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Abstract

Shaping historical memory means extracting lessons from the past. Those lessons frame the debate about the nature of the present. Just months after the inauguration of Woodrow Wilson, the attention of most of the nation focused on the events scheduled to commemorate the semi-centennial of what was by then increasingly viewed as “the turning point” of the Civil War. The reunion at Gettysburg in 1913 constituted the contemporary public exegesis of the status of American memory of the Civil War. In this respect, the reunion in Gettysburg reflected the erasure of the legacy of emancipation and the unfulfilled promise of equality for African-Americans. Yet, almost all the public discourse at Gettysburg reflected no sense of disappointment; rather, the battle now represented a triumph of the American spirit. The presence of African-American veterans would have complicated the message of white reconciliation at the reunion. Reckoning with the honorable service of black troops was not something mainstream American society felt comfortable with in 1913. Whether or not black veterans attended the fiftieth anniversary of Gettysburg is a small detail which illuminates a profoundly broader pair of subjects: the meaning of the Civil War and the nature of American race relations in 1913. In answering this question of black veterans at the Gettysburg reunion, the broader context of the organization and execution of the reunion, the lessons drawn from the ceremonies in Gettysburg, explicit discussions of race at the reunion and contemporary African-American perspectives must all be explored. [excerpt]

Keywords

Civil War, 1913 Gettysburg Reunion, Civil War memory, African-American veterans, race relations

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Evan Preston

Shaping historical memory means extracting lessons from the past. Those lessons frame the debate about the nature of the present. Just months after the inauguration of Woodrow Wilson, the attention of most of the nation focused on the events scheduled to commemorate the semi-centennial of what was by then increasingly viewed as “the turning point” of the Civil War.¹⁰⁰ The reunion at Gettysburg in 1913 constituted the contemporary public exegesis of the status of American memory of the Civil War. In this respect, the reunion in Gettysburg reflected the erasure of the legacy of emancipation and the unfulfilled promise of equality for African-Americans. Yet, almost all the public discourse at Gettysburg reflected no sense of disappointment; rather, the battle now represented a triumph of the American spirit. The presence of African-American veterans would have complicated the message of white reconciliation at the reunion. Reckoning with the honorable service of black troops was not something mainstream American society felt comfortable with in 1913. Whether or not black veterans attended the fiftieth anniversary of Gettysburg is a small detail which illuminates a profoundly broader pair of subjects: the meaning of the Civil War and the nature of American race relations in 1913. In answering this question of black veterans at the Gettysburg reunion, the broader context of the organization and execution of the reunion, the lessons drawn from the ceremonies in Gettysburg, explicit discussions of race at the reunion and contemporary African-American perspectives must all be explored.

¹⁰⁰ *Gettysburg Compiler* July 9, 1913.

Carol Reardon is the most eminent modern historian to embrace the idea that black veterans were both invited to and attended the 1913 reunion at Gettysburg. Reardon claims the organizers of the reunion in Gettysburg invited black veterans to participate fully in the celebrations, and a few went, but in Jim Crow America, they were housed on their own separate street in the tent camp.¹⁰¹ Reardon further notes that white veterans enjoyed the behavior of the African-Americans in the camp. Reardon's only apparent source for this assertion is Civil War veteran Walter Blake's account of his journey to Gettysburg, *Hand Grips*. Reardon is not the only prominent historian to recently address the question of black veterans in 1913 Gettysburg. In his analysis of race in the memory of the American Civil War, David Blight propounds a conclusion contradictory to Reardon's claim. Blight argues that while according to the main organizers, the Pennsylvania Commission, black veterans were implicitly eligible to attend the reunion, "research has turned up no evidence that any [black veterans] did attend."¹⁰² Writing on earlier reunions at Gettysburg along with 1913, James Weeks writes that "first-person accounts describe black veterans attending the spectacle" of reunions in Gettysburg.¹⁰³ Weeks is unclear as to whether he believes the accounts but he also observes "the ceremonies and official pronouncements disregarded racial matters altogether." In fact, Weeks never directly cites a primary source concerning the 1913 reunion at Gettysburg. Instead, Weeks appears to cite only other works by David Blight in reference to the 1913 reunion in particular. In spite of his reliance on Blight's work, Weeks conveys a subtly different message than Blight by being less declarative about the lack of reliable evidence to substantiate claims of black veterans' attendance in 1913. At the core of this

¹⁰¹ Carol Reardon. *Pickett's Charge in History and Memory* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1997), 188.

¹⁰² David Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge: Belknap, 2001), 385.

¹⁰³ James Weeks, "A Different View of Gettysburg: Play, Memory, and Race at the Civil War's Greatest Shrine," *Civil War History*: June (2004), 176.

historiographical debate is the single contemporary account involving black veterans at the reunion.

Walter Herbert Blake was a Union veteran of the Civil War from New Jersey. In 1913, he and other veterans embarked on an expedition to the Gettysburg reunion. Blake wrote a travel narrative of his group's experiences on during the expedition. To assess the credibility of Blake's claims it is helpful to examine his entire account. Blake is illustrative of the spirit of the reunion, believing the "wonderful conclave" of veterans in Gettysburg would allow the North and the South to "understand each other as they never did before".¹⁰⁴ Veterans of each side remembered acts of kindness during the war, though the Southerners remained decidedly unapologetic about their actions. Initially, the Confederate veterans of General George Pickett's Virginians concerned some of Blake's Northern comrades since the Confederates wore an emblem with the phrase "SIC SEMPER TYRANNIS", which many Union veterans associated most with John Wilkes Booth's declaration after assassinating Abraham Lincoln.¹⁰⁵ Blake condescendingly observed that "those better informed realized there was no connection" between the Southerners attire and the assassination of President Lincoln since the phrase in question was *merely* Virginia's state motto, existing on Virginia's State Seal generations before Booth's actions in 1865. Blake noted that the United Confederate Veterans declared the lesson of the war to be a validation of "the utter impossibility of the dismemberment of the Union".¹⁰⁶

Only three pages of Blake's 203-page narrative mentioned African-Americans. In the first half of the narrative, the perceived conduct of the organizers angered Blake because they planned "only for negroes from the Union side, forgetful of the fact that there were many faithful slaves

¹⁰⁴ Walter Herbert Blake, *Hand Grips: The Story of the Great Gettysburg Reunion July, 1913*. Compiled by Frank E. Channon. Vineland, N.J.: G.E. Smith, 1913. 1972 facsimile by University Microfilms, Ann Arbor, MI. United States Military History Institute, 26.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid*, 44-45.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid*, 170.

who fought against their own interest in their intense loyalty to their Southern masters".¹⁰⁷ Blake noted there were black people in both groups of veterans. In this assertion Blake voiced the well-established trope of the mythic legion of "loyal slaves" but Blake ventured further than the traditional narrative about loyal slaves in his alleged observations of Southerners in the camp. The idea of substantial numbers of African-Americans serving as *soldiers* for the Confederacy has been thoroughly refuted in recent historiography; Blake's desire to claim this myth is not unusual for his era though this point illustrates the ways in which Blake's account must be used cautiously when attempting to establish facts about the reunion based upon his word.¹⁰⁸

Blake's perspective appears limited in more than one instance and his writing on African Americans raises questions about how well he understood the status of race relations from the perspective of blacks in the age of American apartheid. Blake claimed "some colored boys from the Southland" found their way into the camp of veterans and were promptly sheltered by "the big-hearted Tennessee delegation", giving the black men "a special tent" of their own.¹⁰⁹ Blake included a second major act of Southern beneficence toward blacks in his account. Developing the story in an almost stream-of-consciousness transition, it seems writing about the "colored comrades" reminded Blake of other black people in the camp. Blake recalled Confederates walking down near his tent when they encountered "an old negro, Samuel Thompson." Immediately, Thompson saluted the Confederates and the Confederates responded in a manner Blake construed as friendly. The Confederates assured Thompson they were "glad" to meet him and told him "we-all want to shake hands with you, nigger, an' to say as we have some niggers at home just as big as you".¹¹⁰ Blake portrayed

¹⁰⁷ Blake, *Hand Grips*, 66.

¹⁰⁸ Bruce Levine, *Confederate Emancipation: Southern Plans to Free and Army Slaves During the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University, 2006).

¹⁰⁹ Blake, *Hand Grips*, 66.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid*, 67.

the black man's response as amicable, emphasizing that "EVERY ONE of the Southerners" shook hands with the man identified as Thompson.¹¹¹ In the interaction between blacks and white Southerners, as with his other descriptions of Union veterans meeting Confederate veterans, the hand shake represented the ultimate sign of complete reconciliation for Blake, the motif and attestation of friendliness. The mere idea the Confederates could extend a hand to "their dark-skinned brother" was proof to Blake that there was "no color line here".¹¹² On this point however, Blake later contradicted himself. Blake identified a single street of the tent camp for veterans "devoted entirely to negro soldiers".¹¹³ These black men encountered no discrimination and "they were treated just like the others and had the time of their lives", according to Blake.¹¹⁴ Such men proved entertaining as the "great attraction" to their area of the camp since they regularly played "old plantation melodies".¹¹⁵ This paragraph emerged as an interjection in Blake's narrative of the commemoration of the action of July third 1863. Blake did not introduce the lines with any fuller context nor did he dwell on the subject. The possibility that the black men were some of the many laborers in the camp never appears in Blake's writing.

Blake's observations deserve some context in the geography of Gettysburg. Most of the African-American residents of Gettysburg lived in the southwestern district of the town, the Third Ward, proximate to the edge of the veterans' camp. When this fact is considered alongside the well documented evidence of blacks working in the camp during the reunion, a clear possibility emerges to suggest the black men Blake observed were not invited veterans attending the reunion but simply black people who happened to be in or near the camp as workers or local residents. Moreover, the pictures published with Blake's book show black cooks and camp laborers, though Blake never acknowledged the role of

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² Blake, *Hand Grips*, 67.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 184.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

these blacks. The pictures in Blake's account serve as a narrative unto themselves, sometimes providing a divergent message from Blake's words. In an ostensibly unintentional reflection on the vital role of the labor of African-Americans in American society, Blake's publisher included a poem below the photograph of the black cooks which read: "We can live without friends, We can live without books, But civilized man cannot live without cooks".¹¹⁶ Clearly, Blake's travel journal contained stunning stories, but how many of his most colorful assertions could be corroborated outside his book? Who was invited to Gettysburg?

Organization of the semi-centennial reunion was a joint venture between the Federal government and each individual state government, though the vast majority of responsibility was split between the Federal government and Pennsylvania. The Federal government appropriated money to provide tents and supplies for an estimated 40,000 veterans. In an April, 3, 1912 Concurrent Resolution of Congress, the government planned to provide "material support and accommodation of veterans, including sewage, water, hospital services and policing".¹¹⁷ A "big camp" with centralized latrines and medical care would house the veterans during their stay. Nowhere in the War Department's report are African-Americans mentioned and no trace of a "separate street" for black veterans remains on the maps detailing the layout of the tent camp.¹¹⁸ Instead, veterans were organized by state or territory. The Pennsylvania Commission nominally invited and offered to pay transportation fees inside Pennsylvania of "all honorably discharged soldiers . . . sailors and marines", of either side of the war that enlisted in Pennsylvania, or for those living in Pennsylvania in 1913. The stated purpose of the Pennsylvania commission was to organize "a general reunion of the veterans of the Union and Confederate Armies," for "the first time since the close of the

¹¹⁶ Blake, *Hand Grips*, 151.

¹¹⁷ Fiftieth Anniversary of the Battle of Gettysburg." War Department: Washington Government Printing Office, 1912.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

Civil War.”¹¹⁹ The Field Secretary of the Gettysburg Battlefield Memorial Association, Lieutenant Colonel Lewis Beitler, disseminated this list of qualifications and benefits to local and national papers.¹²⁰ Pennsylvania and New York spent the most on the reunion, appropriating \$450,000 and \$150,000 respectively.¹²¹ Pennsylvania spent over \$140,000 on transporting veterans alone.¹²² All told, the States appropriated “about \$1,000,000”, including \$150,000 of Federal funding.¹²³ Pennsylvania estimated 54,928 veterans attended the ceremonies. The Pennsylvania Commission proudly included in its report the invitation issued by General C. Irvine Walker, Lieutenant General Commanding the United Confederate Veterans (U.C.V.), which encouraged Southern attendance since “all surviving soldiers of the war of the South and of the North will be invited guests”.¹²⁴ Pennsylvania and Vermont remained open to veterans who had not served at Gettysburg, and New York gave preference to veterans of the battle, followed by veterans with the longest service records.¹²⁵ Though the initial intention of the gathering was to include all veterans of the Civil War wishing to attend, many states ultimately supported only veterans of the Battle of Gettysburg. The Indiana Commission specifically invited

¹¹⁹ “Fiftieth Anniversary of the Battle of Gettysburg: Report of the Pennsylvania Commission, December 31, 1913.” Harrisburg, PA: WM. Stanley Ray State Printer, 1915. ix.

¹²⁰ Lt. Col. Lewis Beitler to unnamed paper editor. Gettysburg College Vertical Files: Kramer, Frank H.

¹²¹ “Pennsylvania Commission,” vii. “Fiftieth Anniversary of the Anniversary of the Battle of Gettysburg: Report of the New York State Commission” (Albany: J.B. Lyon Company, 1916), 18.

¹²² “Pennsylvania Commission,” 114.

¹²³ “On the Field of Gettysburg: Celebration of the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Great Battle”, *Adams County News* January 4, 1913.

¹²⁴ “Pennsylvania Commission,” 9.

¹²⁵ “New York State Commission,” 92, 96.

individual units.¹²⁶ By choosing to invite only those veterans who fought at Gettysburg, Indiana passed directly over the 28th Regiment Indiana Infantry who became the 28th United States Colored Troops.¹²⁷ By choosing to invite only veterans of Gettysburg, Indiana and other states made it unnecessary to disinvite black veterans. This decision was made despite the fact the bill authorizing the federal government to organize a reunion at Gettysburg encouraged “each State [to] send to Pennsylvania all surviving Veterans of the Civil War resident within such states”.¹²⁸ Cost doubtlessly influenced the decision of states choosing to invite only Gettysburg veterans. Thus it is very difficult to argue race was the fundamental reason some states decided to send only Gettysburg veterans. Logistics and funding would have been a rather substantial obstacle to the inclusion of all living and willing Civil War veterans. Even if it was not the specific intention of state legislatures, the consequence of this decision seems to have been an effective exclusion of many black veterans since they would now have to pay their way to the reunion if they wished to attend. States limiting the eligibility for official support of attendance to Gettysburg veterans would have had to explicitly invite black veterans to the reunion. Neither the New York report nor the Indiana report contained any such invitations and the Pennsylvania report never explicitly invited African-American veterans. While there is no clear evidence of an invitation of black veterans, there is equally no clear evidence in the state commission reports of an explicit prohibition of African-Americans attending the ceremonies in Gettysburg. It is difficult to absolutely prove the negative point that blacks were not invited, lacking a positive statement

¹²⁶ “Indiana at the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Battle of Gettysburg: Report of the Fiftieth Anniversary Commission of the Battle of Gettysburg, of Indiana” [Indianapolis?, 1913], 6-7.

¹²⁷ “Indiana’s 28th Regiment: Black Soldiers for the Union” in *The Indiana Historian*: February (1994), (Indiana Historical Bureau), <http://www.in.gov/history/files/7023.pdf>, accessed on November 15, 2010.

¹²⁸ “Indiana at Gettysburg,” 15.

of their prohibition. As a result, events, tone and message of the reunion are important pieces of circumstantial evidence about the question of an invitation as they are fundamental direct evidence for determining if blacks attended.

The theme of reconciliation animated the public actions at the reunion. Some began to refer to the event as the “great peace reunion”. With the possible exception of a drunken stabbing in a bar, the reunion was peaceful.¹²⁹ UCV leader Gen. Walker welcomed “the hand of peace” offered by Union veterans in inviting the Confederates to come en masse.¹³⁰ William E. Mickle, Adjutant General and Chief of Staff of the Grand Army of the Republic (G.A.R.), joined Walker in calling for all those of his organization who were capable to attend the reunion to do so.¹³¹ The G.A.R. and the U.C.V. worked together to, in the words of G.A.R. Commander-in-Chief H.M. Trimble, erase “forever any lingering prejudices and bitterness that may have survived” from the War.¹³² More than one local reporter wrote of the story also mentioned by Walter Blake of one Union veteran and one Confederate veteran meeting at the reunion, buying a hatchet in Gettysburg and literally “burying the hatchet” on the battlefield.¹³³ The potent imagery of this story gained national attention. Another local paper exhorted any veteran still with “bitterness in his heart” to “bury it on the battlefield where the ashes of brave men have found sepulchre”.¹³⁴ Northern reporters seemed eager to obtain the opinions of former Confederates, finding subjects sincerely interested in reconciliation. One former Confederate confessed he and his comrades “love our country not because of the great war but because of what has happened since the war.” Crucially, the veteran referred to the *United States*, rather than the South or

¹²⁹ *Gettysburg Times*, July 3, 1913.

¹³⁰ “Pennsylvania Commission,” 9.

¹³¹ “Pennsylvania Commission,” 10.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 16.

¹³³ “Bury the Hatchet,” *Gettysburg Times*, July 3, 1913.

¹³⁴ “G.A.R. Encampment,” *Gettysburg Star and Sentinel* July 2, 1913.

his state, when he spoke of “our country”.¹³⁵ Here, the former Rebel stated perhaps more than he meant. “What” had occurred since the war was nothing less than an easing of sectional tension at the expense of black rights by means of a political retreat from Radical Reconstruction’s promise of greater racial equality and a legal evisceration of the most egalitarian legislation from the post-war period by the Supreme Court. Nonetheless, Southerners had not forgotten the threat of racial equality and many *Northerners* felt compelled to admit their former policies were misguided at best. The Lieutenant Governor of Rhode Island, Roswell B. Burchard, actually issued an encomium to the South because it did not remain bitter about “the errors of reconstruction, where they were committed more than the North”.¹³⁶ Though Burchard declared that “brothers cannot forget the death of brothers”, he also argued that it is the shared recognition of loss on each side that allows for reconciliation.¹³⁷

Mutual recognition of strenuous loyalty to principles, shared loss and manly gallantry constituted this reconciliationist “soldier’s faith” which overwhelmed the ideological legacy of the War.¹³⁸ Margaret Creighton explained this cultural shift to mean that “Gettysburg’s importance... was not that it helped deliver a death blow to slavery; rather, it helped tighten white blood ties”.¹³⁹ The “bloody shirt” rhetoric, urging remembrance of the war dead along with the reasons for war and the fault of Southerners for bringing the carnage of battle, had largely passed out of use by 1913, with the exception prominent African-Americans. At Gettysburg, strands of the rhetoric of loss were woven into a new fabric of nationalism as the “bloody shirt” became the family tablecloth in a feast of reunion. Virginia Governor William Hodges Mann articulated a new desire for

¹³⁵ “The Celebration Message,” *Gettysburg Compiler* July 9, 1913.

¹³⁶ *Gettysburg Compiler* July 9, 1913.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

¹³⁸ Blight, *Race*, 208-210.

¹³⁹ Margaret Creighton, *Colors of Courage: Gettysburg’s Forgotten History* (New York: Basic Books, 2005), 211.

cooperation and a new belief in the national spirit. The North and South could now work together in war, as they had in 1898. Mann confidently proclaimed that “if we have to call for troops to repel a foreign enemy” he was sure “that our sons will meet them at the gate”.¹⁴⁰ White supremacy formed the bedrock of that nationalism. One local publication ventured so far as to quote famed abolitionist Henry Ward Beecher’s wartime explanation of the difficulty of conquering the South; speaking to a British audience, Beecher was quoted as explaining that “Northern armies had to fight men of their own race”, a fight of equals.¹⁴¹ This was not an entirely accurate assessment of Beecher’s views on race; he may have been referring to a “national” race of “Americans”. Even so, the local paper wanted to read Beecher out of context to make its point.

National press coverage reflected the sentiments of nationalism expressed in Gettysburg. Helen Longstreet, widow of Confederate General James Longstreet, delineated an interpretation of the Civil War which expanded from Beecher’s supposed elucidation of white supremacy to include a celebration of white nationalism without ever even addressing the subject of African-Americans. Mrs. Longstreet argued that the meaning of Gettysburg ought to inspire all true “white” Americans because at Gettysburg the white race again proved its worth. In the context of giving an account of the commemoration of Pickett’s Charge, which Helen claimed for her late husband, Mrs. Longstreet argued that “the mettle that wrestled and triumphed here is the mettle that for twelve centuries has kept the hope of the Anglo-Saxon undimmed”.¹⁴² Gettysburg was glorious and important because there fought “Anglo-Saxon against Anglo-Saxon” and proved each side’s continued commitment to “the cause of human liberty”. Longstreet proffered a strong argument for white nationalism but it was not wholly original. Edward Linenthal, historian of

¹⁴⁰ “Pennsylvania Commission,” 146.

¹⁴¹ “The American Review of Reviews: Gettysburg Fifty Years After,” July, 1913. Adams County Historical Society.

¹⁴² “Says Famed Charge Was Longstreet’s” *New York Times*, July 4, 1913.

battlefields and memory, notes that the Gettysburg *Compiler* argued as early as 1903 that the field should be preserved as a reminder of “immortal Anglo-Saxon bravery”.¹⁴³ Even G.A.R. chief, Alfred B. Beers argued the war was a “conflict waged by men of the same race”, but Beers spoke no words about African-American soldiers in this statement.¹⁴⁴ *The Outlook* echoed the nationalism of Governor Mann’s speech but appeared moderate in comparison with the widow Longstreet. *Outlook* boasted Teddy Roosevelt as contributing editor, still promoting his “New Nationalism” after an electoral defeat in 1912. *Outlook*’s editorial board embodied the reconciliationist interpretation of the Civil War. *Outlook* editors cited the most succinct declaration of the meaning of the reunion in the statement of one Union veteran that the reunion was his last chance to do something “for the Union”.¹⁴⁵ The same veteran remembered the battle of Gettysburg as “the time the Union was saved”.¹⁴⁶ *Outlook* editors, either out of ignorance or purposeful omission, noted the importance of veterans decorating the graves at the National Cemetery but failed to mention the fact this was an entirely one-sided endeavor as the Confederate dead were not buried there. In a later edition, Herbert Francis Sherwood reported that the true lesson of the reunion lay in the speech by Secretary of War Lindley Garrison who said “the field of enmity has become the field of amity”.¹⁴⁷ Sherwood remarked how veterans could tease one another about shooting each other and literally bury the hatchet, in one case; he viewed this as the greatest “proof that the war is over”.¹⁴⁸ Even someone identified as a “citizen of Richmond” testified that “we are one people now”.¹⁴⁹ Neither

¹⁴³ Edward Tabor Linenthal. *Sacred Ground: Americans and Their Battlefields* (Champaign: University of Illinois, 1993), 108.

¹⁴⁴ Blake, 37.

¹⁴⁵ *The Outlook*, July 12, 1913. Vol 104, 541.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁷ Herbert Francis Sherwood. “Gettysburg Fifty Years Afterward.” *The Outlook*, July 19, 1913. Vol. 104, 610

¹⁴⁸ Sherwood, “Gettysburg”, 610.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 612.

the correspondent nor the Southerner ever broached the topic of African-Americans, much less African-American veterans; the “people” now united did not refer to the experience of blacks during the war or in 1913. Woodrow Wilson felt no need to mention the racial legacy of the Civil War. Wilson’s speech in Gettysburg unified the themes of nationalism and American progress while still ignoring any concept of racial tensions. Wilson extolled the triumph of America in a new age in which “there is no one within its borders, there is no power among the nations of the earth, to make it afraid”.¹⁵⁰ Yet, Wilson mixed his triumphalism with a challenge to America to live up to “its own great standards”, a bitterly ironic comment given Wilson’s record on race.

Though the themes of nationalism and reconciliation dominated the national narrative the white press coverage was not completely unanimous. Though Wilson shared some elements of liberalism with the editors of *The Independent*, they drew distinctly different lessons from the reunion in Gettysburg. *The Independent* continued, to some degree, the legacy of its Civil War era editor, Henry Ward Beecher. *The Independent* offered a more complicated reflection on the reunion at Gettysburg than most national press coverage. *Independent* editors chose to open their publication for the week of July 3, 1913 with a reprinting of their editorial from July 9, 1863. Written by Henry Ward Beecher’s successor at *The Independent* Theodore Tilton, the 1863 piece offered a rousing partisan celebration of the defeat of the Confederates. Tilton explained that the Union army had blocked Lee and the South on their “triumphal way to the establishment of the Slave Power”.¹⁵¹ In republishing this editorial, the 1913 editors of *The Independent* did not shrink from Tilton’s position. Rather, the paper affirmed Beecher’s fight for “justice and freedom for the slave”.¹⁵² Thus the editors reaffirmed not only the ending of slavery, something not

¹⁵⁰ *Gettysburg Star & Sentinel* July 9, 1913.

¹⁵¹ Theodore Tilton. “Victory!!” *The Independent*, July 9, 1863. Republished in July 3, 1913. Vol. 75, 2.

¹⁵² “Fifty Years After Gettysburg.” *The Independent*, July 3, 1913. Vol. 75, 3.

mentioned by *Outlook*, but also the promise of *justice* for former slaves. The editors of *The Independent* agreed that the reunion at Gettysburg was a “very happy” occasion.¹⁵³ *Independent* editors credited “the God of armies” for bestowing the twin blessings of “union of all the states, and liberty for all the people”. In this statement however, the editors overestimated the degree to which “liberty” had been realized by blacks in America; their declaration evoked accomplishment but not continued struggle. Still, *The Independent* stood out for its courage as a non-black paper addressing the emancipationist legacy of the war in 1913. Moreover, *The Independent* re-introduced the concept of race while mentioning African-Americans, with at least some agency, in the discussion of the meaning of the Civil War.

Racial identification, racial hierarchy and racial pride all found expression in Gettysburg. The racial dynamics of the reunion comprise perhaps the most powerful circumstantial evidence to support the position that black veterans were at least indirectly disinvented to the reunion. Blacks visited Gettysburg regularly, usually in September around the anniversary of the issuance of the Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation.¹⁵⁴ Thousands of blacks rode into Gettysburg on trains at least once a year. These “colored excursions” were not palatable to many white Gettysburg residents. In 1913, local papers warned residents that “part of Baltimore’s innumerable colored population” would be “dumped” on the town.¹⁵⁵ The arrival of black tourists invariably corresponded with a rash of news covering any and all, or more than actually existed, of their debauchery. The excursion of 1910 proved especially heinous to the white locals. The *Adams County News* patronizingly praised some black tourists for their “far and passable” behavior only to highlight a black man acting like “a four-legged animal” and as a “half-clad” black woman

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁴ “Happenings of the Past Year” *Adams County News* January 4, 1913.

¹⁵⁵ “Expect Busy Fall Season” *Adams County News* September 13, 1913. “Colored Folks Here in Force” *Adams County News* September 17, 1913.

slatternly flaunted herself in the town square.¹⁵⁶ The same paper was sure to record every member of the tourist contingent indulging in alcohol. Considering the climate of suspicion about any black visitors to Gettysburg, it seems highly probable that if there had been any noticeable number of black veterans in attendance at the 1913 reunion, at least one of the local papers would have warned the population. While there were many events occurring during the reunion which hypothetically could have distracted local reporters, the *Gettysburg Times* managed to notice the single Native-American veteran in attendance. “Chief Dwan-O-Guah”, or David Warrior of the 1st New York Light Artillery, received enough attention to merit a small but separate article. If the *Times* noticed one Indian veteran, would the paper not also, in all likelihood, have noticed the multiple black veterans mentioned by Blake? It is possible the papers simply purposefully neglected to report the presence of black troops. Certainly most of the coverage of the reunion ignored the blacks working at the camp, despite the pictures proving the efforts of African-Americans during the massive spectacle.¹⁵⁷ Nowhere in the reporting on the thousands of food workers or tent builders are African-Americans identified in print as the laborers.¹⁵⁸

Northerners, in general, had not always ignored African-Americans. Immediately after the Civil War, white Union veterans “routinely collaborated with African-Americans in honoring the war dead”.¹⁵⁹ However, by 1900, “there were just three monuments to black soldiers in the

¹⁵⁶ “Excursionists Disorderly” *Adams County News* September 17, 1910.

¹⁵⁷ The one exception to this is a personal account of a woman who wrote about the pleasant service of black servants on the train ride to Gettysburg in “The Gettysburg Reunion: Dedicated To My Husband, H.D. Tucker, Only Surviving Confederate of Manatee County [FL]” by Annette Tucker. Adams County Historical Society.

¹⁵⁸ “Army of Cooks Arrive in Town”, *Gettysburg Times* June 28, 1913.

¹⁵⁹ Creighton, *Colors*, 218.

northern United States and none in Pennsylvania".¹⁶⁰ While the North tried to forget African-American "service" in the war, attempting to forget even their very existence after Reconstruction, the South expanded its active remembrances of a type of African-American. Monuments to "loyal slaves" were built by Southerners reconstructing their history.¹⁶¹

In Lumberton, North Carolina, merely weeks after Gettysburg's commemoration in 1913, locals organized "a sumptuous dinner" to be served in honor of "former servants".¹⁶² In the reporting of this event, local journalists used the terms "slave" and "servant" interchangeably, suggesting their opinion of the degree of new liberty for African-Americans. The North Carolinians agreed with Walter Blake and lamented the fact "hitherto no public recognition has been given to the loyalty and devotion of the slaves, the 'colored veterans' whose number is rapidly diminishing".¹⁶³ Southerners at Gettysburg fought to spread a similar understanding about the true legacy of the war and its implications for race relations in 1913. In an address published by the Pennsylvania Commission another North Carolinian and Confederate veteran, Sergeant John C. Scarborough, conceded that during the Civil War Southerners had been "afraid that the negroes would rise behind us".¹⁶⁴ Scarborough assured the Gettysburg audience that "our fears were all misplaced because the negro was quiet and as safe and thoroughly imbued with the idea of the principle that was involved and was loyal to the South as he was to his master and mistress".¹⁶⁵ Scarborough articulated a version of the "white man's burden" but his imagery painfully invoked the physical memory of slavery; he argued that whites must take the lesson of the Civil War to be the greatness and

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶² "Reunion of Former Slaves" in *The Semi-Weekly Robesonian*, August 21, 1913.

¹⁶³ "Reunion of Former Slaves" in *The Semi-Weekly Robesonian*, August 21, 1913.

¹⁶⁴ "Pennsylvania Commission," 125.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

indissolubility of White America. Using their renewed strength, white Americans must uplift blacks and “show to [the negro] that we are his friends and *tie him to us with hooks of steel* [emphasis added] and he will reward us for what we do for him”.¹⁶⁶

Scarborough’s message would have doubtless seemed repugnant to the African-Americans of Gettysburg. Gettysburg contained black veterans, including John Watts, Lloyd Watts and Randolph Johnston.¹⁶⁷ The service of black men was not always ignored. In fact, “during the war, the borough’s Democratic paper had devoted considerable column space to these men”. Yet even during the war this attention was degrading. Black troops were depicted as quick to “turn tail and run” at Petersburg and elsewhere; though, being a Democratic paper it possessed some potential incentive in addition to racism to attack the Union war effort.¹⁶⁸ Black residents of Gettysburg faced severe dangers on the home-front as well. In a compendium of oral histories of Civil War battles, some interviews of African-Americans from Gettysburg survived. The accounts were published in 1915 but the oral histories were conducted near the time of the reunion in 1913. While the lack of proper names in the accounts is disconcerting, the details of the accounts do not on the surface appear ridiculous. In fact the compiler, Clifton Johnson, demonstrated noteworthy tact for his time by seeking to probe “the comments of the blacks on the whites and those of the whites on the blacks, though sometimes uncharitable and unjust”.¹⁶⁹ In one account, a black man identified merely as “the colored farm hand” recalled his surety during July of 1863 that “if the Rebels had happened to come through they’d have took [horses] and me, too”.¹⁷⁰ For other local blacks, the potential positive or negative consequences of the war seemed

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁷ Creighton, *Colors*, 216.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁹ Clifton Johnson, ed., *Battleground Adventures: The Stories of Dwellers on the Scenes of Conflict* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1915), vi.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 184.

an almost absent concept in remembering the battle. A black woman identified as “the colored servantmaid [sic]” offered only one paragraph of reflection on the war beyond her vivid account of some of the violence of the battle; she repeated that the war years were “rough times” and that “if they ever fight again in this country I don’t want to be around”.¹⁷¹ In 1866, black veterans from Gettysburg formed a fraternal society called the “Sons of Good Will” but by 1913, no record of any fraternal organization of black veterans appeared in local papers in connection with the reunion activities.¹⁷² This decline in black organization was met with an increase of white organization when the Ku Klux Klan established itself in Gettysburg in the 1920s.¹⁷³

Instead of focusing on Gettysburg, many black Americans turned their attention to the events in Boston in late July. While Gettysburg and most of white America celebrated the reunion at Gettysburg, an African-American paper, the *Chicago Defender*, dedicated its weekly issue to the persecution of boxing champion Jack Johnson. The headline of the July fifth edition read “JACK JOHNSON IS CRUCIFIED FOR HIS RACE”, referring to Johnson’s conviction for traveling across state lines with a “prostitute” who was actually his white girlfriend.¹⁷⁴ The events of July 18, 1863, the battle of Fort Wagner, concerned the black community represented by the *Defender* much more than the events of Gettysburg in 1913. In this action the famed 54th Massachusetts led an ill-fated but tremendously courageous assault on a coastal defense bastion at Charleston. In Boston, a proud celebration of the service of African-Americans presented reflections on the current state of affairs in the nation. The *Defender* noted that although the rest of the nation focused on the “elaborate celebrations” at Gettysburg and Vicksburg, the memory of Fort Wagner was equally important because it was “an equally pivotal battle”. Whether this

¹⁷¹ Johnson, *Battleground Adventures*, 191.

¹⁷² Creighton, *Colors*, 217.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁴ “Jack Johnson Is Crucified for His Race,” *Chicago Defender* July 5, 1913.

assertion is true in the narrow military sense was and is perhaps debatable but the significance of acknowledging black heroism in the War was evident. The most important duty of people at that time was, for the black writers at the *Defender*, the need to remember “the cause these soldiers represented”. This cause was not that both sides of the Civil War fought gallantly and for equally valid principles but rather that the Union cause represented “freedom and equality in all things for the class of Americans whose liberty and equality were won by that war and are now being abridged”. Unlike the speeches and press coverage at Gettysburg, the *Defender* emphasized “both races” commemorated the memory of the black and white soldiers of the 54th Massachusetts, their leader Colonel Robert Gould Shaw, and Governor John A. Andrew who commissioned the unit. The celebrants laid wreaths at Andrew’s statue and at Shaw’s memorial while singing hymns such as “The Battle Hymn of the Republic” and “John Brown’s Body”. Even in this celebration, the reporter included an acknowledgement of the tension in Andrew’s begrudging acceptance of “men who were sometimes rough and not cultivated” into the black regiment. Still, the *Defender* assessed the legacy of Fort Wagner to be proving “to the world that the American Negro soldiers had the valor, patriotism and courage of other American soldiers”.¹⁷⁵

If black veterans had attended the Gettysburg reunion in an organized way or in any substantial numbers, a publication such as the *Defender* ought to have written about it. There are simply too many reasons why Walter Blake might have grossly misunderstood what he may or may not have seen to base an entire argument about black veterans solely on *Hand Grips* as Carol Reardon has done. The lack of documented evidence of explicit invitations of black veterans, the growing sense of nationalism among white Americans embedded as it so often was with the vicious qualifying notion of *white* nationalism, race relations in Gettysburg before, during and after the reunion all strongly suggest the improbability of the notion black veterans were either explicitly invited to the reunion or attended on the assumption

¹⁷⁵*Chicago Defender*, July 19, 1913.

of an implicit invitation. Gettysburg in 1913 never truly wrestled with the “negro problem”. The character of the reunion would have been dramatically different with a few thousand black veterans in attendance, as Carl Eeman speculates.¹⁷⁶ Nonetheless, this was not the case. If blacks were present it is extremely challenging to explain the possibility of a large amount moving about the camp without attracting notice from someone other than Walter Blake. Edward Linenthal’s reflection on reunions captured the true spirit of 1913 as it was remembered by most of its attendees. Linenthal observed how “patriotic rhetoric on numerous ceremonial occasions, and monument building” allowed Northerners and Southerners “to celebrate Gettysburg as an ‘American’ victory”.¹⁷⁷ The gallantry of each side could be acknowledged and celebrated because it signified “a uniquely American form of commitment to heartfelt principle” but also because being a true and full *American* meant being “white”, as that term had been defined by 1913.¹⁷⁸ To praise American courage was not necessarily to imply African-Americans were capable of real courage because courage requires agency. The effects of reconciliation confirmed Frederick Douglass’ trepidation about what would happen when whites clasped “hands across the bloody chasm”.¹⁷⁹ This was the slogan of the reconciliationist Horace Greely in his presidential campaign of 1872. Fort Wagner, and Boston by extension, was the locus of black pride in the summer of 1913, not Gettysburg. Certainly by 1913, it seemed most white Americans planned to write African-Americans out of American history or only include them in a subservient status deprived of any rational agency. In response, black people and their relatively few white allies would become active builders of their own historical memory, a memory which struggled for decades to enter the mainstream of American culture.

¹⁷⁶ Carl Eeman. *Encampment*. Round Lake: New York Mélange, 2009.

¹⁷⁷ Linenthal, *Sacred Ground*, 90.

¹⁷⁸ Linenthal, *Sacred Ground*, 90.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid*, 126.