space between large boulders with earth and stones along the ridge, felling trees to reinforce the breastworks thus providing protection from gunfire as well as a lookout and place to shoot between logs. One Union soldier, Jesse Jones of the 60th New York recounted, “Culp’s Hill was covered with woods: so all the material needful were at our disposal. Right and left the men felled the trees, and blocked them up into a close log fence.”157 Although some combatants of the Civil War era considered breastworks a sign of cowardice, the use of these fortifications would greatly reduce the number of casualties in this battle. Early in the battle, the breastworks gave the thinly spread and outnumbered Union troops a definite advantage in obscuring their true numbers, as well as providing shelter from the assault. Under General Greene’s leadership, a system of rotating all available regiments to the front guaranteed that troops were reloaded and ready to engage the enemy. When they exhausted their

157 Archer, Culp’s Hill at Gettysburg, 25.
ammunition, they dropped back to allow the next fresh regiment to begin firing helped to greatly increase the rate of fire of Union troops.

Another key element that led to the Union victory was the effectiveness of Union response to Confederate artillery. While observing the Union line, Johnson realized that the Union cannons on Cemetery Hill appeared formidable. The Confederates would have to count on the effectiveness of Ewell’s artillery. Around 4:00 p.m. on July 2, Confederate cannons opened fire upon Cemetery Ridge from artillery positions on Seminary Ridge and Benner’s Hill. During this time, Union commander Major General John W. Geary saw the opportunity to launch an attack en *enfilade* (attacking an enemy along its long axis) against the Confederates. The Third North Carolina and the Second Maryland also received “enfilading fire from Green’s New York Brigade, which was posted in an angle of the works.”

Shortly after Geary had called guns upon the crest of the hill and had begun to attack the enemy, Confederate cannons turned their attention towards Culp’s Hill. Although Geary’s tactics had drawn cannon fire upon Culp’s Hill, it was especially damaging to Carpenter’s Allegheny Battery and the Chesapeake Artillery. Another problem that arose for the Confederate gunners, in particular upon Benner’s Hill, was that Union Marksmen easily identified their silhouettes and casualties began to further rise. Eventually after coming under fire from both Union artillery and marksmen fire, Latimer’s battalion on Benner’s Hill was given permission to withdraw, which relieved the Union line of artillery fire from that direction.

159 WW Goldsborough, *The Maryland Line in the Confederate Army*, 104.
160 Ibid., 37.
Even before the main fighting had begun, Major General Edward Johnson put himself at a great disadvantage. Johnson’s advancing force was weakened when he gave the order to the Stonewall Brigade to remain on the Hanover Road in the event that a Union threat would attack from the southern end of the battlefield. This decision would put Johnson down some 1,300 men from his original attacking force which could have played a key role in loosening the Union hold on Culp’s Hill.\textsuperscript{161} Without these needed men, the arduous journey would become only more difficult. To add to the rugged terrain of boulders and fallen timber that hindered their ascent up the slope, the Confederate forces were then also engaged in heavy skirmish action. Skirmishers from Greene’s division greatly slowed the Confederates advance; Sgt. M. L. Olmsted from the 102\textsuperscript{nd} New York recounted: “we in the heavy timber made every tree and rock a veritable battlefield, and probably during the whole war a more stubborn skirmish fight was never waged.”\textsuperscript{162} With the efficient use of the Union skirmishers, the advancing confederates were reduced even before reaching the line of earthworks.

\textsuperscript{161} Archer, \textit{Culp’s Hill at Gettysburg}, 105.
\textsuperscript{162} Ibid, 47.
It is important to note that Brigadier General George H. Steuart’s 1st Maryland division was at the southern end of the Confederate line. This put them in direct contact with the 1st Maryland Eastern Shore Infantry of Lockwood’s Union brigade from Maryland on lower Culp’s Hill near Spangler’s Spring on July 2. This situation literally pitted neighbor against neighbor, with the opposing colors being carried by cousins. The meaning of the Civil War had become a metaphoric reality in their engagement on Culp’s Hill. Steuart’s Marylanders did not fare well, but according to Union Colonel James Wallace “our old friends and acquaintances” (from the

Breastworks on Culp’s Hill

(Source: Wikimedia)
Confederate battalion) were “sorrowfully gathered up... and tenderly cared for” by Lockwood’s Marylanders after the battle.

The fighting went into the night on July 2. Lieutenant General Jubal Early’s division advanced up the northeastern slope and in the process captured several batteries. This small victory was short-lived. Colonel Samuel Carroll and the Gibraltar Brigade were able to retake Rickett’s Battery and repel the Confederate infantry from the hill. At the end of July 2nd, the Confederates held lower Culp’s Hill, but had failed to take any other part of the hill. The orders on July 3rd remained unchanged - control the hill. Their inability to adjust their strategy to capture the hill would become apparent on July 3rd when they would be completely repulsed from the hill. Even some officers of the C.S.A. believed the order to charge the hill again July 3 to be a suicide mission. Before starting the charge, Captain William H. Murray addressed his men telling them, “Goodbye, it is not likely that we shall meet again.”163 This prophetic statement would be fulfilled as he led his men up Culp’s Hill to try to take the earthworks once again. He was mortally wounded in the attempt and died on the field.

Major General Edward “Allegheny” Johnson led the Confederate attack on the western side of Culp’s Hill. He had a large numerical advantage on July 1 over the Union that did not exist at any other point during the battle. He did not capitalize on his ability to break into the fish hook on southern Culp’s Hill. Johnson’s error lay in the fact that he did not adequately focus his resources on capturing the seven acre meadow (later known as the Pardee Field) running between lower Culp’s Hill and the

Baltimore Pike which the Confederates would have to cross to advance, thus putting the men on open ground and subject to fire.

The battle, which ensued on Culp’s Hill on July 3, involved 22,000 troops, and one fifth of all the ammunition expended in the battle.\textsuperscript{164} Union guns on Cemetery Hill aided the assault while the Confederates had Ewell’s artillery on Benner’s Hill. Geary enfiladed the enemy with their own cannons.\textsuperscript{165} Despite the Confederates’ grueling efforts over seven hours on July 3 to capture Culp’s Hill, they were defeated by eleven o’clock in the morning by the outnumbered, but entrenched, Union forces in some of the most intense, and close-quarter fighting of the entire battle. One of the victim’s of the battle, Wesley Culp, was a grandson of the original landowner of Culp’s Hill. He had joined the Virginia Second Infantry (Stonewall Brigade) and had just returned from town after visiting his sick mother when he rejoined his brigade and was killed on Culp’s Hill.\textsuperscript{166}

Without first capturing Culp’s Hill, the Confederate plan to take Cemetery Hill from the east could never have come to fruition. Thus, as long as Cemetery Hill was held by Union forces, the opportunity remained for them to win the Gettysburg Campaign. If the Union had lost Cemetery Hill it is likely that they would have been forced to retreat, leaving Washington, D.C. exposed, and the Union demoralized. Fortunately for the safety of the United States capitol and the war effort, men like George Sears Greene and the Twelfth Corps courageously defended Culp’s Hill. Although the struggles at Culp’s Hill were significant in achieving the Union victory

\textsuperscript{165} Archer, \textit{Culp’s Hill at Gettysburg}, 79-80.
at Gettysburg, it does not seem to hold the same fascination as Devil’s Den, Little Round Top, and Pickett’s Charge. This may be for the simple fact that George Sears Greene was a man who did not highly publicize his role in the actions of July 2, 1863.

The surreal horrors of war were epitomized by the Marylanders who came face to face on the battlefield. Although these men fought on opposite sides, they still realized the human cost of the battle. This horror was all too real to the battle participants, but was as yet unknown to the American public. It was the accounts of these soldiers, as well as the photographers and visitors to the battlefield in the weeks following Gettysburg that would shock the conscience of America.

Bibliography


Like Civil War soldiers, nurses in the Northern forces found it difficult to sustain the conflicting duties to home, nation, and army. It was especially difficult for women to assume responsibilities in battlefield hospitals. Women struggled with their new roles, which challenged and extended notions of nineteenth century womanhood. Furthermore, navigating a military establishment of male power, while also trying to maintain connections to home, forced women to use gender assumptions to their advantage when trying to gain agency in the hospitals, respect from their patients, and independence from their superiors. Women brought their Victorian manners, morals and duties into the public sphere out of necessity for the war effort and proved themselves worthy of respect by skill and strength when the government’s medical care was insufficient. Women of the North and their male allies were what the Civil War demanded and were therefore more valuable than skill in military strategy or even medical technique.

The life of Maine’s Harriet Eaton is an example of a valuable case study, for she exemplified women’s mobilization by leaving her home, working in military hospitals, and consequently helping influence men’s concept of women’s capabilities. She negotiated a male-dominated military environment by earning the trust of her patients through a maternal approach, one that drew from well-accepted notions of nineteenth century motherhood. Moreover, male officers found it especially difficult to challenge her authority
since they recognized her ability with the sick and respected current cultural assumptions on womanhood. Male surgeons, however, were more reluctant to acknowledge her capabilities to treat the sick in order to maintain their own medical authority. Further, Harriet wrestled with her obligations to family and obligations to country. Her diary entries document her reluctant transformation from sheltered, Victorian woman to unconventional model for a new social concept of women in this extended women’s domain.167

What is known today as the Victorian Era began in approximately 1837, and continued through the end of the century. Harriet Eaton grew up in a middle-class family at the beginning of this era. Several key characteristics defined women’s proper roles in society and within the household during this time period. Women became known as the “angel of the house,” referring to their talent for comforting the husband, teaching the children, decorating the home, and exemplifying the life of a morally upright citizen. The nineteenth century saw significant change through industrialization, yet the home remained a safe haven from the bustling, changing world. Women were the center of that refuge. Their responsibility was to raise a family and sustain a “peaceful, comforting home.”168


Many historians have explored the Victorian era and the role of women fulfilling Victorian ideals. Female historians such as Ellen Plante have broadly examined Victorian womanhood. By looking at the era in its entirety, there is some discussion of change in women’s roles over time. Karen Halttunen discusses the middle-class social hierarchy of Victorian men and women in terms of the “confidence man” and the “painted woman” as the ideals of Victorianism. A major question she addresses is how this ideal was hypocritical of the growing middle class in America. Other historians such as Catherine Clinton, Nina Silber, and Harvey Green have also analyzed the goals and lives of northern women in the Victorian era and contributed to the Victorian discourse.\textsuperscript{169}

Concurrently however, and by necessity, this era saw a widening of the gap in gender roles in the United States. As the nation industrialized and urbanized, women’s domain of the home took on greater importance as the bedrock for the lives of the entire family. Because of this, women had greater responsibility to properly manage their home and provide a moral grounding for the family. To accomplish these growing expectations within the household, popular instruction manuals taught middle-class Victorian women fashion trends, cooking and decorating techniques, and offered morally uplifting stories. Catherine Beecher wrote several well-known instruction manuals and etiquette books for Victorian women demonstrating the ideal for home and family in her books, \textit{The American Woman’s Home} and \textit{New Housekeeper’s Manual}. Louis A. Godey also offered advice to women

in some of his issues of *Godey’s Lady’s Book* in the 1850s. He also included lithographs in his publications showing new trends and standards for Victorian homes. As a result, Victorian women became firmly rooted in controlling the private sphere of family life, religion, and moral superiority, thus allowing men to further dominate the public, industrialized and political realm.\(^{170}\)

Harriet Eaton’s first challenge was a personal one that confronted these Victorian ideals. Like all women raised in the Victorian era, Harriet was accustomed to caring for her home and family without any significant obligations beyond her home life. Born in 1818, she grew up in Massachusetts with her parents, Josiah and Agnes Bacon. Harriet married Jeremiah Sewell Eaton around 1840 and followed him to Maine where he became the minister of the Free Street Baptist Church in Portland. She referred to her husband as Sewell, and together they raised three children: Frank, Agnes and Harriet. She also directed their Irish housekeeper, Anora, and ran their home in Portland. They lived a devout middle-class life until, tragically, her husband died of tuberculosis in 1856.\(^{171}\)

Following his death, Harriet was left as a single mother who needed to provide for her growing children. After war broke out, her husband’s church, due to reduced donations, was unable to financially support her family in the


previous manner. Out of economic necessity, Harriet decided to work outside the home to earn wages to support her family. It was easiest for widows to become nurses because they were relatively free of familial male authority. Her eldest son, Frank, worked as a clerk to support his widowed mother. This could have been another motivation for Harriet to wish to earn her own wages allowing Frank to continue school or enlist in the military without familial financial concerns. For nurses during the Civil War, average wages were $12 per month. With this income, she could not only gain economic independence, but she would also be actively contributing to the war effort. As an agent of the Maine Camp Hospital Association, a wartime hospital charity organization founded by her husband’s church, Harriet left home on October 6, 1862, only days after the sixth anniversary of her husband’s death, to work as a nurse in Maine regimental field hospitals in Virginia.172

Nursing was not the only way women were breaking out of the Victorian ideal to contribute to the war effort. Many women chose not to leave their homes but rather supported the war effort by hosting fundraisers, sewing clothing or blankets, wrapping bandages, and collecting necessary supplies to send to the soldiers. Other women left the homefront and the Victorian restrictions they had known to become cross-dressing soldiers, spies, scouts, public writers, and business owners. Many of these occupations were carried out in secrecy, however, they all demonstrated that some women no longer felt bound to the quiet, private, Victorian lifestyle of the early nineteenth century.173

172 Libra R. Hilde, Worth A Dozen Men: Women and Nursing in the Civil War South (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2012), 65. Harriet’s description of her journey leaving Maine can be found in her first diary entry in Eaton, Birth Place of Souls, 55.

173 Jeanie Attie, “‘For the ‘Boys in Blue’”: Organizing the Homefront,” in Patriotic Toil: Northern Women and the American Civil War (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 87-121; Anne Firor Scott, Natural Allies: Women’s Associations in American History (Urbana, IL: University
Women often selected roles, which embraced the norms of Victorianism -- nurturers, caregivers, and ‘behind the scenes’ voices for social justice and economic issues – and accomplished them outside the home in a public setting. In other words, they were broadening the realm of Victorian womanhood by performing “traditional women’s work in a nontraditional setting.” Men were more accepting of new, necessary roles for women during the war because these were not fully outside the traditional Victorian notion. Many women were working, perhaps unknowingly, to extend their sphere instead of escape it. This meant that women were still caring for people, but they were no longer only caring for their own families. They were caring for a nation’s worth of men and organizing on a larger, more public scale to provide for them.174

For Harriet, who was working outside the home and therefore altering the prewar expectations for ‘decent’ women’s ‘appropriate’ behavior, her time as a nurse was still very much emblematic of the Victorian mindset. Aside from her financial need to work outside the home, Harriet had other motivations to become an army nurse. Her eldest son, Frank, enlisted as a private in Company A of the 15th Maine Volunteers after the bloody battle at Sharpsburg, Maryland in 1862. As a mother, Harriet was reluctant to allow her son to become a soldier despite their common belief in the Union cause. With Frank’s enlistment, Harriet found greater reassurance in leaving home knowing she would be closer to her son. In addition, Harriet’s chief

responsibility was treating Maine soldiers in field hospitals not far from the battlefields. Should her son ever be wounded or become sick close to her hospital in Virginia, it was possible she would be the nurse to care for him. Further, “she reasoned that if she cared for other women’s sons, perhaps her own would meet with better care.”

Harriet had two younger children as well, however, and leaving home to work as a nurse meant leaving them behind. This decision was not congruent with the Victorian role of a mother, who was supposed to remain at home and care for her children. However, given the necessities of money and support for the war effort, Harriet made arrangements for her two daughters during her absence. The youngest daughter, Harriet, lived with family friends who provided a motherly figure to care for a young girl, and Harriet sent the other daughter, Agnes, to school near Boston. While this decision to be separated from her children was emotionally difficult for Harriet, it allowed her to close her home and move to Virginia to fully concentrate on her work. This decision, made by many Civil War nurses, further confirms Harriet’s sacrifice within her family to exert her Victorian capabilities on the war effort.

In addition to her monetary needs and her desire to be closer to her soldier son, Harriet also had great religious convictions about her service to the Union cause. Prior to his death, her husband’s church had been very successful increasing the size of its parish and strengthening their Baptist traditions. Later, as a Baptist minister’s widow, Harriet had endured the personal loss of her husband by maintaining her belief that personal sacrifice

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175 Eaton, *Birth Place of Souls*, 1. Elizabeth Leonard defines “appropriate” women’s behavior as the reason for tension between men and women in the public sphere, but also the vehicle, which allowed women to gradually move into the public sphere without breaking social norms. Leonard, “Mary Surratt,” 105.

would make her a better Christian and bring her closer to God. Subsequently, if she could alleviate the suffering of Maine soldiers, perhaps she could alleviate some of her own suffering and consecrate her commitment to God. This effort from a woman was unique to the American Civil War in that it was a peoples’ democratic war supported by common citizens. Harriet was one of these women.177

Once Harriet arrived at her nursing post in Virginia, she was up against challenges she had never before faced. She, along with her fellow female nurses, lived in army camp tents surrounded by unfamiliar men. Traditionally, Victorian women led very private lives in that they would not have fraternized with unknown men without a male relative or chaperone present. This often explained why nursing organizations like the United States Sanitary Commission were very particular about the age and appearance of its nurses in order to prevent any impressionable young ladies from forgetting the purpose of their nursing mission and become involved with a young soldier. Nurses were not to appear as loose women or at all provocative.178

Miss Dorothea Dix, the superintendent who oversaw the selection and assignment of army nurses, outlined her strict regulations for Civil War nursing staff. She felt all applicants must be qualified, matronly, industrious, obedient, and plain. She even denied one eager woman from New Jersey, Cornelia Hancock, because of her “youth and rosy cheeks.” Volunteer nurses had to abide by similar standards given the collaboration between volunteer


relief nursing organizations and the military’s medical department. While Harriet was a widow and therefore met more of the qualifications, she was still a young woman in her mid-thirties who could be influenced by the men in military hospital camps. Luckily for her, this question was partially alleviated when caring for Maine soldiers because she knew the families of some of the soldiers she treated. There was comfort in the familiarity of family, friends, and common hometowns.\textsuperscript{179}

The life Harriet led during her time at the military hospitals was very different from running her home in Maine. She often lived in a canvas tent

\begin{flushright}
Dorothea Dix, Nurse
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(Source: Library of Congress)

\textsuperscript{179} Dorothea Dix, “Circular in Washington, DC,” September 17, 1864, as quoted in Lynda L. Sudlow, \textit{A Vast Army of Women: Maine’s Uncounted Forces in the American Civil War} (Gettysburg: Thomas Publications, 2000), 84; Cornelia Hancock, \textit{Letters of a Civil War Nurse: Cornelia Hancock, 1863-1865}, ed., Henrietta Stratton Jaquette (n.p.: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 3. Dorothea Dix was an exception to the rule in terms of women’s roles coming out of the Victorian era. She dedicated her life to nursing, jail and hospital conditions, and better treatment for the poor in almshouses. By 1861, she founded thirty-two hospitals in the United States.
alongside officers’ tents or hospital tents where the wounded were housed. She had minimal privacy from unfamiliar men. She worked very long hours, rising early in the morning to make gallons of gruel for sick patients, and not retiring at night until all the needs and comforts of the soldiers were fulfilled. She was living as the soldiers did. With little heat, harsh winds and blowing snow during the winter, Harriet was certainly unaccustomed to living under such unpleasant conditions when she arrived in Virginia in October. These were not conditions ‘suitable’ for a Victorian woman. It was a necessity that Harriet quickly adjust to both the challenges of weather and sleeping arrangements, as well as the larger hurdle of adapting to the intimate nature of her contact with unfamiliar, and often desperate, men.180

In addition to tending to the sick and injured, a national nursing force of nearly twenty-one thousand northern women managed all donations arriving from home, controlled their organized distribution, and then were expected to correspond with the donors, expressing gratitude so the supplies would keep coming. A “well-run” hospital was often thought to be a result of organized nurses. More often than not, a specific protocol did not exist because this was the first time such a large nursing staff was required, especially under battle conditions. Furthermore, the nurses were now women – not soldiers – making it challenging for both the military establishment and the Victorian trained women. In the end, women most often did what needed to be done rather than following regulations, further solidifying their public role outside the home and effectively starting to feminize the male environment.181

180 Schultz, Women at the Front, 39.
181 Sudlow, A Vast Army of Women, 48; Schultz, Women At the Front, 2, 38; Eaton, Birth Place of Souls, 125; Jane E. Schultz, “Healing the Nation” Condolence and Correspondence in Civil War Hospitals,” Proteus 17:2 (2000): 33. For further explanation about how women acted against military protocol, see Hilde, Worth A Dozen Men, 57.
Daily routines for camp nurses were challenging. The surgeons “prescribed pills and powders,” but the nurses addressed all other needs of the hospital and its patients. Inside the hospital, nurses carried out doctors’ orders for food, administered medicine, dressed wounds, handed out pillows, blankets, broth, tea, sherry, tobacco, “comfort bags,” or care packages, fresh clothing, and many other items. They read to the men from donated material, wrote letters to their families, recited Bible verses, and conversed casually with the patients to distract them from the misery of war. As the war progressed, out of necessity nurses began to assist with surgery. Nurses gained the knowledge for their duties from the leading nursing manual in print by Florence Nightingale, *Notes on Nursing*. They often aspired to the ideal to “be a Florence Nightingale.” The exhausting routine of hospital camp life, with the long hours and emotionally draining nature of the work, was certainly more than a Victorian era woman would have been accustomed. This is a further example of Harriet’s metamorphosis from sheltered, home-based wife and mother to a task oriented member of the public workforce.¹⁸²

In addition to living near so many new and unfamiliar men, Harriet also had to care for these men as a nurse. Traditionally, women performed these types of duties on family members in the privacy of her home. Now, Harriet was required to give the same kind of intimate care to complete strangers. Previously, treating unfamiliar men “went beyond a respectable woman’s role.” She changed old bandages, bathed sick or wounded men, and

fed men too weak to eat independently. These actions, while characteristic of women nursing family members in the home, were not common for complete strangers before the Civil War yet became necessary throughout the conflict.  

As Harriet’s daily work continued, she struggled not only with her new social situation, but she also struggled with the violence and death surrounding her. Despite this hardship, Harriet intentionally chose to work at a field hospital close to the front lines of battle where she felt she would be most helpful. As a result, she witnessed a lot of danger and violence. Harriet could have retreated within herself to block out the harsh realities of war and protect her emotional health, however this dysfunction could have proven fatal. Instead, she embraced the necessity for women to work as nurses in the face of danger. Consequently, she went through a “hardening process,” and most likely an unexpected “purifying process” as well. She overcame personal struggle in desperate times of need to do her duty and, as a result, began to remove herself from the traditional, private, Victorian world.

Much like the compromise between the domestic and public spheres for men and women before the Civil War, Harriet compromised internally to find the balance between her public and private self. It was a necessary

183 Hilde, *Worth a Dozen Men*, 57; Schultz, *Women at the Front*, chap. 3.
184 Schultz, *Women At the Front*, 39; Eaton, *Birth Place of Souls*, 84; Nancy Scripture Garrison, *With Courage and Delicacy: Civil War On The Peninsula: Women and the U.S. Sanitary Commission* (Mason City, IA: Savas, 1999), 119. Women’s hardening of emotions was a common consequence of working with so much death and suffering. Anna Holstein wrote in her diary of her own experience living indefinitely in tents with her husband as they both worked in military hospitals and she overcame her hesitations to help the “desperate sufferings.” This excerpt of her diary can be found in Anna Holstein, *Noble Women of the North*, ed., Sylvia G.L. Dannett (New York: Thomas Yoseloff, 1959), 210-213. Another example of a female army nurse who worked in similar, battlefront conditions is Annie Etheridge, who worked with the 17th Maine Volunteers. She was described and regarded quite highly by soldiers whom she cared for without any regard for the violence surrounding her. A 17th Maine soldier remarked, “I saw one young lady in the very front of the battle dressing wounds and aiding the suffering where few Surgeons dared show themselves.” There are many similarities between Etheridge’s and Eaton’s experiences and portrayals while working as army nurses. Etheridge’s story is told in Elizabeth D. Leonard, “‘Half-Soldier Heroines’: A Handful of Civil War Army Women and Their Predecessors,” in *All the Daring of the Soldier: Women of the Civil War Armies* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999), 99-141.
transition for Harriet away from her private, Victorian past to an active, public life in military hospitals. Since this nursing commitment was necessary for a substantial number of women and was widely seen as a patriotic duty, the social norm changed for women during the war if only temporarily. During Harriet’s time with the army, however, she came to discover her personal transition was not the only way her life would change during the war.\textsuperscript{185}

Simultaneous to Harriet’s transition from a domestic, private life in Maine to nursing in the military, she was also trying to find her place in this new public realm. Prior to the Civil War, women dominated the homefront and family life, while men controlled the public, industrial world. This pushed gender roles farther apart and excluded women from any authority in public life. Many women had difficulty or were unsuccessful navigating the public, male sphere. Women like Mary Walker, M.D., tried to overcome this gender divide by proving she not only had the competency and training, but also that nursing was a “natural” application for women’s maternal, nurturing instincts. Once the war began, women like Walker brought their Victorian manners, morals and duties into the public sphere out of necessity for the war effort, which started to make the confines of domesticity ambiguous. Men no longer lived at home but were instead fighting and dying on many battlefields. As women ventured into the public sphere to fill roles left vacant or create new roles where none existed previously, women had to navigate new circumstances. They were confronted by unknown men, surrounded by unfamiliar events, and needed to work effectively with socially superior men.\textsuperscript{186}


Negotiation between nurses and military doctors was focused particularly on the societal hierarchy between men and women, volunteers and military officials. Much like nurses, doctors were not always well screened before being assigned to an army unit. Appointments were more often made for political reasons instead of ability. This oversight became very obvious after battles with mounting casualty numbers and too many inexperienced, incompetent doctors to care for them. Even soldiers noticed their “inefficiency at the commencement of the rebellion.” Doctors’ duties typically required them to operate a triage unit instead of a long-standing treatment facility. Long-term care, therefore, was left to the nurses. However, even with this fundamental flaw in the military system, male doctors and officers still held greater authority in the societal hierarchy over volunteer nurses, thus outlining the potential conflict between doctors’ authority and nurses’ responsibility.  

Harriet arrived to start her new career as a Union nurse with an overwhelming feeling of responsibility. This was brought on by many different motivations, including an appreciation for the official duties she must perform as a nurse in the midst of war. However, she came to understand that the medical personnel often did not share that appreciation. She resented the doctors’ lack of medical knowledge and unprofessional attitude. She disapproved of their lack of care, compassion, or respect for patients and nurses alike. Furthermore, she had great religious convictions in her duty to do God’s work to provide for the sick and wounded, doing everything in her power to alleviate their suffering. These efforts were, at times, in conflict with the doctors whom she worked for, yet they demonstrated her commitment to

responsibility as well as her struggle for acceptance and acknowledgement by her comrades.\textsuperscript{188}

While it is true that some army doctors received questionable training and lacked professional medical skills, Harriet and other nurses had to deal with these same doctors daily, despite their disapproval. This conflict caused resentment. In particular, one day while Harriet was at the 6\textsuperscript{th} Maine’s field hospital, “one of the soldiers in Hos. managed to get some liquor and became somewhat noisy, the doctor in attendance said, I’ll soon still him, at the same time administering some medicine, and sure enough he was still in twenty minutes, he was dead.” This may have been a political statement by the doctor, supporting the contemporary temperance movement and therefore scorning the soldier’s abuse of alcohol - even as a form of pain relief. In fact, many people, especially women, opposed the use of alcohol, because of the resulting unruly, inappropriate behavior. This doctor may have felt it his duty to punish the young soldier for partaking in such an evil habit. However, despite the doctor’s personal feelings, it was unprofessional and an abuse of authority to treat men in this way. These types of events greatly undermined many doctors’ credibility with the other soldiers and with the female nurses.\textsuperscript{189}

Never once did Harriet claim that she could alleviate soldiers’ suffering more effectively than the male doctors, nor did she directly accuse surgeons of killing men in surgery. She did, however, record such abuse in her private diary to vent her frustrations. Harriet never received proper medical


training before arriving at the army hospitals; therefore she did not have the knowledge to effectively treat soldiers’ wounds or diseases herself. Yet after gaining practical experience working with the patients, patients’ wounds had not been treated properly or “prompt[ly].” Perhaps her accounts provided a biased example of nurses’ experiences in regimental field hospitals, but it is also written proof of the tension that existed between army surgeons and volunteer nurses over the issue of incompetency. In her eyes, men and women should be held to equal expectations, and she had little tolerance for incompetency. She held everyone, including herself, to high standards when treating and comforting soldiers.\footnote{Eaton, \textit{Birth Place of Souls}, 67-68. The inadequacy of female nurses’ training as well as their general ability to overcome their limited professional knowledge through their refined maternal, domestic capabilities is discussed in Ross, “Arranging A Doll’s House,” 101-102.}

Some non-military men running the hospitals, particularly Maine State Relief Agent John H. Hathaway, had a decided lack of respect for women in military camps. Men who strongly disagreed with women’s participation as nurses in the field, said women “asked too many questions and did not adapt well to military protocol.” This further frustrated Harriet when she worked so hard for her patients and wanted desperately to be acknowledged as a capable, independent woman. Upon her arrival at the first hospital camp, Hathaway attempted to dupe Harriet and other nurses into turning over all of their documentation, or nursing ‘credentials,’ to him. This would have left them without proof of their assignment or authorization. Fortunately Harriet, as well as many fellow nurses, knew the proper procedures and saw Hathaway’s deceit. She exercised some agency by challenging Hathaway, thus displaying some newfound power in the ever-shifting hegemonic relationship.\footnote{Ibid., 65-66. Harriet Eaton to Col. John W. Hathaway, January 30, 1863, Relief Agencies Collection, Maine State Archives; Geisberg, \textit{Civil War Sisterhood}, 94-95.}
Resentment also came when women like Harriet disagreed with the overall conditions of the hospitals. Conditions “were annoying and mortifying in the extreme,” at the 5th Maine Battery’s field hospital, “and with not a shadow of reason for it that I could see.” Harriet saw no reason for the inefficient procedures used in the hospitals or the lack of heat or adequate space to house the wounded. However, she was “willing to bide [her] time,” until she would have an equal voice to make meaningful, logical changes to benefit the soldiers. She saw her goal of independence, equal responsibility, and authority as an attainable one, but she needed to live with the doctors’ flaws to achieve it.192

Maternal tendencies were a motivation for Harriet to push the boundaries of the social tendencies and work with so many husbands and sons. Her own sense of motherhood encouraged her to care for countless other mothers’ children as she wished someone would care for her own. She had a tremendous sense of compassion driving her to comfort sick and wounded soldiers even when she herself was suffering form exhaustion and emotional devastation. At times, Harriet wrote how she wished to spoil “my boys,” in order to relieve their fear and make them smile, if even for a moment. “How I wish I had a mint of money- I should like to tempt the appetite of these poor fellows.” Harriet felt responsible for the men and wished to not only fulfill their every need but a few wants as well. When she had money she could offer those precious few luxuries the soldiers had long lived without. Her surrogate role of mother impressed upon her the desire to satisfy a few indulgences when possible.193

Harriet’s actual son, Frank Eaton, was now a soldier with the 29th Maine, and she “had the joy of seeing [her] dear son,” when she was able to visit him in Washington. She was traveling to obtain new shipments of supplies from the Maine Camp Hospital Association and spent the afternoon with Frank while his regiment was “camped on Capitol Hill.” She described the visit in her diary: “He looks well, he dined with me & then… did a little shopping,” before visiting the Smithsonian Institute. She was in greater awe seeing her son than to elaborate on the wonders of the nation at the Smithsonian. Harriet and her son exchanged letters throughout the war, but there were rare opportunities to actually see him.194

Harriet’s motherly affections, both to her own son and the countless other women’s sons she cared for, were acknowledged and appreciated as reminders of home and often inspired great patriotism. Maternal instincts were a major factor supporting women’s abilities as nurses and their right to be outside the home working. There were too many sick and dying soldiers to deny women’s maternal capabilities a place in army hospitals. Many patients while receiving their treatment recognized compassion from Harriet and other Maine nurses. They would call out to her, “How do you do, Mother?” even though she was hardly old enough to be the mother of most of them. “I reckon I shall feel pretty old with such boys as some of these for my sons.” Regardless, Harriet mothered each one of them, and they were thankful for her comfort. It was comforting to be cared for by a fellow Mainer. It mattered less where the authoritative doctor was from, but the soothing hands of a female nurse were much more comforting when from their native state of Maine.195

194 Ibid., 64, 117.
195 Ibid., 59, 106, 127-128; Clarke, War Stories, 102.
Despite disagreement on multiple levels, compromise often occurred between Harriet and some doctors. Working not only side-by-side but effectively as an integrated unit, nurses and doctors formed an efficient team of medical staff. This unrealized compromise was a subconscious social renegotiation of gender responsibilities and respect, accepting Harriet as a productive member of the hospital team. For instance, a “Dr. Morrison going round with me,” to assess each soldier’s progress demonstrated collaboration among personnel. Their cooperation may even go so far as to be described as a friendship growing between Harriet and her superiors. Later in the war, she was summoned “to see [a patient,] Mr. Chick as [the orderly] thought him dying,” instead of finding a doctor to examine him. In instances like this, it was less her own control that overpowered authority, but rather other men who gave her more power than some doctors wished her to have. As time and supplies were limited, reality inadvertently gave many nurses more duties and decision-making power.\footnote{Ibid, 102, 171; Leonard, “Mary Walker,” 115.}

Harriet needed support in her struggle to be professionally accepted outside the private sphere, effectively work as a nurse, and beat the challenges of navigating public, male-dominated, military life. Many women faced these struggles, and they could not be successful independently. As a result, compassionate military officers, and supportive soldier-patients acted as allies in their goal. Combined, these people comprised Harriet’s support network, helping her to be successful in her new, wartime environment. Their kind words, encouragement, camaraderie, and concern for her health and safety supported Harriet through her tumultuous array of feelings and experiences.\footnote{Hilde, \textit{Worth A Dozen Men}, 58.}
Some male military soldiers, officers, and doctors saw the great need for female nurses’ assistance in hospitals and respected the women for their willingness to contribute to the war effort in such a noble way. Many saw the necessity of having strong hands to aid the cause and help the thousands of sick and wounded soldiers regardless of their gender. “Fighting Joe,” Harriet wrote referring to the prominent Union general, Joseph Hooker, with the nickname his soldiers called him. He “very politely ordered an ambulance for my use while we should be visiting his division,” much like he would have ordered for one of his soldiers. This allowed Harriet and her fellow nurses to travel with ease between regimental hospitals. When she arrived at a camp, “officers made a reconnaissance to find lodgings for us,” to ensure our comfort and safety during the visit. They were treating nurses, whom they were dependent upon, with great respect and gratitude for their work while continuing men’s Victorian role of protecting and providing for women.198

Lower ranking officers showed equal care and respect for female nurses as well. Col. Joshua L. Chamberlain of the 20th Maine invited her to dine with him and his officers for an evening “full of fun over their table.” “Sergeant Montgomery came in this morning and sewed the top [of my tent] together and Mr. Hayes fixed the door,” after it had broken in the bitter wind the previous night. Officers of the 2nd Maine even “took [Harriet] all round the fort and explained the fortification and entrenchments,” treating her as an educated, informed equal eager to learn about military strategy instead of as an ignorant, sheltered woman. These officers did not understand they were helping her achieve agency as she navigated this male-dominated environment. Her role as nurse gave her greater agency, however, with so

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198 Eaton, *Birth Place of Souls*, 87.
many officers at each camp holding her in such high regard.199

Doctors were typically the most critical of nurses’ work and their role in military hospitals. But some doctors acknowledged the good fortune of having female nurses working for the cause and were “deeply impressed in [their] work.” Others, too, expressed their gratitude and verbal support for her hard work. One man in Washington DC, Dr. Letterman, kindly simplified the task of transporting boxes of donated goods for Harriet by “assign[ing] part of his own barge to [her] use.” This kind man recognized the generosity of so many northerners to send supplies, as well as the necessity that the supplies reach the sick and wounded soldiers. Therefore, perhaps out of patriotic duty to support the Union cause or sheer compassion, he willingly assisted Harriet transporting heavy boxes of supplies. This seemingly small favor was, in reality, much more significant as Harriet continued to find her place as a nurse in the social hierarchy.200

Individual patients whom Harriet treated also supported her efforts to integrate into a male-dominated society through their expressed appreciation and emotional support. Capt. Folger sent Harriet a photograph through one of his comrades after leaving the hospital to show his gratitude for her kindness and to encourage her perseverance with nursing work. He requested “an exchange” of photographs so he could remember the woman who cared for him in the hospital. Other soldiers sent rings, letters, and tokens of remembrance to Harriet. She embraced support like this from the patients as confirmation that she was, indeed, a useful, effective nursing agent. 201

199 Ibid., 87, 168, 179.
200 Ibid., 63, 87.
201 Ibid., 164, 175, 183. Schultz argues the “nurse-patient bond was central to women’s sense of usefulness as hospital workers. Jane E. Schultz, “‘Are We Not All Soldiers?’: Northern Women in the Civil War Hospital Service,” Prospects 20 (October 1995): 39-41.
Harriet took pride in assisting Maine soldiers and always worked to become an admired, female authority in the hospitals. This new role passively challenged the private-sphere norm of women. The motivations for her somewhat drastic decision to leave home included patriotism, her sense of motherhood, her basic need to financially support her family, and a desire for religious mission work. Yet her most private, emotional incentive was to do God’s work in what she saw as a senseless war. Harriet, a widow of a Baptist minister, “believed that her worth as a nurse rested on her success as an instrument of the Lord.” She questioned God’s position on the war and if He supported violence as a way of resolution. “I am afraid this is not a war

Patients in Ward K of Armory Square Hospital, Washington D.C.

(Source: Library of Congress)
under God’s direction, only in so far as he permits evil.’ “Can a Christian nation conscientiously kill each other? Will our Maker approve?” Even questioning God’s support to win the war, Harriet saw her religious obligation to do her Christian duty, alleviate suffering, and use her feminine influence to “transform their souls.”

Harriet shared her religious convictions through religious tracts that were sent in the boxes of supplies, which were filled with food, “delectables”, clothes, handmade quilts, and pillows. She often handed the tracts out to interested soldiers as part of her daily tasks. In addition to delivering food each morning, she “had a little talk with the men on the Sabbath and left them some tracts.” Another day, Harriet “had a little talk with [a sick patient, Charlie Mero] about his soul’s interest,” working to “inspire his salvation.” Never once in her years of working with the soldiers did she mention any animosity from them about her religious pamphlets, prayers or Bible studies with the men. More often than not, her talks comforted scared, wounded soldiers and assured them that God cared for each one of them. Sometimes men asked Harriet to sit by their bed and read a Bible passage to them, particularly if the soldier knew he had very little time left to live. Her religious convictions not only helped herself to “endure the emotional turbulence,” of her job, but it also comforted her patients as well.

Some doctors disagreed with Harriet’s leadership in religious practices with the patients, and at times, “sent word to them to ‘stop their infernal noise,’” during a prayer meeting. Harriet believed the religious reassurance she gave the men as a messenger of God was relief for young

202 Schultz, Women at the Front, 77; Eaton, Birth Place of Souls, 77, 140; Clarke, War Stories, 85.
203 Eaton, Birth Place of Souls, 78, 120; Clarke, War Stories, 101; Schultz, Women at the Front, 76.
soldiers who were ordered to commit such atrocities as war demanded of them. This escape from the brutality of war to God’s protection calmed wounded or dying soldiers who were seeking solace and forgiveness for their sins on the battlefield. Soldiers’ religious enlightenment also “hallowed” the nurse’s work. For Harriet, the traditional relationship she navigated each day came with recurrent frustrations. Her Bible offered solace and an escape back to the religious world she left behind.  

In addition to her Bible, Harriet’s diary was her personal retreat and comfort. She could acknowledge her frustrations and resentments with the doctors and how the hospital was managed. She could then willingly distance herself from those emotions to focus on God’s work, as she understood it, and further motivate herself in her personal journey of autonomy. She wrote in her diary “let me ever remember that my duty is to labor and toil for the poor soldiers, let me hourly seek grace and hold my Father’s hand. I need patience, especially,” to continue so well.

Patience and endurance through the emotional upheaval of hospital life did not always sustain Harriet. She was regularly overcome with emotion when she lost any soldier she cared for mixing her pre-war and wartime spheres. However, as her hospital experience increased, she became emotionally hardened by the death and suffering surrounding her. Young men dying were an understandably difficult sight for Harriet to repeatedly witness because they reminded her of her own son. Her son, just like those dying in hospital beds, could be taken away from his mother far too soon.

204 Eaton, Birth Place of Souls, 81.
205 Sudlow, A Vast Army of Women, 95; Eaton, Birth Place of Souls, 66, 87.
However, she maintained her composure and shared her grief in her diary. After all, it was her goal to be a respected, independent, equal figure to the doctors who would not accept weak, fragile emotions from a woman. She maintained her dignity in front of the men, continued her duty of caring for the others, and only expressed emotion over the losses in her diary. Yet even in her diary, her greatest lamentation was “Poor boy!” She cared for the men as a mother would care for her children. So many of these wounded and dying soldiers were, in fact, boys who were far away from their own mothers. Her most sincere expression of grieving their deaths was preparing the bodies for burial. She “made wreaths for the coffins and cut off a lock of their hair and prepared it to be sent home in their letters.” Moreover, she learned to gain closure by writing to the families and sending possessions home. She was one of many women practicing sending home the good, Christian death for honorable, courageous young soldiers. Her ability to cope in this manner was a prime example of her personal metamorphosis from the stereotypical ‘delicate’ Victorian woman to a stronger, more resilient, nurturer within the public sphere.

The challenges female nurses like Harriet had to overcome during the Civil War era allowed women to expand the proper sphere for Victorian women by performing traditional, nurturing roles in a non-traditional, public, male setting of Union army camp hospitals. Harriet experienced this unfamiliar transition when she left quiet Maine for the frontlines of the Union army in Virginia to support the Union’s cause by caring for wounded Maine soldiers.

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206 Eaton, Birth Place of Souls, 60, 80-82; Faust, This Republic of Suffering, 6-8. Faust thoroughly discusses the Civil War’s “good death,” in regards to a courageous, honorable, Christian death and the rule of conduct for a dying person. Also see Clarke, War Stories for further discussion of soldiers’ suffering and the 19th century definition of an honorable death.
She effectively navigated the unknown, male-dominated, military world of the Union army camp hospital by exerting her motherly, nurturing authority for sick and wounded soldiers. This represented both a change in the style of war the country was fighting as well as a change in women’s roles by being an active contributor to the war effort. Harriet did not always meet support for her work however. Male doctors often were less supportive, perhaps even intimidated by Harriet’s natural nurturing care and maternal instincts within the hospital. As a result, male doctors became one of the biggest obstacles for her to overcome during her service in the war. Despite facing so many changes and challenges, however, she had the support of fellow female nurses as well as male soldiers and officers. With their assistance and companionship, Harriet adjusted well to her new surroundings in field hospitals and the new public sphere of which she was an integral part. These experiences allowed Harriet the opportunity to transition from the traditional, Victorian woman to a new, exceptional woman who, out of necessity, redefined Victorianism for women to accommodate their newfound abilities in the public sphere.
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