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A Letter from the Editors

It has been an absolute honor to serve as the editors of the Gettysburg College Journal of the Civil War Era for the spring of 2014. Fielding and reading the scholarship of our peers in the field of the American Civil War never fails to be informative, and the width and breadth of article subjects submitted this year broadened our own interest and awareness of the numerous facets of the historical discipline as it has been applied to this seminal conflict in the development of our nation. Of seventeen total submissions, it was a trying task to select only five for final publication. We would like to extend our profuse gratitude for the tireless dedication of our associate editors, Valerie Merlina (’14), Heather Clancy (’15), Brianna Kirk (’15), Thomas Nank (’16), Kevin Lavery (’16), and Steven Semmel (’16), without whom this effort would have been exponentially more difficult. The guidance of our faculty advisor, Dr. Ian Isherwood, has also proven invaluable, as has his practice of letting us find our own way whenever possible.

The five pieces included herein are an eclectic mix of academic essays, book reviews, and interviews that showcase the diversity of Civil War Era Studies. This issue of the journal opens with “Freedmen with Firearms: White Terrorism and Black Disarmament During Reconstruction,” written by David Schenk of Marquette University, which deals with the oft-overlooked efforts of newly-freed African-Americans to violently resist the white supremacist oppression of the Reconstruction South. Next comes “Île à Vache and Colonization: The
Tragic End of Lincoln's ‘Suicidal Folly,’” written by Graham Welch of Georgetown University, in which the original plan for the foreign settlement of free blacks during the Civil War is examined in detail. The first of our book reviews, written by Brexton O'Donnel of the University of Mary Washington, analyzes Bruce Levine’s 2013 work *The Fall of the House of Dixie*, while the second, written by Heather Clancy of Gettysburg College, looks at Caroline Janney’s 2013 book *Remembering the Civil War: Reunion and the Limits of Reconciliation*. The journal closes with an exclusive interview with D. Scott Hartwig, the recently retired Supervisory Historian of Gettysburg National Military Park, wherein he reflects on his own career and what the future holds.

The entire process of compiling this issue has been filled with trials and tribulations, as is any editing job, and has assisted the both of us in realizing our editorial and academic potential. It is thus with the utmost pleasure that we present Volume 4 of the Gettysburg College Journal of the Civil War Era, and eagerly look forward to the publication of many more.

Sincerely,

Bryan G. Caswell, Gettysburg College Class of 2015
Peter S. D’Arpa, Gettysburg College Class of 2014
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Freedmen with Firearms: White Terrorism and Black Disarmament During Reconstruction

David H. Schenk

Common American History 101 narratives of post-Civil War Reconstruction have generally included docile and helpless former slaves, who quietly adjusted to the oppressive governance and terror of white Southern peoples for nearly a century. This established narrative, however, obscures another possible reason why organized Freedmen gave up their fight for suffrage and basic civil rights. Congressional records describe the early years of Reconstruction with armed Freedmen communities successfully defending their rights against white Southern authorities and terrorist organizations. At the same time these records also reveal efforts by these same white Southern entities to systematically disarm African American citizens.

African Americans fought hard for their political and civil rights as new United States citizens, during a time when they were reasonably well-armed and could organize a viable resistance. In what could be described as the *disarmament period*, these firearms were confiscated through various means of violence and coercion. As a result, the political agency of Freedmen was greatly diminished, and the consequences are clearly represented by reduced Freedmen poll numbers during the later years of Reconstruction. Freedmen were largely willing to fight and die for their rights as new U. S. citizens as long as defiance remained a course of rational action. Disarmed and overpowered by the weaponry of their oppressors,
African Americans grudgingly resigned themselves to the politics of basic survival.

I. Voices of Authority and Insight

Nearly a month after the end of the Civil War in May of 1865, Frederick Douglass addressed the American Anti-Slavery Society on the future of emancipated slaves. His tone was pessimistic because he understood the challenges that lay ahead, and he warned those in attendance that their work was not yet completed. Douglass expressed his greatest fear for former slaves living under white Southern authorities, explaining that “The black man has never had the right either to keep or bear arms; and the legislatures of the states will still have the power to forbid it.” What Douglass expressed here just weeks after the cessation of hostilities is the premonition of another conflict on the horizon. Freedom, citizenship, and the ability to vote were not enough to assuage Douglass’ worst fears, because without the political agency of black firearm ownership, and by extension the threat of an organized uprising, the actions and policies of white authorities would have little restraint.

The Federal government fell extremely short of securing the rights of freedmen, and Douglass saw this future reality far in advance. Perhaps he understood all too well the attitudes and indifference of the Northern public, and that, for political reasons, Washington could

not possibly fulfill the Reconstruction visions put forward by Radical Republicans like Thaddeus Stevens. Of course, Douglass’ eloquent speaking ability and political pragmatism would preclude him from saying directly that white northerners essentially just did not care about the fate of Freedmen.

The closest Douglass comes to this statement is so eloquently spoken that the meaning could be reasonably misconstrued. “I think the American people are disposed often to be generous rather than just,” he declared, then proceeded to list benevolent organizations that have assisted African Americans. The questionable duration of this aid was tied to a post-war public sentiment and Douglass asked for something much more sustainable: “What I ask for the Negro is not benevolence . . . but simply justice.” The great cause of the hour was peacetime philanthropy directed at millions of freed slaves, but the benefactors of these organizations were part of the same tiny minority of Abolitionist whites; the

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same handful of people who would actually consider inviting Douglass into their homes as an honored guest.

Douglass asked for the same constitutional protections given to all Americans, such as the right to assemble, speak, vote and own firearms. He stressed this key to the black citizen’s autonomy in his April speech when he declared that, “If the Negro cannot stand on his own legs, let him fall . . . all I ask is, give him a chance to stand on his own legs.” The truth was that either through the Federal retreat from Reconstruction, or a growing condition of indifference, without the guarantee of justice former slaves would soon be completely defenseless in the former Confederacy. Organized citizens with firearms were the only protection against oppressive Southern authorities, and Douglass knew this long before Reconstruction ended and the last Freedmen’s Bureau closed shop in 1877. The eventual creation and implementation of Jim Crow laws, through which discriminatory exclusions and restrictions controlled nearly every facet of African American life, embodied Douglass’ worst-case outcomes for unarmed black communities.

The post-Reconstruction South became the social nightmare Douglass had envisioned, and black journalist and activist Ida B. Wells reiterated his belief in armed black communities nearly thirty years later. Contemporary scholars consider Wells to be the mother of the Civil Rights movement because of her innovative and relentless approaches to racial violence and injustice.

1 Ibid.
She publicized the horrors of epidemic lynching, led successful economic boycotts of white businesses, and revealed through her writings the harsh realities of late 19th century Southern racism. In *Southern Horrors: Lynch Law In All Its Phases*, Wells describes the only defense available for black citizens:

The only case where the proposed lynching did not occur, was where the men armed themselves in Jacksonville, Fla., and Paducah, Ky., and prevented it. The only times an Afro-American who was assaulted got away has been when he had a gun and used it in self-defense.⁵

Wells had extensive knowledge of white terrorism throughout the whole of the U.S., and she concluded that an armed black population was the only means of immediate justice.

Wells’ primary mission was spreading the truth through the press and educating both the national and global public, but the extensive amount of violence and death demanded a far more archaic solution. Changes would come—that was the heart of her crusade for justice—but the life of a single black citizen was precious and irreplaceable. Wells assessed that “a Winchester rifle should have a place of honor in every black home. . . . When the white man . . . knows he runs as great a risk of biting the dust every time his Afro-American victim does, he will have a greater respect for Afro-American

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This violent conclusion reveals the realities of Wells’ lifetime, where black citizens were dehumanized by much of white American society. This is evident in Wells’ detailed accounts of lynching where the victims were treated in the most horrific and torturous manner. Postcards from photographs of public lynching were widely produced, marketed and sold to the general public. The attitudes of white Americans are conveyed through their general indifference to these images that were widely available at the time through the activism of Wells and others.

A question emerges from the thirty years between Douglass’ and Wells’ statements; what happened to all the firearms that were in the homes of Freedmen and former Union soldiers? Congressional testimony reveals substantial amount of firearm ownership among African American communities during the early years of Reconstruction and a population willing to brandish them in protest and self-defense.

The importance of firearms that Douglass and Wells stress is insightful because quiet, helpless, and docile black communities—those commonly found in mainstream Reconstruction narratives—would never dream of pointing loaded weapons at their white neighbors. The will among blacks to resist and fight back, however, was strong before and during the Civil War, and

6 Ibid.
the period of Reconstruction and beyond was no different.

During the antebellum period, slave uprisings did occur, such as the highly publicized 1831 Nat Turner revolt and John Brown’s raid on Harpers Ferry. Because of informants, however, most revolts were typically prevented while still in the planning stage, with deadly consequences for the conspirators. Slaves regularly risked life and limb to escape to freedom in the North, and when the opportunity to enlist in the Union Army and Navy arose, 179,000 black soldiers and 10,000 black sailors joined the fight. In fact the fear of slave uprisings was so great that in antebellum Louisiana the penalty for a white person caught speaking or writing anything promoting a slave revolt could be imprisoned for decades or even executed. These laws were generally aimed at white northern abolitionists who had intentionally brought their religious and moral crusades directly into the slave holding states.

If millions of slaves were as docile and helpless as current scholarship contends, it would take far more than a white Yankee orator to instigate a full-scale uprising. The often-violent backlash against abolitionist speech in the antebellum South may have simply been an overreaction, but on the other hand slave patrols and local militias, which stood as a defense against mass slave

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2Ibid., 52.
insurrections, were very common throughout the South in this pre-Civil War period.

Four million slaves were a powder keg of discontentment both before and during the Civil War, and it will be demonstrated that this African American spirit of rebellion did not simply end during Reconstruction. The body of evidence to this effect resides in congressional records and other various written documents. In Africa, traditions and histories are generally oral and hereditary in their storage and transmission, unlike the meticulous systems of Western recordkeeping, with books, libraries, and archives. These traditional oral histories also exist in North American black communities, and run a quiet and parallel path to the mainstream collections of written scholarship.

One such example is revealed in the famous autobiography of Ralph Ellison, entitled *Invisible Man*, which reveals a hidden story pertinent to the disarmament of Freedmen. Ellison opens his narrative as a child at the deathbed of his grandfather, who in his younger years was an emancipated slave in the Deep South. Ellison focuses on the dying words of his grandfather, which confess an unforgivable cowardice and betrayal against his own African American peoples. Speaking his last words to Ellison’s father he asks him to do what he was never able to do in a lifetime: Son, after I’m gone I want you to keep up the good fight. I never told you, but our life is a war and I have been a traitor all my borndays, a spy in the

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enemy’s country ever since I gave up my gun back in the Reconstruction. Live with your head in the lion’s mouth. I want you to overcome ‘em with yeses, undermine ‘em with grins, agree ‘em to death and destruction, let ‘em swoller you till they vomit or bust wide open."

After disarmament the politics of basic survival replaced the active fight for real freedom, and Ellison’s grandfather never forgave himself for this surrender. These were not simply the incoherent ramblings of a dying old man, because the family reaction clearly demonstrated a buried truth among the African American descendants of Reconstruction. Ellison was extremely bothered by his grandfather’s last words because they established a strong motivational basis for his later introspections on black manhood. According to Ellison, the effect on his parents was equally potent, and he explains that these last words had a greater effect on them than the actual death of his grandfather. Ellison recalls, “I was warned emphatically to forget what he had said and indeed, this is the first time it has been mentioned outside the family circle.” Ellison reveals a well-kept family secret, which may in fact be an isolated incident with merely one Freedman giving up his firearm to white authorities, but it may also present a rare glimpse into a larger hidden story of Reconstruction.

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12 Ibid.
The reaction by Ellison’s parents suggests there is a substantially negative aspect to this confession, one that might be very harmful to either family pride, or traditional community narratives concerning the Reconstruction period. There is nothing particularly shameful about a single Freedman giving up his firearm to overpowering Southern authorities. There would be little alternative to do so in the face of such certain and deadly circumstances, and this event would leave little if anything to ponder and regret years later on one’s deathbed. A more reasonable conclusion is that Ellison’s grandfather was one Freedman among many who realized too late what was happening on a larger scale. The opportunity for armed resistance quickly passed away one firearm at a time, until the only remaining action was to be a traitorous black man like Ellison’s grandfather saw himself as: forever smiling and acquiescing to the enemy just to survive.

The confession from Ellison’s grandfather is not significant in itself, but it does lend credibility to the congressional testimony that will follow. A family secret revealed through the rare autobiography of a mid-twentieth century African American author might prove to be as equally scarce. Yet, if the mass disarmament of Freedman has been buried in the collective closet of the African American consciousness, then Ellison’s recollection becomes merely the tip of the iceberg. The only evidence to this effect exists in congressional testimony compiled directly during the middle of the twelve-year Reconstruction period (1865-1877).
II. Terror and Disarmament: The Official Record

The 42\textsuperscript{nd} U.S. Congress conducted extensive hearings in 1871-1872 because of the growing threat of terror organizations such as the Ku Klux Klan.\textsuperscript{13} The 13 volume published report is called \textit{Affairs In the Late Insurrectionary States}, and it records the detailed testimony of victims, perpetrators, and witnesses. The findings reveal the attitudes and actions of African Americans living under the constant threat of violence and intimidation. Black citizens were not alone because white Republicans, Yankee businessmen, and schoolteachers at black schools were also terrorized. Testimony from the state of Mississippi reveals these tangled lines of intimidation as Southern Democratic powers worked to regain full control of their home state.

African American voices are largely absent from the hearings, and this is simply the product of their low standing in the nineteenth century U.S., but the testimony of white associates and neighbors reveal an angry and active black community. Joseph F. Galloway, a white schoolteacher at St. Mary’s Academy near Caledonia, Mississippi, had regular encounters with the Ku Klux Klan and testified about reactions from the black community. The Klan believed that Galloway influenced the political thoughts of his black pupils, and they wanted him to stop teaching and leave the area. He refused to do so and gained a position of leadership among the black community.

\textsuperscript{13}McPherson, \textit{Ordeal by Fire}, 609.
Terrorism had been increasing lately and a group of local black leaders approached him and asked him “if there is not some way to get rid of these Ku Klux,” and he replied that they would have to rely on government forces to do that.\footnote{The Condition of Affairs in the Late Insurrectionary States: Mississippi, Vol. II, S. Rep. No. 42\textsuperscript{rd}-No. 41, pt. 12, 2d Sess. (1871), 670.} The men were not satisfied with his answer and one angrily replied that “they had waited on the Government of the United States a good while now, and were getting killed and whipped and abused all around. . . . They would have to take it into their own hands.”\footnote{Ibid., 671.} These Freedmen were not cowering like frightened children from the regular Klan raids, but rather they were very anxious to fight back somehow. They approached the educated schoolteacher for guidance or a plan of action, because they had the will to resist and the weapons to do so. What they needed, however, was good strategy from someone who could reasonably formulate such things. Galloway refused to condone violence and continued to discourage armed resistance, but eventually he did admit that a firearm served as a strong deterrent against Klan attacks.

The inquiry of terror continued along the lines of resistance and the chairman of the committee asked a leading follow up question to Mr. Galloway: “These ghostly fellows are afraid of arms, are they?” Galloway replied, “Yes, sir; very much so,” and he described an incident where Klan members learned that their intended victim was carrying a pistol. “They went up to Caledonia
and left. They found that he had his arms that night and
went back and told them that it would not do any good to
whip him, so they let him off.”

This line of questioning
was intended to either learn the mettle of Klansmen, or to
showcase their cowardice to a larger audience. The clear
point in either case was that the Klan was afraid of armed
Freedmen, and this may explain the focused acts of
disarmament that are revealed in later testimony.

The targeting of isolated and unarmed individuals
becomes apparent throughout later testimony, but this
does not mean that these white terrorists remained static
in their approach. Defenseless individuals would remain
the primary victims, but the systematic disarmament of
not so helpless Freedmen would become the first order of
business on nightly raids. Testimony from Captain
George W. Yates of the U.S. 7th Calvary described two
disturbing instances of firearm confiscation followed by
cold-blooded murder. The first altercation dealt with a
black woman seeking justice through Union Army
channels, and Yates relayed the incident in detail. “An
armed band had visited her house. . . . She said they came
for arms, and [her husband] did not have anything but an
old gun. . . . They made him bring it out, and while in the
act of bringing it out he was shot.”

The second incident he described, which took
place just a few miles away, was even more brutal: “She
said the party came there, several people that they called
for arms, and finally killed her husband and told her to go

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16 Ibid., 673.
17 Ibid., 793.
to bed.” The Klansmen then proceeded burn the house to the ground, which incinerated her husband’s body and killed their two children. Violence was escalating along with the disarmament of Freedmen, and the reasons for this are unclear. It could have been due to increasing hostilities, or merely meant to affect the black turnout in an upcoming election, but the record does not provide any explanation.

Senseless acts of violence committed against Freedmen must have been the accepted reality for the congressmen conducting the inquiry, because they did not press for reasons or motivations. The hunt to capture and prosecute white terrorists takes center stage, and the otherwise highly detailed record suffers from an overemphasis on this objective at the expense of other aspects of Reconstruction such as the sociopolitical climate of the South. The Ku Klux Klan takes on superhuman characteristics because of the often tabloid quality of the hearings.

Secret Klan handshakes, disguises, and oaths are treated with fascination and all the depth of inquiry found in a developing conspiracy theory. The hearings dwell on the disputed level of nudity a white woman was in when law enforcement officers entered her bedchamber, and this line of inquiry comes across like an example of Victorian era pornography. A century and a half removed from these hearings, the attitudes and values of this time period come across as extremely strange in contrast with contemporary sensibilities.

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Ibid.
Black communities were living in terror, and in many instances actively resisting oppression, but the Congressional Record more than often treats them like inanimate objects. Armed freedmen were fighting back, and efforts were underway to disarm them, yet all of this remains at the extreme periphery of these congressional documents. This struggle, however, emerges from the testimony line by line when searching for Freedmen, firearms, and conflict.

Testimony demonstrates that citizens were generally well-armed in the Mississippi city of Meridian and that a general state of hostilities existed between black and white citizens. Klansmen had been coming over the border from Alabama terrorizing and attacking freedmen, while local white authorities did little to stop them. Riots had occurred with a portion of the town set to fire, and subsequent trials and arrests further intensified the violence. A white citizen of Meridian, M.H. Whitaker, provided extensive testimony concerning the condition of unrest and the anger of black citizens. “Large squads of colored people were seen about in portions of the town in an organized form, with arms,” he described, and when the freedmen were questioned about the reason for state of armed readiness, they explained that “they were going to fight the white people: if they wanted a fight.” The testimony does not focus on the motivations of the armed freedmen, but it clearly demonstrates the general numbers of weapons in their possession.

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Whitaker surmised the count by comparison: “White people always had arms, always kept one or two guns about their premises, for squirrel hunting and bird hunting. The colored people all have guns, I suppose, for the same purpose.” The common ownership of firearms by freedmen is not isolated to Meridian, and later evidence will demonstrate the expanse of an armed black population across the former Confederate States. A quantitative analysis after a century and a half is impossible in all likelihood, but since this testimony is a consistent sampling of a Reconstruction trend, it must represent something much larger in scope.

Miles away from Meridian in Brooksville, Mississippi, the story of armed Freedmen is quite similar, but with an added element of coordinated firearm confiscation. Former rebel soldier John R. Taliaferro testified in depth concerning his relations with freedmen and the Ku Klux Klan. He was not a member of the Klan, but rather was a plantation owner who employed former slaves. Taliaferro was questioned by congressman John Coburn as to whether freedmen were the majority population in the county and if they were all armed, and Taliaferro replied to both in the affirmative and added, “All the negroes who work for me, pretty much—have shot-guns or something of that kind.”

The follow up question concerned the disarmament of these freedmen by the Ku Klux Klan,

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20 Ibid., 200.
21 Ibid., 244.
and Taliaferro replied, “Yes sir; they have taken away pistols and things of that kind from them. . . . Thirty or forty pistols.”  

He denied there was any form of organized system of firearm confiscation, and that mass disarmaments only took place after riots.

In later testimony, however, he makes mention of a General Forrest coming down from West Point Mississippi to calm down the population of Brooksville. Another General followed this visit from West Point who conducted a large-scale disarmament of freedmen. Taliaferro recalled the event and qualifies the soldiers as former Confederates. “That was the occasion the when the Negroes were disarmed,” he explained, "by captain Franks, with his company from West Point. They came down, of course, as citizen soldiers.”

The Confederate army had been disbanded and outlawed as part of the terms of surrender, but they were reorganized and had participated in local affairs such as the confiscation of firearms.

It is unclear whether this was in fact Nathan Bedford Forrest, the first national leader and Grand Wizard of the Ku Klux Klan, but this testimony referred to events taking place around 1869 and this would be just a year after the time when General Forest and other former Confederate officers transformed the Ku Klux Klan from a “harmless fraternal order” into a “hooded terrorist organization” that James McPherson describes as

22 Ibid.
23 Ibid., 245.
24 McPherson, Ordeal by Fire, 586-587.
“The military arm of the Democratic party.” The presiding congressmen did not follow up this disarmament testimony with any questions at all, and the line of inquiry instantly shifted to the Mississippi public school system, or lack thereof. If this was in fact General Forest and his followers in action, and this may never be known, then the newly organized and nationalized Klan had disarmed Freedmen during broad daylight in Brooksville, Mississippi. If this is the case, then white terrorists dressed down as common citizen soldiers did their most important work toward subjugating Freedmen, and the U. S. Congress did not even take notice. The testimony from Mississippi demonstrated some evidence of systematic firearm confiscation, but across the border in Alabama blatant and violent acts of disarming Freedmen reached near epidemic proportions.

The act of disarmament appears at first to be political in nature, and intended primarily to affect the outcome of elections in favor of Democrats. Freedmen voted in overwhelming numbers for Republican candidates and the party of Lincoln was deeply despised by white citizens throughout the former Confederate States. This sentiment is clear and understandable for those recently defeated in the Civil War and struggling to restore a cohesive working order to their society. The fundamental Southern hatred of Yankees, Republicans, and Freedmen communities are not at issue here, but rather the lasting effects of disarmament in the way of long-term black political agency lost, and white racial

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* Ibid.
oppression completely unfettered.

Testimony from Alabama presents a closer look at the Ku Klux Klan in action and a well-armed community of oppressed African Americans. Freedmen had the will to fight and the armaments to do just that, but what they lacked in hindsight was an educated leadership that could form a qualitative plan of militant action. Previous testimony describes a white schoolteacher Galloway approached by freedmen in search of a strategy for resistance to the Ku Klux Klan. White authorities and their clandestine terrorist groups already had a plan in motion to subjugate African Americans, the testimony from Alabama offers a glimpse into these disarmament operations.

The pages of testimony in Volume II Alabama are so full of firearm confiscation incidents that they are much too numerous to be listed here. The pattern begins in the nighttime when masked and armed white men arrive at homes or plantations where freedmen reside. They demand under threats that any guns on the premises be brought out and surrendered to them. When this is accomplished through force, or merely the threat of violence, then the African American residents are generally abused, beaten, or murdered.

There are exceptions that hint of a more organized and focused operation aimed merely at disarming freedmen with minimal incidents of violence being committed. George Cornelous worked at a plantation in Madison County and gave a sworn affidavit that described a streamlined raid one night. Twelve
Klansmen confiscated firearms from freedmen on his plantation and another one nearby, and he described their intended objective: “They also examined all the houses for money, and asked if we knew who had guns, pistols, and money.” The incident comes across as a robbery because the objective seemed to be the search for valuables and cash. Firearms can hold a significant value depending on the condition and model, and these Klansmen were probably of the mercenary variety. The outcome of disarmament, however, was the same because as Cornelous described in the aftermath of this raid, “There is not a colored man in the Big Cove that had a gun or pistol, they all having been taken by the Ku Klux.”

Not all nightly raids by the Klan went so orderly, and these instances demonstrate why the disarmament of freedmen was so important for white Southern interests to prevail. After learning of a Klan attack at a neighboring plantation a group of armed freedmen, in anticipation of being next, set up an ambush for the sixteen approaching Klansmen. Second Lieutenant John C. Bateman of the Union Army described the negative outcome for the white terrorists: “The Negroes returned the fire, wounding, it is supposed, three of the party. . . . The disguised men broke and ran, and were pursued by the

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27 Ibid.
negroes about a quarter of a mile.”\textsuperscript{28} In the confusion of retreat one Klansmen was killed by friendly fire, and the others were most likely galvanized to enact the future disarmament of freedmen by any means necessary.

Nightly raids and terror campaigns were very common throughout Alabama, but not all forms of firearm confiscation were this piecemeal in method. A Freedmen’s Bureau worker, John H. Wagner, who had been living in Alabama since the end of the war, presented evidence of a large-scale disarmament operation. He described from secondhand accounts what happened to all the confiscated arms from in and around Huntsville: “It seems that along in 1868, they would go to a house and ask a Negro where his gun was; they knew he had one. . . . They would say, ‘you have got one, we will give you until such a day to take it to Markham’s mill and deposit it there.’”\textsuperscript{29} This systematic method of firearm confiscation was far different than the nightly raids, and according to Wagner was also more effective: “One old man went to the mill, and he said he saw a thousand stored there. Very often they would take the guns from the Negroes and break them.”\textsuperscript{30} This testimony identifies a form of disarmament that does not reflect the robbery and terror motivations of previous accounts. There was a basic line of reasoning behind this organized operation and Wagner addressed this question directly: “I suppose that the object was to keep the Negroes down. They

\textsuperscript{28}Ibid., 1224.  
\textsuperscript{29}Ibid., 935.  
\textsuperscript{30}Ibid.
thought they had no right to have guns. That is what they say to them.”31 This testimony is from just one county and does not prove a nationalized conspiracy, but within the halls of Congress this issue was becoming central to the politics of Reconstruction.

III. Armed Freedmen Under the U.S. Constitution

Klansmen and Southern authorities did their best to maintain secrecy in the confiscation of firearms and subjugation of African American citizens. Radical Republicans in Washington, however, already had a clear grasp on this disarmament practice and worked hard to introduce new protective legislation. These progressive politicians were generally from the pre-emancipation ranks of abolitionists. They perceived African Americans as fully human and fully equal citizens, and their Reconstruction plans included the redistribution of land and wealth to these former slaves.32 The leading Radical Republican Thaddeus Stevens, a Congressman from Pennsylvania, was so extreme in his egalitarian politics that “when he died in 1868, he was buried in a black cemetery because the main cemetery in Lancaster PA refused to accept blacks.”33 Stevens did not live to see the dismal end of Reconstruction, but his beliefs and tenacity set the tone for Radical Republicans who battled hard for the rights of African Americans.

Among these Radical advocates for former slaves was Congressman Benjamin F. Butler from

31 Ibid.
32 McPherson, Ordeal by Fire, 548-549.
33 Ibid.
Massachusetts, a former Union general and a strong supporter of freedmen’s rights. He introduced a bill that would guarantee the Second Amendment’s right for African Americans to keep and bear arms. Butler’s work would form the basis for what became the famous anti-Ku Klux Klan Act, which has since been referred to in contemporary legal circles as the Civil Rights Act of 1871. Legal scholar Stephen P. Halbrook concludes from his examination of the Butler bill it is clear that “the Second Amendment guarantee was the only provision in the Bill of Rights mentioned by name” in the 1871 act. This landmark legislation was passed to protect the civil rights of freedmen with a strong focus on the right for them to keep and bear arms. Halbrook is an avid gun rights advocate, and this may taint the scholarship, but given the limited work on this subject material it has been included with a disclaimer. His conclusion appears reasonable enough, however, because in 1871, the remnants of Union forces and understaffed Freedmen’s Bureaus were not sufficient to protect African Americans from white terrorist organizations. The Fourteenth Amendment guaranteed the full rights of citizenship, at least to all male freedmen, and the anti-Ku Klux Klan Act should have provided a greater degree of jurisdiction for the enforcement of Federal laws including Second Amendment protections.

[A well-regulated Militia being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms shall not be infringed.]

[Stephen P. Halbrook, Freedmen, the Fourteenth Amendment, and the Right to Bear Arms, 1866-1875, (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1998), 122.]
The events in Mississippi and Alabama were being repeated all across the southern United States. Justification for the Butler bill in the Congressional Record recorded that 2nd Amendment violations were being enacted by legal authorities, “In Union County [South Carolina], where all the negro population were disarmed by the sheriff only a few months ago . . . five hundred masked men rode at night and murdered and otherwise maltreated the ten persons who were in jail in that county.” Armed freedmen otherwise could defend their family and neighbors awaiting trial for any number of alleged crimes, but the confiscation of firearms in South Carolina meant that many freedmen would not survive to receive a constitutionally guaranteed trial by jury.

It is not surprising that these violent acts took place, because in both the North and the South, the post-Civil War white public was generally indifferent to the struggles of freed slaves. What is unusual is the strong push by white radical Republicans to secure the rights and liberties of freedmen, because their voting constituencies would not have directly demanded these actions in any great numbers. These actions may also have hurt the chances of certain Republicans for reelection, but indifference to the struggles of southern blacks was generally the prevailing attitude of the day. The right to defend oneself is fundamental among philosophical and legal circles, and so the denial of Second Amendment rights to freedmen would be reasonably troubling for Republicans or anyone who perceived blacks as fellow

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Ibid.
human beings. These congressional battles for the benefit of a greatly marginalized black population are an example of bold progressive thinking put into the praxis of legislation. Federal law was all that Washington politicians could reasonably wield against restored Southern powers, and radical Republicans did their best against the prevailing political winds.

Not surprisingly, representatives from former Confederate slaveholding states disagreed with the protections found in the Butler bill. The argument put forward was that the federal government had disarmed the white southern populations and unleashed black militias against them. This was generally not true, of course, but it did serve to support an argument that could not be readily disproved on the floor of the Congress. There were black militias formed throughout the South, armed by Federal and local governments, and there were some incidents, but they were rarely if ever used by states with Republican-controlled Governors. In fact, the opposite was generally the case.

When the war was over, tens of thousands of black Union veterans returned to the South, but first they purchased and kept their army muskets. But according to Republican Representative George McKee from Mississippi, they did not keep them very long. “I have seen those muskets taken from them and confiscated under this Democratic law. The United States did not

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37 Ibid., 126.
38 Ibid.
even protect the soldier in retaining the musket which it had given him [during the war], and which he had borne in its defense.”

His point was that southern governments should not be allowed to infringe on the rights of new black citizens, and that legislation was desperately needed to insure that this erosion of Civil Rights did not continue.

Butler debated fiercely for the passage of his bill, because the confiscation of firearms was only the beginning of an organized oppression. The violence he feared would otherwise continue and become grossly one-sided with white terrorists and authorities subjugating legally free citizens. In fact, in 1871, the line between law enforcement and terrorism was often crossed. To make this point, Butler read a troubling letter from Tennessee. “The Ku Klux fired on them through the window one of the bullets striking a colored woman. . . . The colored men then fired on the Ku Klux, and killed their leader . . . . He was identified, and proved to be ‘Pat Inman,’ a constable and deputy sheriff.”

Allowing local state ordinances and law enforcement the autonomy to dictate firearm restrictions was certainly not acceptable according to Butler.

Southern politicians and Northern Democrats argued at length, and through concessions the Butler bill continued to be stripped down to the point it became ineffective at protecting the Second Amendment rights of freedmen. There were provisions initially included making it a federal crime to unlawfully confiscate firearms

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“Halbrook, Freedmen, 127.
Ibid., 127.
from legal citizens. Representative Washington Whitthorne from Tennessee argued against the provision using an absurd example. “If a police officer . . . should find a drunken negro or white man upon the streets with a loaded pistol flourishing it . . . [and if] he takes it away, the officer may be sued because the right to bear arms is secured by the Constitution.” The powers to interpret Second Amendment protections were eventually surrendered to state and local ordinances. The watered-down Butler bill, which became the Civil Rights Act of 1971, was not specific enough in its language, and this allowed for a wide range of future Supreme Court rulings.

The armed conflict between freedmen and white terrorists was part of a struggle by white citizens to restore the old Southern order. This top-down, white-dominated society would resemble the antebellum South in every way possible if they had their way. Plantations filled with subservient black workers would fill the landscape once again, and the proper social orders would be restored to their former glory. The greatest obstacles remaining as the Reconstruction era wound to a close were Yankee carpetbaggers, Scalawags, Republicans and, of course, armed freedmen. Federal prosecutions against Klansmen succeeded in some states, but the vast stretch of southern territory and webs of local authorities made it nearly impossible to impose federal law in the former Confederacy.

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42 Ibid., 125.
43 McPherson, Ordeal by Fire, 597-603.
Legal scholars had engaged the Fourteenth Amendment with caution before its passage, because the central flaw of this constitutional correction was that Federal authorities could not readily enforce it. The dean of the New York University Law School, John Norton Pomeroy engaged the issue in 1868, and his writing presents an ominous preview of the Jim Crow South.

The Fourteenth Amendment guaranteed equal constitutional protections for all citizens, and Pomeroy believed that it was the only viable solution for discriminatory practices in the Reconstruction South. The example he put forward focused on the Second Amendment and equal treatment, because according to how he interpreted this law, individual states could simply create discriminatory regulations “by which certain classes of inhabitants—say Negroes—are required to surrender their arms, and are forbidden to keep and bear them under certain penalties.” The 14th Amendment did pass, but it too retained the great impediment of being extremely difficult to enforce. It did, however, open up the means for more meaningful action when mass transit

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“Article I: All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the state wherein they reside. No state shall make or enforce any law, which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any state deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.

and media exposed the southern United States to greater scrutiny in the mid-twentieth century.

The Fourteenth Amendment did have an early day in court, one that tested the meaning of Federal enforcement of the right of citizens to keep and bear arms. The case originated with the infamous Colfax Massacre in Louisiana in 1873, which was a protracted battle between black militiamen and white terrorists. Armed freedmen defended themselves at the Colfax courthouse, against a much larger white force, after disputed election results had erupted into violence. Negotiations failed and the white mob set fire to the courthouse, shooting anyone who tried to escape from the fire.\textsuperscript{46} The violent incident created a string of legal battles that went right up to the U.S. Supreme Court. Federal jurisdiction in the matter was strongly disputed, and this legal hurdle overshadowed the substance of both the incident and constitutionality of the massacre.

The establishment of federal police powers was too much of a stretch for the Supreme Court, and the \textit{U.S. v. Cruikshank} decision came down on the side of state’s rights.\textsuperscript{47} According to legal scholar Saul Cornell the verdict set the legal tone for the Second Amendment for the whole of the twentieth century. The states' rights argument flows directly into the collective rights school, where firearm laws are left to individual state governments.\textsuperscript{48} During Reconstruction and the following

\textsuperscript{46}McDonald ET AL v. City of Chicago, Illinois, No. 08–1 52 1 S. Ct. (2010), 191.
\textsuperscript{47}Ibid., 192.
\textsuperscript{48}Ibid., 212.
decades, the decision of *U.S. v. Cruikshank* was devastating for African Americans, because while their rights as citizens were fully protected under Federal law, there was no tangible legal apparatus available to enforce these protections.

The Supreme Court by its decision had oddly enough declared that the Federal enforcement of Constitutional law was in fact unconstitutional. This legal rift demonstrated the strange balance of power that existed between the states and Federal government during the nineteenth century. The same imbalances of legal authority that fermented the outbreak of the Civil War also created a legal minefield of absurdities that hampered Federal efforts towards Reconstruction.

Conclusion

The consequences of the American Civil War often resonate into present day society, and there are a few who readily recognize these indelible signs of this national tragedy. Scholars of the sectional conflict can often find themselves unable to read a daily domestic newspaper without finding something either distantly or intrinsically connected to the Civil War Era. The origins of this article, for example, are not the product of some tattered and worn archive document, but rather a contemporary *Chicago Tribune* article from 2010. Colleen Mastony, "The Public Face of Gun Rights." *Chicago Tribune* (Chicago, IL), January 30, 2010, online edition.
examples used by Justice Clarence Thomas in a contemporary Second Amendment case. Justice Thomas is an African American justice who is often maligned for his politically conservative tendencies on the court. Regardless of his political leanings on gun rights, the legal battles he described did turn out to be accurate.

Justice Thomas argued that the right of 19th century freedmen to bear arms in self-defense still remains central to the modern gun control debate. The United States Supreme Court had ruled in 2010 that the city of Chicago could not legally forbid its law-abiding citizens from owning handguns, and in an attempt to support this majority opinion Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas referenced events in the Reconstruction period. The Court had originally ruled in 1875, in the case of *U.S. v. Cruikshank* that Second Amendment rights were to be determined by individual state laws and that “the 14th Amendment only required the states to apply their laws about arms bearing in a non-discriminatory fashion.”

Thomas recognized the gross deficiencies of this ruling because discrimination itself was the rule of law in the Reconstruction South. He warned against the court leaving 2nd Amendment constitutional interpretations to the jurisdiction of state governments because, as Thomas recalled, “Without federal enforcement of the inalienable right to keep and bear arms, these militias and mobs were

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30 Ibid.
tragically successful in waging a campaign of terror against the very people the Fourteenth Amendment had just made citizens.”

Thomas also speculated about the devastating effects of a Chicago-type civilian firearm ban and concluded that “African-Americans in the South would likely have remained vulnerable to attack by many of their worst abusers: the state militia and state peace officers.”

Reconstruction presented a dangerous ambiguity, because Southern law enforcement could simply turn its back on racial injustices, or as Justice Thomas suggested, become the lead perpetrators of violence against African Americans.

The confiscation of firearms from Freedmen during Reconstruction remains a sparsely explored avenue of scholarship, and this article creates more questions than answers. Ascertaining the size, scope and organizational structures, of what appears to be a regional disarmament movement, would require a substantial amount of further research. The political implications alone could be staggering, because millions of African Americans were eliminated from local and national elections for nearly a century as a result of the disarmament period. Current historic narratives maintain that African Americans were simply frightened away from politics, but the evidence presented in this article explains the sudden, and largely tranquil race relations that

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52 McDonald ET AL v. City of Chicago, Illinois, No. 08–1 52 1 S. Ct. (2010), 53.
53 Ibid.,44.
emerged during the late and post-Reconstruction eras.

Ralph Ellison shared a family secret about his grandfather giving up his firearm during Reconstruction, and living as a traitor and spy behind the enemy lines of an ongoing war. Perhaps this account was fictionalized, or merely the distorted thoughts of a dying old man. What if, however, this really was a universally well-kept secret in the African American community, and was otherwise taken silently to millions of graves? This possibility would not be outside of the realm of reasonable scholarship, because the genuine history of oppressed and marginalized peoples is most commonly buried with them.
Bibliography


Île à Vache and Colonization: The Tragic End of Lincoln’s “Suicidal Folly”

Graham Welch

“I shall, if I get a sufficient number of you engaged, have provisions made that you shall not be wronged.” These words from President Abraham Lincoln in 1862 would prove to be prophetic for all the wrong reasons when, in two years, 350 freed blacks and emigrants returned to the United State in tattered Union army uniforms, all victims of a disastrous attempt at settlement abroad on the Haitian island of Île à Vache. A policy vision that existed from the embryonic days of the United States, the settlement of former slaves abroad had its opportunity in practice on the island under the aegis of the Lincoln administration and its representatives, all to collapse in a venture marred by disease, corruption, incompetence, and death. This event proved to have a significant effect on Lincoln, and ended a life-long exploration of colonization for both him and the nation. Through reconsideration following abject failure, Lincoln embraced policies of black inclusion that would have transformative impacts both on the Civil War and the nation going forward. Through disaster, the Île à Vache endeavor put an end to one of the more controversial legacies of Abraham Lincoln, ultimately forcing him to embrace a multiracial future.

The decision to send freed men, women, and children to Île à Vache was not the brainchild of Lincoln, rather it was the tangible completion of decades of colonization rhetoric and action throughout the United States. Colonization, the state-sponsored emigration and resettlement of freed slaves outside of the United States, possessed a deep legacy in the early United States. Thomas Jefferson, in his 1785 *Notes on the State of Virginia*, documented his concerns over the justice of forced bondage as well as “new provocations” of slavery that could arise in the future, and later took an interest in political proposals of colonization. The political legitimation of colonization began in 1816, when Virginia Delegate Charles Fenton Mercer and New Jersey Reverend Robert Finley established the American Colonization Society (ACS), emerging as the preeminent colonization organization. Even Henry Clay, Lincoln’s “beau ideal of a statesman” and Whig forbearer took an active interest in the ACS alongside other early national luminaries John Marshall, Francis Scott Key, and James Madison. By its own estimates, the ACS had aided in the

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59 Staudenraus, 27, 69; *Collected Works*, 3:29. Madison was even elected President of the American Colonization Society in 1833, proudly accepting the post by offering his “earnest prayer, that every success may reward the labors of an Institution... so
emigration of 11,909 African Americans from the date of its founding through 1867, though only a negligible amount occurred following the outbreak of war.\textsuperscript{60} Furthermore, local colonization groups emerged across the United States from Providence to Augusta, frequently pressing state governments for funding of prospective journeys.\textsuperscript{61} Colonization was hardly a passing political fancy, but rather was an ingrained belief in the minds of many of the young nation’s leaders. However, it also remained to be seen whether such proposals could ever succeed in reality on a larger scale and with governmental assistance, a question that would be answered with the failure of Île à Vache.

Support for colonization was widespread throughout the antebellum United States, albeit for divergent motivations. In the North, colonization sentiment arose from a similar religious vein as abolitionism, specifically a post-Great Awakening missionary impulse to both remove bondage at home and to project the Gospel abroad.\textsuperscript{62} There were also calls for colonization strictly as a means to control a rising labor force of freedmen, as evidenced by the Tammany Hall Young Men’s Democratic Club’s resolution in March

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\textsuperscript{60} Memorial of the Semi-Centennial Anniversary of the American Colonization Society (Boston: Cornhill Press, 1867), 32; Staudenraus, 66, 248.
\textsuperscript{62} Staudenraus 12, Tomek 45.
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1862: “we are opposed to emancipating negro slaves, unless on some plan of colonization, that they may not come into contact with the white man’s labor.” Southern colonizationists, including those who saw no moral objection to slavery, argued that exclusion of free blacks, coupled with gradual emancipation, would be beneficial for white planters in the future and reduce the threat of black retribution.\(^\text{64}\) Both attitudes were shaped by a pseudoscientific notion of race that emerged in the 1830s and continued to the age of Lincoln, centered on the supposed infeasibility of a multi-racial state.\(^\text{65}\) It was evident that mixed motivations were at the heart of colonization, and would further demonstrate the difficulties of implementing effective policy.

As colonization movements gained credence in national and state discourse, one powerful political advocate emerged in Washington from Springfield, Illinois, in the form of Abraham Lincoln. Leaders in colonization circles recognized his personal devotion to the movement, as in 1853 and 1855 Lincoln addressed the annual meeting of the Illinois Conservation Society.\(^\text{66}\) Lincoln’s support of colonization, as evidenced through a


lifetime of speeches, came from a sincere and profound desire to improve the condition of African Americans, even in this misguided venture. This sentiment of benevolence is evident in Lincoln’s 1852 eulogy for Henry Clay, in which the future President speaks of a longing for justice “in restoring a captive people to their long-lost father-land, with bright prospects for the future; and this too, so gradually, that neither races nor individuals shall have suffered by the change.”  

Later speeches reflected this pattern for Lincoln, as he expressed the same missionary impulse that guided early colonization advocates in one 1857 speech in which he invoked Christian duty to the policy, comparing African Americans to enslaved Israelites.  

This rhetoric also emphatically disproves a prevalent historical narrative surrounding Lincoln and colonization espoused by James Oakes, in which he described colonization rhetoric as solely political grandstanding and pandering to “make emancipation more palatable to white racists.”  

Lincoln’s words and actions throughout his public life establish his sincere dedication to the cause of colonization, which would ultimately conclude with the failed experiment at Île à Vache.

Lincoln’s decision to approve the Île à Vache venture stemmed from a combination of logistical and diplomatic convenience that had proven impossible in

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other possible locations. Upon his inauguration, Lincoln explored possible venues for colonization, including directing his Minister to Guatemala with gauging interest in colonization projects throughout the Americas. By 1862, the administration had narrowed possible locations for emigration into the Western Hemisphere. While the West African nation of Liberia had been a location of interest since its founding by the American Colonization Society in 1822, attempts at state building quickly failed, and left the nation in the midst of disease and a harsh diplomatic climate. Lincoln himself lamented this reality, stating, “If they were all landed there in a day, they would all perish in the next ten days,” but his acceptance of the infeasibility of transatlantic colonization further demonstrates his practical nature in the matter of black emigration.

After eliminating Liberia as a feasible option, Lincoln explored the possibilities of emigration to Central and South America, a policy that entailed new diplomatic challenges. Much of this diplomatic responsibility fell on the shoulders of Secretary of State William Seward, a staunch advocate of assimilation, who publicly declared, “I am always for bringing men and states into the Union,

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72 Collected Works, 3:15.
never for taking any out.” Lincoln acknowledged these difficulties before, stating, “The political affairs in Central America are not in quite as satisfactory condition as I wish.” The administration, per the advice of the Sen. Samuel Pomeroy and Rev. James Mitchell, Lincoln’s Commissioner of Emigration and Colonization, found the most favorable scenario in the province of Chiriqui, in present day Panama. Lincoln had initially authorized the mission under the auspices of “coal and privileges,” but that promise proved unfounded when Joseph Henry of the Smithsonian Institute found Chiriqui coal to not only be poor for steam engines, but dangerously flammable. In addition, background checks revealed that the private speculator behind the Chiriqui venture had been suspected of embezzlement, prompting a swift reconsideration of this specific plan. By September 1862, the Central American plan was dead, leaving one remaining option to fulfill Lincoln’s dream of colonization in Île à Vache.

As Lincoln explored emigration opportunities in Central America and the Caribbean, he drew the ire of abolitionist groups both black and white. National abolition figures had been wary of Lincoln’s proposals to prevent the spread of slavery and gradual emancipation

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74 Collected Works, 5:374.
77 Bancroft, 225.
since his arrival on the national stage. On colonization, however, these disagreements reached a fever pitch, such as William Lloyd Garrison’s public denouncement of “puerile, absurd, illogical, impertinent, and untimely” schemes in his periodical *The Liberator*, placing responsibility on the President who endorsed them. These disagreements accompanied colonization during his presidency, but became most raucous upon his meeting with the Deputation of Negroes in 1862.

The antipathy between Lincoln and abolitionists on the issue of colonization reached its apogee on August 14, 1862, when a committee of five African American leaders met with Lincoln at the White House. These men might not have been the best audience to colonization proposals, as three were members of a black abolitionist group that had recently been responsible for the banishment of emigration lobbyists from Washington. Lincoln outlined his colonization proposals, but his rationale, particularly the statement “you and we are

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78 One major critic of Lincoln the candidate was Charles Grandison Finney, evangelical abolitionist and president of Oberlin College, who denounced Lincoln in 1860 on grounds that, despite his qualifications, Lincoln’s “score of humanity towards the oppressed race was too low.” Allen C. Guelzo, “Lincoln and the Abolitionists,” *The Wilson Quarterly* 24, no. 4 (Autumn 2000): 60.
different races. We have between us a broader difference than exists between almost any other two races,” met a harsh rebuke. The outcry to this meeting in the black community was widespread, evidenced by Frederick Douglass’ characterization of Lincoln as a “genuine representative of American prejudice and Negro hatred.” in the September 1862 issue of Douglass’ Monthly. Ultimately this experience demonstrated a key problem for Lincoln regarding colonization, specifically that the President, who had limited experience with African Americans in his personal life, had drastically misgauged black resistance, which was nearly universal.

The negation of transatlantic and Central American colonization schemes, while disheartening to Mitchell and other advocates, also opened the opportunity for the venture to Île à Vache. The proposal did not emerge from within the administration, but rather came per the solicitation of Bernard Kock, an American speculator who had obtained an agreement with the Haitian government for ten-year privileges for timber on Île à Vache, a hilly island off of the coast of Haiti roughly 25 square miles in size. Kock found entry into the White House through frequent correspondence with Mitchell,

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81 Collected Works, 5:371.
84 Ibid., 230.
supplementing his own legitimacy by appending his correspondence with the title “Governor of A Vache.” Mitchell was aware of Haiti as a possible locale for colonization, as the abolitionist and Republican activist James Redpath had funded a campaign to export freedmen to the main island from 1860-62; this project, however, quickly foundered, as Redpath encountered both Haitian opposition and financial difficulties that forced his retreat. Nonetheless, the prospects of a federally-funded colonization venture proved enticing for Mitchell, who agreed on the terms of a contract with Kock on November 6, 1862: 5,000 free blacks would depart to Île à Vache at the rate of $50 per person in transfer costs, with Kock also responsible for the construction of sufficient living quarters, medical facilities, and the distribution of fair wages. The contract also included $600,000 in funds authorized by Congress for the purposes of colonization, no insignificant amount at a

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85 Ibid., 231.
88 Redpath experienced the journey of emigration himself, making the transatlantic voyage from his native Scotland to Michigan in the 1840s. (John R. McKivigan, Forgotten Firebrand: James Redpath and the Making of Nineteenth-Century America (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008), 4).
time when the overall federal budget was slightly greater than $60 million and the nation was at the peak of the Civil War, costly in both dollars and lives. On Île à Vache, the Lincoln administration had found an ideal location for a federally funded colony, and December 1, 1862, only a month before the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation, Lincoln had agreed to terms with Kock, and the first government-run colonization was afoot.

The Île à Vache proposal also succeeded in satisfying the one unwavering aspect of Lincoln’s colonization policy, specifically that it remain voluntary. During one Cabinet debate over colonization proposals, in reaction to a suggestion of compulsory deportation, Lincoln emphasized, “Their emigration must be voluntary and without expense to themselves.” This unwavering belief in colonization as strictly a voluntary measure further demonstrates Lincoln’s earnest conviction that blacks would be inclined to pursue emigration. On paper, Île à Vache was the ideal opportunity to do just that.

The first inauspicious signs of the Île à Vache venture emerged nearly immediately after the administration approved the contract with Kock. After Lincoln approved Secretary Seward’s request for a temporary investigation into Kock on January 8, 1863,

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89 Lockett, 437.
90 Gideon Welles, Diary of Gideon Welles, Secretary of the Navy Under Lincoln and Johnson, Volume 1 (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1911), 152.
one month after the signing of the initial contract, word began to trickle into Washington concerning the “Governor.”91 Statements from New Orleans depicted a man who had used deceptive business practices to unload shipments of low-quality tobacco on unsuspecting merchants, while the United States Commissioner in Haiti spoke of Kock as an unpopular figure in Port-au-Prince and just as forebodingly, had not yet heard of any progress in constructing a settlement on the island.92 These allegations overwhelmed to both the Interior Department and the President, and on April 16, 1863, Lincoln formally rescinded Kock’s contract.93 Shortly beforehand, on March 20, Lincoln agreed to terms with more reputable characters, Wall Street financiers Paul S. Forbes and Charles K. Tuckerman, for a rate of $50 per colonist at a maximum of 500 colonists.94 Unfortunately for the expectant colonists, this transfer would not spell the end for Bernard Kock in Haiti, as ultimately his actions at the helm of the failed colonization project would validate Attorney General Edward Bates’ claim that he was but “an errant humbug.”95

As for the black settlers themselves, sources and documentary evidence of their lives both before and after Île à Vache are regrettably limited. Records from Fort

91 Collected Works, 6:42.
93 Collected Works 6:179.
Monroe, however, reveal that they were “principally Virginia Negroes from the Tidewater area around Norfolk, Petersburg, and Richmond,” and by status as contrabands, represented an ideal group for the experiment of emancipation and subsequent colonization. The chosen colonists for the project represented a unique subsection of newly freed blacks; aside from a few family units, the settlers were individuals divided relatively evenly by gender. Their enthusiastic reaction to the prospect of colonization provided hope for future projects, as accounts describe those chosen to have exalted cries of “Amen” and “Hallelujah” in anticipation of a future of landowning and true freedom. Desire to depart former Confederate territory was a common sentiment for freed slaves under federal jurisdiction, as conditions for these “contrabands” were rife with disease and malnutrition. These aspirations for improvement would tragically not come to fruition on Île à Vache, and ultimately their experience defined the human element of the disaster.

From the moment the vessel Ocean Ranger departed Fortress Monroe on April 14, 1863 carrying 453 black settlers, the mission to colonize Île à Vache was an unmitigated failure. The journey itself demonstrated the

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97 Bancroft, 244.
98 Ibid., 245.
100 Bancroft, 243
inherent dangers of mass ocean transport, as a major bout of smallpox killed at least twenty-five settlers at sea, while the survivors were allegedly forced to pay for their own water rations.101 The real horrors began, however, once the settlers arrived on the island, as Kock instituted a policy of “no work: no rations” that rivaled any antebellum plantation.102 The contractors had reneged on their duty to construct any serviceable accommodations to protect them from the ravages of exposure, and the emigrants were left to construct crude huts for any shelter. Meanwhile, disease raged across the island from an outbreak of fever, killing a number of freed men and women.103 In addition to their physical maladies, colonists suffered psychologically from what physician and Île à Vache witness Dr. James Brazier deemed “homesickness [and] depression of the spirit” in an interview with the Freedmen’s Inquiry Commission in December 1863.104 Concurrently, attempts at cultivation proved unfruitful and starvation soon coupled with disease on the island, forcing the survivors to subsist on the decaying remains of corn and salt pork from the journey.105 The situation on

101 Ibid., 247.
103 Bancroft, 246-249.
104 Records of the American Freedmen's Inquiry Commission, File No. 9, "Hayti and the south," Record Group 94, Letters Received by the Office of the Adjutant General (Main Series) 1861-1870 1863-328-0, Microfilm 619, Reel 201, Frame 254, NARA.
Île à Vache was nothing short of nightmarish, unbeknownst to its promoters at home.

Washington remained ignorant of these developments, aside from a June 1, 1863 report from George C. Ross, American Vice-Consul at Aux Cayes, Haiti, confirming that operations were “flourishing under the able, wise and humane director of its projector, Bernard Kock.”\footnote{Ibid., 247. Boyd, “The Île à Vache Colonization Venture, 1862-1864,” 52-53.} Evidently Forbes and Tuckerman, ignorant on the logistics of colonization, had appointed Kock to coordinate their operation on the ground.\footnote{Bancroft, 247.} By July 1863, the emigrants had reached a breaking point of mutiny, and the terrified “Governor” fled the island for his life, while the Haitian government dispatched a military unit to maintain order.\footnote{Boyd, “The Île à Vache Colonization Venture, 1862-1864,” 51.} Within weeks, word of these atrocities reached American soil through Southern press outlets, and the nation and its leaders would learn the harsh realities of colonization, but not before rescuing the destitute colonists.\footnote{Bancroft, 246. Records of the American Freedmen's Inquiry Commission, File No. 9, "Hayti and the south," Record Group 94, Letters Received by the Office of the Adjutant General (Main Series) 1861-1870 1863-328-0, Microfilm 619, Reel 201, Frame 256, NARA.}

The most significant outcome of the catastrophe at Île à Vache was its profound impact on Lincoln,
specifically his decision to not only rectify the situation as quickly as possible, but also never engage in further ventures of colonization. In response to these atrocities, Lincoln acted curiously slowly to rectify the situation and remove the emigrants from a situation for which he was ultimately responsible. In mid October 1863, more than three months after the first media accounts of the island’s conditions emerged, Lincoln ordered D.C. Donnohue, a former legal associate of Secretary Usher, to sail to Île à Vache and verify the reported conditions on the island while offering immediate aid to the victims. In the meantime, Lincoln was preparing the rescue of the victims of this failed operation, ordering Secretary Stanton on February 1, 1864 to commission a naval vessel, complete with supplies and medical personnel, to depart immediately to the island for rescue purposes. By March 4 1865, the U.S. Navy’s Marcia C. Day had departed from Île à Vache with 350 surviving emigrants, reaching its ultimate destination in Alexandria, Virginia, per Lincoln’s orders.

According to future Assistant Commission of the Freedmen’s Bureau John Eaton, Lincoln expressed grave distress over the failure on Île à Vache, and was left shaken by the experience. The timing of the incident was unfortunate for all sides, as reports of Kock’s Haitian fiefdom emerged just as the dust was settling at Gettysburg

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110 Ibid., 248.
111 Collected Works, 7:165.
112 Bancroft, 252.
and the War continued in full throughout the summer. Nonetheless, it remains significant that Lincoln, once fully aware of the atrocities committed under his watch, ultimately acted to set the situation right and return the emigrants to their nation of birth.

In the aftermath of Île à Vache, its primary actors were quick to pronounce blame for the disaster in nearly all aspects of the operation. Forbes and Tuckerman were quick to denounce the actions of the man they appointed to run the colony, blaming the “obnoxious” Kock for dereliction of duty and breach of contract in one public statement.\textsuperscript{114} In addition to the rampant acts of exploitation on the island, federally-promised support proved to be an illusion to both the emigrants and their benefactors; of the $600,000 allocated for colonization efforts, only $38,329.93 was ever spent on Île à Vache, a majority of which went straight to the salaries of Rev. James Mitchell, expenses such as the transportation costs for the project, and compensation to Sen. Samuel Pomeroy for his legislative assistance in the project.\textsuperscript{115} Forbes and Tuckerman were unable to recoup their investment that ended up totaling over $90,000 despite their protestations, which included the publishing of a self-exonerating pamphlet that deflected the majority of the blame onto the Interior Department and Kock.\textsuperscript{116} Usher’s Interior Department, “eager to forget a fiasco that was held up to ridicule by the increasingly powerful Radical branch of the Republican Party,” was reluctant to

\textsuperscript{114} Ibid., 248.
\textsuperscript{115} Lockett, 442.
\textsuperscript{116} Bancroft, 256.
request funds at the risk of spectacle, and Forbes and Tuckerman’s appeal ultimately went unheeded.\footnote{Boyd, “The Île à Vache Colonization Venture, 1862-1864,” 59.} Curiously enough, Kock attempted to return to the island where he had caused so much havoc on Christmas Day 1863, only to flee in terror on the first boat out when he learned of threats to his life at the hands of those he had exploited.\footnote{Bancroft, 250.}

Ultimately, the responsibility for this humanitarian disaster lay at the feet of the Chief Executive, and his reaction proved monumental in the end of colonization as a chimera in American policy.

Following his reversal of the Île à Vache venture, Lincoln not only remained silent on the failed Haitian colony, but also never issued another public statement concerning colonization, a decision that is astounding after his many prior proclamations on the matter.\footnote{Magness and Page, 7. Foner, “Lincoln and Colonization,” 183.}

It should be note that one countervailing account exists in the 1892 memoirs of General Benjamin Butler, who claimed that that Lincoln confided unto him, “I can hardly believe that the South and North can live in peace, unless we can get rid of the negroes.” However, recent historical investigation has shed light on the illegitimacy of Butler’s claims, as not only was he recalling the conversation nearly three decades later solely from memory, but telegraph records show that at the time of this supposed conversation, Butler was at his home in Massachusetts while Lincoln was at City Point per an invitation from General Ulysses S. Grant. Benjamin F. Butler, \textit{Autobiography and Personal Reminiscences of Major-General Benjamin F. Butler} (Boston: A.M. Thayer & Co., 1892), 903. Mark E. Neely, “Abraham Lincoln and Black Colonization:
abandonment of colonization as a viable policy option was evident in his acceptance of Minnesota Senator Morton S. Wilkinson’s bill introduced on March 15, 1864, which formally withdrew any federal funds for future colonization. Upon its passage on July 2, Lincoln signed the bill, and the colonization in the United States was effectively dead, with nary a word from the President.\textsuperscript{120} Colonization was officially an afterthought in Congressional policy as a direct result of Île à Vache, but it was Lincoln’s rejection that would prove to be the nail in the moribund movement’s coffin.

Despite his silence on the matter, Lincoln’s abandonment of colonization as a viable policy in the wake of Île à Vache is evident through the commentary of those still involved both in the administration and dwindling colonization efforts. On July 1, 1864, nearly four months since the last of the Île à Vache refugees had returned to Washington, Lincoln’s personal secretary John Hay expressed relief when he wrote, “I am glad the President has sloughed off that idea of colonization. I have always thought it a hideous & barbarous humbug & the thievery of Pomeroy and Kock have about converted him to the same belief.”\textsuperscript{121} The inclusion of Pomeroy and

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Kock in this statement further shows the specter of Haiti within the administration. Conversely, Pomeroy became increasingly frustrated with a lack of new emigration efforts, and wrote to Lincoln in demand of action for the estimated fourteen thousand freedmen who had reached out to Pomeroy in hopes of manning the next colony.\textsuperscript{122} Emancipation was a watershed moment for ACS activists, and abandonment by a perceived ally in the White House proved fatal; the organization, which had already been operating under heavy costs without matching incomes, dwindled in popularity until it published its final newsletter, \textit{The African Repository}, in 1892.\textsuperscript{123} Through making the deliberate effort to remain silent on colonization, but also to ignore any possibilities of future endeavors following Île à Vache, Lincoln showed the transformative impact this failure had on his evolution toward a dying policy.

The abject failure of the Île à Vache venture had dramatic ramifications for the Lincoln administration in its aftermath, as preexisting rivalries and disagreements within the White House reached an apex. Opinions on colonization were split nearly evenly across Lincoln’s cabinet, with Seward, Welles, and Stanton firmly against any such proposals, while Interior Secretaries Caleb Smith and John Usher, alongside Postmaster General Montgomery Blair were vocal in favor of colonization as a

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\textsuperscript{122} Vorenberg, 42.
\textsuperscript{123} Allan Yarema, \textit{The American Colonization Society: An Avenue to Freedom} (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2006), 73.
\end{flushright}
policy measure. Many of these arguments centered on Emigration Commissioner Mitchell, who frequently drew the ire of his superiors in the Interior Department with his frequent association with speculators and other less-reputable colonization advocates. Île à Vache provided an ideal opportunity for an incensed Usher to freeze Mitchell’s salary and have him expelled from his office. These disagreements also embroiled the President himself, particularly regarding his Secretary of State, William Seward. While Seward fulfilled his duties to explore colonization options, he frequently voiced his displeasure to the President. While recovering from an assassination attempt within the same conspiracy that had killed Lincoln, Seward told an interviewer, “Only once... did we disagree in sentiment... His ‘colonization’ scheme, which I opposed on the self-evident principle that all natives of a country have an equal right in its soil.”

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124 Taylor, 191. Welles, 151. Vorenberg, 38. Donald, 344. Secretary Blair’s brother, Congressman Francis Blair, Jr., was one of the most strident advocates of colonization during the 1850s and 1860s, both through campaigning on the House floor for colonization as well as sitting on the House Committee on Emigration that resolved on July 16, 1862: the highest interests of the white race, whether Anglo-Saxon, Celt, or Scandinavia, require that the whole country should be help and occupied by those races alone.” (Bancroft 201).
127 Taylor, 191.
Lincoln administration provided an ideal microcosm of the debates over colonization, and ultimately the fiasco at Île à Vache brought these debates to the forefront.

In the public arena, media coverage of the Île à Vache disaster proved to be overwhelmingly negative towards colonization as a policy option for the Lincoln administration and allies. Colonization efforts in the Caribbean in the months preceding Emancipation already elicited outcry from Northern media members of both political parties. The Democratic New York Evening Express railed against logistical costs that deportation would “entail upon the White Labor of the North,” while the Republican New York Times offered an equally blunt editorial statement: “‘No, Mr. Pomeroy. No, Mr. President. The enfranchised blacks must find homes, without circumnavigating the sea at the National expense.’”

The media reaction was swift following Île à Vache, and following its report of the material failings of the operation, the Chicago Tribune issued an editorial with the prescient title “The End of Colonization.” In it, the staff swiftly declared, “We have probably seen the last of a long line of attempts to colonize the blacks from this country” due to infeasibility in both logistics and black desire, observing, “their general reluctance to leave the country is a good reason why they should not.”

African American newspapers issued sentiments of relief, such as the New Orleans Tribune’s declaration that “We shall hear no more of that suicidal folly.” These editorials,

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130 Chicago Tribune, March 23, 1864.
coupled with factual accounts of the horrific details on the island, contributed to a public discourse that rejected colonization once and for all following Île à Vache.

The failure of colonization as a feasible policy option, while temporarily disheartening to Lincoln, nonetheless left new opportunities for post-war racial policies, particularly military enlistment and participation in an emancipated nation. This turn to assimilation, rather than displacement, found support within black communities, particularly those who saw enlistment as an avenue to support the nation and president that had granted them freedom. African-African intellectuals had embraced their own permanent status, as abolitionist and staunch anti-colonization advocate David Walker wrote in his Appeal that indeed the true “promised land” for former slaves was in the United States. Lincoln voiced his support of black enlistment and subsequent positions in the post-war society in his final public address on April 11, 1865, when he advocated for “the elective franchise... on those that serve our cause as soldiers,” an effort he argued would sustain the reunified Republic. Through statements such as this, the President offered optimism of black allegiance and democratic participation in a way that

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132 Tomek, 246.
134 Collected Works, 8:403.\]
would never require such ill-conceived attempts as Île à Vache again. In the symbolic transition from colonization to assimilation, a number of the surviving men of the colony found both shelter and income through enlistment in the Union army, fulfilling one black abolitionist’s desire for recognition that “this land which we have watered with our tears and our blood, is now our mother country.”

Despite its failure on both humanitarian and political grounds, the Île à Vache excursion proved to have one positive lasting consequence for the United States and the legacy of Abraham Lincoln in the realm of diplomacy, specifically through the diplomatic recognition of Haiti. Following Toussaint L’Ouverture’s 1804 victory and subsequent expulsion of French colonists from the island state, the Jefferson administration issued a temporary embargo and diplomatic non-recognition of the sole black-controlled state in the Western Hemisphere; the latter policy soon became a norm for Jefferson’s successors in the White House. This policy stood in stark contrast to the traditional de facto policy of diplomatic recognition toward former Spanish and French colonies in the Americas, described by the House Foreign Affairs Committee in 1822 when it reported to President James Monroe, “it is sufficient that it is really sovereign and independent,” as grounds for recognition, a

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135 Apap, 327.
qualification that undoubtedly applied in Haiti.\textsuperscript{137} The Île à Vache endeavor, however, caused a rapid shift in this policy, as American involvement on Haitian soil necessitated recognition of the state that had already signed a contract with Kock.\textsuperscript{138} On December 3, 1861, one year prior to his approval of the Île à Vache proposal, as part of his annual address to Congress, Lincoln recommended the recognition of both Haiti and Liberia, citing “important commercial advantages might be secured by favorable commercial treaties with them.”\textsuperscript{139} Within months the United States had formally reestablished ties with Haiti; in response, the Republican press praised Lincoln, typified by the \textit{New York Times} proclaiming victory over the era “when the slave-lords ruled in our legislative halls.”\textsuperscript{140} The diplomatic recognition of Haiti after decades of ambivalence and hostility demonstrates that for all of the individual losses of the Île à Vache fiasco, some good still managed to emerge from the island.

The historiographical conversation surrounding Île à Vache is focused on one of the more confounding aspects of the abolitionist movement and presidency of Abraham Lincoln, specifically, support of colonization as a policy appendage of emancipation. To an observer

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\item\textsuperscript{138} Alfred N. Hunt, \textit{Haiti’s Influence on Antebellum America: Slumbering Volcano in the Caribbean} (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988), 186.
\item\textsuperscript{139} \textit{Collected Works} 5:31.
\item\textsuperscript{140} \textit{New York Times}, January 1, 1862.
\end{itemize}
today, the concept of colonization appears at its most innocuous to be infeasible and at its most malicious as the ultimate solution for American racists. Colonization as a serious policy option appears outlandish from a contemporary perspective, and Lincoln’s support for black emigration provides a contrast from the image of the Great Emancipator. A range of scholarly works exists on national and local efforts to spur African American colonization up until the Civil War, as well, demonstrating the persistence of this movement in the antebellum years. Nonetheless, writings concerning Lincoln and colonization focus primarily on his ideological support for the movement, rather than his tangible efforts to enact such a policy. Therein lies Île à Vache; the Haitian island provided an ideal experimentation for these grand schemes, all to collapse in a spectacular fashion. For the majority of writings, even those specific to the endeavor, Île à Vache is but one example of colonization as a failed policy, rather than as a pivotal moment in Lincoln’s strategy toward a post-


Emancipation and biracial United States. Ultimately the historical record, as proven in this essay through a combination of policy shifts and lack of official statements following the disaster are more reliable than speculation, demonstrating that the Haitian excursion was the death knell for colonization.

An evaluation of the historical narratives of colonization reveals one of the most contentious aspects of Lincoln scholarship, specifically his beliefs regarding race. Some historians have viewed Lincoln’s support for colonization as an indelible blemish on his legacy, characterized by Eric Foner’s description of these programs as “the ethnic cleansing of America” in one review. Both this interpretation, as well as a newfound interest in colonization as anything but a footnote in history, emerged in the 1960s with a newfound historiographical interest in race. Some of these more vociferous analyses assert that “to his dying day” Lincoln questioned the ability of blacks and whites to coexist in a

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143 For example, In John Burt’s *Lincoln’s Tragic Pragmatism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), he concludes a section on Lincoln’s views on colonization by referring to Île à Vache as but a “coda” to the broader narrative, without delving into the specifics of the ventures itself, a common thread in colonization historiography. (Burt 365).


post-Emancipation United States. Nonetheless, these accounts provide a view of the President that frequently do not place colonization within its proper historical context, despite its obvious faults in both morality and pragmatism, as well as rejection within the black community. The accounts of abolitionists wary of Lincoln furthered the historiographical debate over Lincoln and race, a persistent and inflammatory element of his legacy. It is evident that an examination of the tragedy at Île à Vache contributes to a controversial but relevant appraisal of Lincoln’s presidency, and thus must it be interpreted in both its failure as an endeavor as well as a driver of future policy.

When the *Marcia Gay* departed the shores of Île à Vache on March 4, 1864, it left behind not only the ruins of one failed experiment at black resettlement, but also the fate of a movement itself. The Île à Vache fiasco was a combination of governmental mismanagement, individual malfeasance, and misplaced policy ambitions, together culminating in death and disease for a chosen collection of society’s most marginalized residents. Ultimately the responsibility for these failures fell on the shoulders of Abraham Lincoln, who made the concerted effort to not only rescue the surviving members of the expedition for return to American shores, but to forever abandon future schemes of black resettlement. In the

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place of colonization, Lincoln instead explored ways to integrate those he had freed into a post-emancipation society, shaping future efforts to reunite the United States. Alexis de Tocqueville once wrote, “The great privilege enjoyed by Americans is not to be more enlightened than other nations but also to have the chance to make mistakes that can be retrieved.” The incident on Île à Vache, while undeniably a tragic and preventable event, proved a retrievable mistake through the negation of an unfeasible and unpopular solution to racial questions, replaced by subsequent transformation toward a more integrated future.

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Book Review: The Fall of the House of Dixie, by Bruce Levine

Brexton O'Donnel

Bruce Levine's *The Fall of the House of Dixie* (2013) opens with a stirring reminder of the size and wealth of the antebellum Southern states, and the fact that much of that wealth was in human capital. Levine extensively details the immense wealth tied up in slavery, and the luxurious lifestyle of the Southern slave-holding elite. The book’s goal is to stress the importance of slavery as an economic and social institution for white Southerners, and a central fact of life for them. Levine argues that the Civil War transformed from a conventional military conflict into a revolutionary struggle that transformed American society and politics. His core thesis is that the Civil War brought about a great social and political revolution in the American South especially. Most of the book consists of Levine seeking to demonstrate how the structures of wealth and power in the South, founded on the cornerstone of slavery, were radically altered by the Civil War in an event he calls “the second American revolution.”

Levine begins the book by laying out the background of “The House of Dixie” and continues chronologically recounting its fall through the war and into Reconstruction. He devotes successive chapters to the early phases of the war, the evolution of Federal war policy towards slaves and slaveholders, and the progressive collapse of Southern society. Levine takes a dual approach in making his argument. Calling on an

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impressive array of sources, Levine spends much of the book examining the relationship of slavery to the society and economy of the Confederacy. Dissent in the Confederacy, which resulted in the creation of West Virginia and guerrilla warfare in Unionist East Tennessee, comes in for close scrutiny.

Some of these poor whites took up arms against the Confederacy out of resentment at their wealthier neighbors leading them into war. However, Levine also notes that even many poor whites continued to support the Confederacy.

Still, conflict between poor whites and the Confederacy demonstrated the weakening of the socio-economic foundations that the House of Dixie stood on. Throughout the book, particular attention is paid to the amount of slaves that abandoned the Confederacy in the wake of the Federal armies' advance.

The military successes of the Federal armies continuously weakened the institution of slavery in the Confederacy, and as the fortunes of slavery waned, so did the enthusiasm of Confederates for the war. Levine does not forget to look at the situation through the eyes of the slaves either. Where the collapse of the South brought ruin to slaveholders, it uplifted the newly freed black population of the South and greatly altered their position in Southern society, as they could no longer be sold or forcibly separated from their families.

A recurring theme throughout Levine's chapters in the latter half of the book is the increasing Confederate fear of what the impending end of slavery will mean, and their failed efforts to control their slaves. Levine's rigorous examination of the increasing amount of cracks in the social cohesion of the Confederacy throughout the book is its greatest strength.
Levine also examines the political relationship of slavery to the war, particularly in the context of Federal war aims. Levine demonstrates how the aims of Lincoln and the Republican Party in regards to slavery changed over the course of the war. Levine rightly emphasizes that the Republican Party was not a revolutionary party. While the Republican Party was committed to undermining slavery, they preferred gradual change. In the early days of the war, only the most radical Republicans foresaw the end of slavery in the near future. Originally, the party embraced a limited war for the Union. The logic of events forced the Republicans to embrace a more radical policy, targeting slavery to win the war.\(^{150}\)

Levine successfully crafts a provocative social history of the American Civil War that neatly describes the origins of the Southern rebellion and the social changes that ultimately transformed the South and brought about the end of the House of Dixie. The dual nature of the book serves it well, as Levine illustrates the social changes and tensions that unraveled the Confederacy's socio-economic structure, while providing a clear political backdrop that contextualizes the transformation of the South with Northern war aims. Much of the book's political content is not groundbreaking, and in the hands of another author, might come off as tedious. But Levine successfully crafts a compelling narrative that skillfully incorporates a wide range of sources.

Levine also addresses the aftermath of the Civil War, pointing out that as the blood-toll of the Civil War mounted, Southerners were reluctantly reconciled to rejoining the Union. They did so while maintaining hopes of being able to restore some form of their social system,

\(^{150}\) Ibid, 142-170.
and in this, they eventually succeeded.\textsuperscript{131} A thorny issue for a scholar arguing that the Civil War represented a social revolution that transformed the South is that the post-Reconstruction South managed to recreate many elements of the antebellum Southern society and retain political power. Yet Levine argues persuasively that the setbacks do not detract from what the “second American revolution” did accomplish, which was to end slavery forever and advance the greater cause of liberty. Bruce Levine has penned a superb work that will stand as one of the premier social histories of the American Civil War.

\textsuperscript{131} Ibid, 284-299.
“The Southern Heart Still Throbs”:

Caroline E. Janney and Partisan Memory’s Grip on the Post-Civil War Nation

Heather Clancy

“Memory is not a passive act,” writes Caroline E. Janney in the prologue of her 2013 book Remembering the Civil War: Reunion and the Limits of Reconciliation. Rather, it is a deliberate process. Our nation’s history has been shaped by countless hands in innumerable ways, and the story of our civil war is no exception. In Remembering the Civil War, Janney seeks to turn our eyes once again onto the players, large and small, who shaped what came to be the accepted narrative of the conflict, from its inception through the 1930s and even bleeding through the Civil Rights Era and into the present. By examining the Civil War generation and its children, Janney sheds light on the evolution of an often vitriolic and always contested Civil War memory, one jaggedly split between reunion and reconciliation, progress and precedent, image and truth. Janney’s postwar South is not only un-Reconstructed, but un-Reconciled. The world of postwar memory construction that Janney paints for the reader is not David Blight’s largely uncomplicated portrait of a willful reconciliation found through a common (white) racial identity. Instead, she offers a messy but intriguing alternative: the clasping of hands across the bloody chasm, but accompanied by clenched teeth and bitter resentment.

At the crux of her evaluation is her differentiation between “reunion” and “reconciliation.” The former was easily accepted by Confederate veterans, explains Janney, for although it was the bitter result of a military surrender,
it was not automatically emasculating or subjugating. Reconciliation, though, implied an alarmingly personal and yet simultaneously collective surrender, not only of armies, but also of spirit, bravery, and cause. The fight between Union and Confederate veterans as well as their descendants for control over the Civil War narrative, then, was in reality for legitimacy.

Janney treats gender, race, region, and generation with care, assessing not only each category but also the interplay between them. Janney is also careful to distinguish between civilian and military wartime and postwar experiences and the roles that both groups played in shaping Civil War memory. Her discussion of feminized memory—the part that women, and particularly white Southern women, played in this process is skillful. Her argument that women saw in popular Civil War memory a chance for pseudo-political engagement and even agency is intriguing, as is her theory that veterans of both sides in the decades following the war merely wore a façade of reconciliation and allowed their politically non-threatening wives, sisters, and daughters to fight the battles for memory supremacy in their place.

Janney’s analysis of the cyclical nature of Civil War memory is both clear and generally concise. Her argument falters noticeably only once, in her epilogue. Here she comments on the denial by “most Americans [and] especially whites” of the central role that slavery played in the coming of the war. She does this despite having reassured the reader repeatedly throughout the book that northerners have never once been fully taken in by the sickly sweet charm of the ex-Confederacy’s Lost Cause. But if a majority of Americans accept the Lost Cause view of slavery as unrelated to the causes of the Civil War, then how can a Lost Cause interpretation of the war have “become increasingly marginalized”? This
one notable self-contradiction is Janney’s sole faltering worthy of mention; nowhere else in the book does such a confusion of argument arise.

*Remembering the Civil War* paces the ground between history and mythos in a briar patch of passed down lore, seeking out kernels of truth. Ultimately, Janney comes to few definitive conclusions by her epilogue, but it is well that she does not. Just as “no single vision of the war could encompass the range of meanings and understandings such a vast American public found in the conflict,” so too do we find ourselves adrift in a sea of contradictory historical narratives today. Although it can be tempting to view our Civil War past as just that, Janney’s murkier look at the postbellum period leaves Sesquicentennial-era historians and historiophiles to wonder just how reconciled our divided past truly is. The bloody shirt may no longer be damp with the blood of our fellow citizens, but it would seem that the stains are still visible.
D. Scott Hartwig, Supervisory Historian for Gettysburg National Military Park, retired in the fall of 2013. In recognition of his long service to the park and community of Gettysburg, Associate Editor Thomas Nank interviewed Mr. Hartwig concerning his personal experiences gained over three decades working at Gettysburg as well as the future of the National Park Service and the field of public history in general.

How does a Park Ranger successfully communicate events of 150 years ago to today’s college generation?

I’d say you do it the same way we’ve always done it, by making it relevant. If you don’t establish relevancy, the events of 150 years ago ultimately are meaningless. We did student these education programs that were curriculum based, and one of the programs was Pickett’s Charge. The students were placed in the role of one of Pickett’s regiments, they learned something about the men, they learned what brought the war on, and what might motivate the men. They were given identities of the men, so they learned different things about the occupations of the men. During the program, you walk the students across the field, so they get the idea that a lot of guys didn’t make it, some were killed or wounded or ended up missing in action. It was a group of juniors from a private school in Washington DC. They were black and white, and they were all guys from an all-boys school, and they were pretty wild. I knew enough that when you’re dealing with students like that, that being a disciplinarian is never going to
works, so you have to build respect with them. So they were having fun, goofing around, and we got halfway across the field, and I stopped all of them. I said “Look, guys, quiet down for just a minute. We’re walking across this field, like 13,000 Confederate soldiers did over 100 and some years ago, you’re never going to have to do this, right? Doesn’t mean anything to you, you’re never going to have to do it. People don’t do this, line up and march across a field, face bullets and shells, right?” Now at this point their curiosity was peaked: where’s he going with this thing? So I said “There’s never going to be a cop, that gets called for a domestic dispute, and there’s somebody behind that door who’s armed, and you have to go through it. There’s never going to be a fire, where somebody’s trapped inside that house, and somebody’s got to have the balls to go up that ladder and get that person out. Never going to happen, right? The point is, what these men did, people have to do every day. They have to face the challenge that this might be the last day on earth for that guy, they have to face their fears, they’ve got to go through that veritable wall of bullets and shell fragments, and at the same time you know, we may be in another war again, you never know what’s coming down the pike. You’re not going to have to make Pickett’s Charge again, but you are going to face things in your life, that these men had to face, and find the courage to conquer it. That’s what you can learn today”. And from that point on, those kids listened to every single thing I said. And I knew a lot of them at the end of the program, were really thinking about it. Until I attempted to do something to make it relevant, they
were like, what does this mean to me, why should I care about this? Up to that point, they didn’t care. But the same thing is true college students or adults, if you’re not making it relevant for them, why does it matter, why should I care? So I come here to Gettysburg, there’s a bunch of monuments, some guys did this or that, why should I care, why does it matter? So you have to establish some type of relevancy.

**How do you inspire today’s high school and college students to pursue the study of history?**

I’d say you inspire them to study history by bringing history alive, and encouraging people to pursue things that interest them in history. A lot of times, people have a tendency to say there’s only a certain way you can learn history. You study it, you write it, and that’s the appropriate way. Some people go out and do living history, why do people do that? People experience history in different ways. That person who likes to get dressed up a portray a Civil War soldier, that may be their conduit for learning a lot more about the Civil War. When the movie “Gettysburg” came out, a lot of people at the park, Rangers and guides, they were really down on it, as a movie in some parts its absolutely ridiculous. But the thing about the movie is that it really reached a huge number of people, and it was a great place to start from with visitors. Okay, so you’ve seen the movie, you remember such-and-such that happened in the movie, now let’s talk about what really happened. People are always interested in that. You can get people charged up about history when you
start talking about people in history, rather than units and tactics and strategy and statistics and those sorts of things, they can be really interesting. But to the average person, it’s generally people that draw you in and really get you going. How many people have had a “love affair” with Joshua Chamberlain, and then suddenly started reading and finding out about these other things?

As a historian, how has working for the NPS affected the way in which you approach history?

Well for one thing, as an NPS historian, you’re a public historian, and when you’re doing interpretation for the public, they can just get up and walk away, they’re not paying to listen to you, its free. You have to be skilled in how you present controversial material. So you’re in the National Cemetery and you want to talk about what the war was about, and you’ve got some people on that program who are neo-Confederates. They don’t think it had anything to do with slavery. Now how do you keep those people on the program? You have to make them think, because if you verbally punch them between the eyes, they’re leaving because they don’t want to hear to what you have to say. So as an NPS historian, you learn the fine art of finessing how you tell people things. As another example: once I was giving a Pickett’s Charge walk for adults, it was a two-hour walk. The program focused on the attack, its main purpose was to talk about why did Lee make the attack, why did the attack fail, and what were the consequences of it. When we got half-way across the field, I stopped
everybody and I said “Ok, let’s talk about why these men are coming across this field, trying to kill those men, who are waiting for them, and are going to deal death to them. Why are they doing it? Let’s talk about the individual, why is he doing it? There are a multitude of reasons. They may like the uniform, they got coerced into doing it, their girlfriend wanted them to do it, they believe in what they’re fighting for, there’s all sorts of reasons they’re going in. But what is their government fighting for? If you’re a Confederate soldier, you’re fighting to set up a slave holding republic. That’s what you’re fighting for. If you’re a federal soldier, you’re fighting to preserve the Union, and by this point in the war to destroy slavery. Doesn’t matter whether you care or don’t care about those things, that’s what you’re fighting for. Now let’s move on to the attack...” So all you want to do is make people think. You don’t want to hit them over the head with stuff, because that’s the quickest way to turn them off. All I ever wanted to do in those situations is put a little something in there that got the wheels turning, and maybe cause them to question some of the things that they thought.

What part of your training or education was the most fundamental to your job? Why was it so meaningful and how did it shape your work?

I don’t want to be uncharitable to the Park Service, but it does not have a training program to prepare somebody to work in a Civil War park. In the early years, they did do a pretty good job of training people to be interpreters, training people to interpret: what does interpretation mean, what are
the fundamentals of it? They had these different courses all interpreters were supposed to go through. But I would say for myself, personally, two things in college that prepared me the best for working at Gettysburg. One was that I took three credit courses from E. B. Long, the research editor for Bruce Catton. The last course I took from him, was a course that he designed for me and one other guy, which was an unbelievable experience, and really fantastic. I wish I could have done more with him, but I learned a lot from him about doing good Civil War history. The second thing was we had a professor, at the University of Wyoming named Myron Sutton who was an NPS employee, and the NPS didn’t know what to do with him, because he was towards the end of his career. He had been involved in setting up some parks, like Mt. Cook in New Zealand, Tiger Tops in Nepal, and he was an amazing photographer, he and his wife. He did these three screen slide presentations, and taught several courses that talked about the national parks, the NPS, and interpretation. I learned a lot from him about what interpretation really was. Other history courses I took were also very helpful but Long was really good, combined with this strong background in interpretation and how the Park Service worked before I even got to Gettysburg really helped me a lot.

What has been the most significant change in the NPS since you first started?

Probably the most significant change in the NPS since I started is doing more with less. If the Park
Service was a business, its buying power has been severely eroded. In 1980, they were talking about it then, “we’re going to have to do more with less.” But the “more with less” in 1980 and 2014 are like night and day. To give you an example of how that works: In 1991 the Visitor Center at Gettysburg, and we were really impressed, got 465,000 visitors which was a huge number. It gets about 1.2 million visitors a year now. We have no more buying power, no more staff, no more anything. In fact, overall in the park we have less. So think about any business that tripled the amount of customers that doesn’t make itself any bigger, it just asks its people to do more stuff. That’s been a big issue. The second thing I’d say, and this is more specific to the Civil War parks and Gettysburg, is the broadening of interpretation. I wouldn’t say that that’s universal, because what happens at one park doesn’t necessarily happen at another. I always tell people: think of the parks as kind of like a Navy: they all fly the same flag, they all have different captains, and they all have different ways of doing things. Some people don’t like what this park is doing, so they do their own thing. We all know about the “Rally on the High Ground” and the broadening of interpretation, some parks gave it a little bit of lip service but don’t do anything towards it. And some parks have been diminished so much they hardly do any interpretation at all. Gettysburg is lucky, we do a lot of interpretation. Fredericksburg does a lot of interpretation. Some parks just don’t have the people to do it. They’re more traditional: put a Park Ranger behind a desk, he or she smiles and greets people and tells them where the restrooms are and when the film starts and maybe
give a little 5-minute introductory talk. Or they have a guy in a uniform that talks about the Civil War soldier, but doesn’t really get into motivations or any of that stuff. Its very uneven but, in general, we are much better off than we were 30 years ago, a lot better off.

**What do you see as the NPS's greatest challenge?**

Getting quality people. Its a challenge, a real challenge. In the government today, particularly in the Park Service, the process for applying is really difficult, complicated and confusing. Our personnel office that has to rate and rank applications when they come in are really overworked, those places took a lot of hits in personnel. They contract out a lot of that stuff. If you want to take care of the parks, you gotta get the best people. You really want to work with the best people. A lot of the best people get demoralized by the process and they get a job somewhere else. Sometimes its people who simply can’t get a job anywhere else, or its someone who just stays at it for so long they end up getting the job, but they’re not the best person. For managers, I would say, its continuing to find resources to continue to do your job, and protect, preserve and interpret your park. That is going to be a really big challenge. We’re lucky here at Gettysburg because we have the Gettysburg Foundation. If we didn’t have that, it would be Little Big Horn time, or at least we’d be on the road there! [laughter].
What are your thoughts about the relationship between GNMP, CWI and history students at Gettysburg College? Are there ways you think those relationships could be improved?

I think they’ve been really good. We’ve had great luck with our work study students, every single person we’ve had from the College has been fantastic. One of them is a permanent Ranger now, Chris Gwinn. What I think makes [the relationships] the best is when there’s open communications between the Institute and whoever happens to be in the position as the Chief of Interpretation at Gettysburg, that they’re both working together to find things that will benefit students. At the same time, the park is making people aware of things that are going on at the Institute that will benefit people who work at the park, and also visitors that come to the park. We’ve had a number of people who were work study students or were volunteers for us or interns in the summertime who have been associated with the Civil War Institute. In fact, I’ll say that one of the best things that’s happened between the park and the Institute is Pete Carmichael. When Pete got here, and he is, among the academics I’ve known over the years, he is unusual to me in how hard he works for his students, to try to give them real-world experiences that will make them more competitive for jobs. One of the things he set up is the intern interview process, where all these people from Appomattox and Fredericksburg and Manassas and almost all the other parks come here to interview interns, and I’ll tell you what, its a fantastic thing that
he did. Previous to that, we didn’t get a lot of interns from Gettysburg College, they just didn’t apply for internships.

**What is one thing about the battle here that still puzzles you?**

There’s a lot of things you’d love to know the answer to. Did Captain Johnson really get on to Little Round Top? Just where did Captain Johnson go? What did Lee tell him, and what did Lee tell General Longstreet when Johnson was going to accompany Longstreet’s march? As I like to point out to people, think about this: he tells Longstreet that Captain Johnson will be your guide. Johnson is not there. He tells Johnson that I want you to accompany Longstreet’s command. Those are two entirely different things! Particularly in the Army of Northern Virginia they did things like that all the time. Of course you’d love to know all the things that went back and forth between Sickles and Meade. I think it’s fairly well established that Sickles, if orders had any meaning, did in fact have orders [to stay where he was]. The Confederate army, because they lose the battle, is actually far less well documented than the Union army is. So where is Lee throughout much of July 2nd? Why does Lee think that a reconnaissance that was performed at 5:00 am is still viable almost 12 hours later, that nothing has changed? That seems kind of unusual to me. I’d certainly love to know what Lee was thinking, and I have a lot of speculations, but I’d like to know what was he thinking when he thought Pickett’s Charge was a good idea. What was running
through his head? What was his thought process that caused him to arrive at that decision.

If you had one career “do-over”, what would you do differently?

There’s probably a lot of things I’d do differently! [laughter]. At Gettysburg it was pretty great, it was the ideal situation. I had a boss [recently retired park Superintendent Bob Kirby] who worked to get you the resources you needed to get the work done, and gave you the freedom to be creative, and trusted you, put implicit trust in what you did. And that is rare, really rare, to find somebody who will do that. We had this opportunity to do all these really cool things at the park. Maybe I would have done some of them earlier, I don’t know. I honestly can’t think of anything at this point that I would say I’m definitely going to do that differently.

What are you most proud of accomplishing in your career?

Several things, one would be the museum. That was a huge amount of work and I think that it came out fantastically. I think the building works really, really well. The interpretive program we developed I think is outstanding. It really reaches a lot of different aspects of the war, there’s a lot of variety to it. Economically, I have no doubt at all, it has benefited this community a great deal because there’s a reason to come here to the park. There are these public programs you can go on. Think about the anniversary battle walks that we did, when you have
400-500 people show up: they all have to go eat somewhere. They stay at hotels. Now imagine we don’t do that. Imagine we never started it, never did it and nobody shows up. Those are the sorts of intangible benefits; everybody loves to bitch about the government, but hey, you know what? The government working with private industry can be a real catalyst. I’m proud of all the seminars that we did, and the books that we published from those seminars, they were a lot of work but they were definitely worth all the work we put into them. My point always was, you can give the greatest talk in the world but it’s like building this really cool campfire: everybody sits around it and later has great memories of the campfire, but they can’t put everything back together the way it was again. But when you write something, you’ve got it. It’s there. You can go back to it over and over again. I can’t tell you how many times, when I’ve wrote something for one of our seminars, and now it’s about 6 or 7 years later, and I’m thinking such-and-such happened, it went this way or that way, and I go back to the seminar paper that I wrote, and I’m like “I’m completely wrong” because I’ve just forgotten! But the ability to go back to some resource that you or somebody else has created, it really is pretty neat, I’m really proud of that. I’m proud of all the work that everyone at the park did, but I’m also proud of the little contribution I made to the landscape rehabilitation of the battlefield.
If you had one more year left before you retired, what would you try to accomplish at GNMP?

I think probably what I would have done if I had not retired is I would have tried to become Chief of Interpretation at Gettysburg. I would have used my time there to allow some of our really creative people to build upon what we have already done. Because, what I’d be looking for is, you’re going to retire, this isn’t about you, it’s about the park and those people that come after you. Helping those people build the foundation for taking the park further into the 21st century, building that solid foundation for the park and empowering those people who are the creative ones and the hard workers. I would have done collaborations with the Gettysburg Foundation. I would have tried to redo a thing we had done before, where we brought Dr. Carmichael in to do a workshop with people from all the Civil War parks in the North Atlantic region. I’d do something like that again with academics, because I think that academics can learn some things from public historians, but public historians can learn a lot from academics because the difference between the two of us is we are doing research for the next program coming up, but academics are on the cutting edge of research. So that we can learn from the research they are doing and apply it to our public history. I would have tried to build a greater bridge between those two worlds, the academic world and the public history world because I think there’s a lot to be gained by doing that. I would have used the Gettysburg Foundation however it could be used to help facilitate that. The other thing I would have
definitely done would be to work with the Foundation to see if we could get research grants. Years ago when Eastern National used to run our bookstore, they had a program where you could apply for research grants. We got a few of them, and we sent researchers out to state and county historical societies, college repositories, and we got some unbelievable Gettysburg primary source material, just phenomenal stuff. In some places we just scratched the surface because there’s a ton of it out there that you’ve got to have time and money to go and get, and you have to look at it, you just can’t write them to send you such-and-such. That would have been another thing to work on. The reality would have been I wouldn’t have gotten any of that done in a year! [laughter]. In five years maybe I would have gotten some of it done...

What is your most vivid memory of the Gettysburg 150th commemoration events at the park this summer?

Three things just stick in my mind. One is the Last March of the Iron Brigade. The whole event was an incredible experience unlike anything I’ve ever had at the park, and I’ve had some really cool experiences at the park. When we got up near the North Carolina monument, I was at the very front of the column and I looked back and the tail end of the marchers was still at the Emmitsburg Road. It was amazing, and how fantastic the visitors were in keeping together and forming up. It was really pretty magical. The living history group that we had [the Liberty Rifles], that’s a great example. Take the
Liberty Rifles out: not the same program. I don’t care how good Dan Welch and I could have been, it would not have been the same program. Those guys made that program, they gave it an energy it wouldn’t have been there otherwise. The second thing is of course would have been Pickett’s Charge. It was a giant risk and a gamble. We did a lot of planning on it to organize the visitors so that the visitors would maneuver to the operational plan I drew up for everybody. We were following the same tactical plan that the Confederates did in the attack. Fry’s brigade is the unit of direction, so that Garnett guided on that, Kemper guided on Garnett, and Armistead stayed 200 yards behind Kemper. And everything worked out, it was amazing. I expected we might get about 10,000 people on it, we ended up with about 40,000. I had a lot of worries about it. I was concerned that (1) it could get out of control, and (2) it could become a Confederate love fest, which I did not want it to be. But I was willing to run the risk that there would be a lot of Confederate battle flags out there, and I know that’s controversial for the NPS to be holding an event, with all these Confederate flags flying around and celebrating the Confederacy 150 years afterwards. That’s not really what we should be doing. The other part of me was, I’m trusting that people are going to be respectful. We tried to set up an event where you could walk across that field with a Confederate flag if you want, you have a right to fly any flag you want really out there, but there were a lot of people I knew who had ancestors, or they were from states that these men had come from, and all they wanted to do was to walk across that ground at that time. They didn’t
want to celebrate the Confederate cause, they just wanted to remember their ancestors and what they had gone through, and I wanted those people to have that opportunity just as I wanted people on Cemetery Ridge to have the opportunity to be present and an active participant, so that everyone involved was a participant rather than an onlooker. And that worked, it ended up working out. We had some little incidents with some folks who thought the Civil War was still going on [laughter]. And the last thing is, I don’t know why this sticks in my mind: Todd Bolton was in charge of all the interpretive programs out in the field. Ernie Price was my deputy, because Ernie is going to be doing the 150th anniversary at Appomattox Court House. So the three of us on July 2nd are trying to get out and visit all of the key moment stations. It was almost impossible, there were people everywhere, all over the place. But the great thing was, everywhere you went everybody was in such a good mood, and it was humid as hell and threatening rain, but everybody was having such a good time. I think part of it was we tried to plan so that there was always stuff for people to be doing, something coming up or something happening. You weren’t just wandering around, you had to get to the next station or the next hike or there was something you wanted to get to. And we got up to Little Round Top finally, I took us about an hour and a half to get up there, and we pulled up in the car, and I see Jim Flook, one of our seasonal Rangers, and he’s just drenched in sweat with the biggest smile on his face, he’s just beaming. He said “Allison did the first talk, and she had 200 people.” That was 9:00 in the morning! Just the look of excitement on Jim’s face
and all the visitors we ran into, it was just an amazing event. So those things always leap into my mind when I think of the 150th.

**When the Civil War sesquicentennial celebrations are over in 2015, what comes next for Civil War historians?**

I think if we’ve done our job the events that we had should get another generation excited about visiting Civil War battlefields, and understanding how the Civil War relates to their life. They become the next generation, that then brings their kids. So that in a way, you always have to have something for a generation that energizes people and reconnects them with their history. We are clearly a country that just keeps moving on, we march on and we don’t look back, generally, and we often times don’t like to be reminded of where we came from because of assorted parts of our past. Past 2015, what you have to do is to stay creative. You have to continue to do some of the traditional things you’ve always done that have connected with the visiting public, but you also have to find ways that connect with a public that maybe doesn’t see the relevancy in a battle walk, but they would like to know what happened on the 2nd day of the battle. To me, the future is (and I know the Park Service is looking at wayside exhibits and things like that) for the Park Service to recruit a new batch of interpreters who can do the interpretation on the field, but have the skills to carry the battlefield out through blogs, through Facebook, through apps, that enable people anywhere in the world to connect with us, because that’s the way you’re going to get
people really energized about wanting to come here one day. You’re always having to go back and make history interesting and relevant. When we started our blog at the park, some people said it’s got to be really short, like a paragraph. I said that’s absolutely wrong. For some blogs, you’re right. But for this kind of blog if it doesn’t have something of substance, they’re not going to read it. The person that’s going to come to this blog is interested, not just cruising around looking at stuff, and it’s got to be worth their time. You have to tell the stories about this park that are the stories you couldn’t tell on an interpretive program, or stories that move people to say “you know what? We need to go back down to Gettysburg this summer.” That’s what you’re trying to do through social media, those sorts of things. Some people who think in traditional terms, look at a Ranger sitting at a computer and say, get that guy out behind the desk. So you get that well-trained Ranger out at a desk (which a volunteer could do), and he sees maybe 30, 40, 60 people on a two-hour shift. However, if they stayed at that computer, and completed that blog post or Facebook post, that just reached 25,000 people. Which was the more efficient use of their time? That’s how I think you have to look at it.

What is next for Scott Hartwig?

Working on volume two of the Antietam campaign. I have a couple of ideas for other books after that once I finish it. I’d like to be able to do some writing. I love writing, I like the research, and it was getting to the point in my later years at the park
where I didn’t have time to write.

Any advice for the next generation of historians?

Don’t get so mired down in the academia, or the bureaucracy if you’re in the public history world, where you forget why we’re doing this. Why are we interested in history? Why do we want to learn about history, why do we want to share what we know with people? It comes back again to making it relevant and telling those stories that move people. There are all sorts of academics that have criticized Bruce Catton and Stephen Ambrose and James McPherson over the years because they reach a broad audience, but I would say: how do you do really good history and reach a broad audience?

That’s your challenge. If you’re only preaching to a tiny group of people, it really doesn’t matter anymore, they won’t find any value in it. If people don’t visit the parks and find value in the parks, we’re failing. Do academic history, but also make history relevant for the broader masses out there that don’t really understand it.