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The "Unfinished Work:" The Civil War Centennial and the Civil Rights Movement

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Abstract

The Civil War Centennial celebrations fell short of a great opportunity in which Americans could reflect on the legacy of the Civil War through the racial crisis erupting in their nation. Different groups exploited the Centennial for their own purposes, but only the African Americans and civil rights activists tried to emphasize the importance of emancipation and slavery to the memory of the war. Southerners asserted states' rights in resistance to what they saw as a black rebellion in their area. Northerners reflected back on the theme of reconciliation, prevalent in the seventy-fifth anniversary of the war. Unfortunately, those who had the most power to make an impact, government officials like the President and other Governors, tread lightly over the civil rights movement and instead focused on uniting a nation over anti-communism and Cold War sentiment. Fortunately, fifty years later, our nation has begun to recognize the real cause of the Civil War, but the "unfinished work" is not done.

Keywords

Civil Rights Movement, Civil War, Civil War Centennial, Civil War Memory, Civil War Commemoration, Race History, African American History, Civil Rights

Disciplines

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Comments

This paper was written for Professor Michael Birkner's course, *HIST 349: The United States Since 1945*, Fall 2015.

THE “UNFINISHED WORK:” THE CIVIL WAR CENTENNIAL AND THE CIVIL
RIGHTS MOVEMENT

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History 349
Professor Birkner
3 December 2015

Abstract:

The Civil War Centennial celebrations fell short of a great opportunity in which Americans could reflect on the legacy of the Civil War through the racial crisis erupting in their nation. Different groups exploited the Centennial for their own purposes, but only the African Americans and civil rights activists tried to emphasize the importance of emancipation and slavery to the memory of the war. Southerners asserted states' rights in resistance to what they saw as a black rebellion in their area. Northerners reflected back on the theme of reconciliation, prevalent in the seventy-fifth anniversary of the war. Unfortunately, those who had the most power to make an impact, government officials like the President and other Governors, tread lightly over the civil rights movement and instead focused on uniting a nation over anti-communism and Cold War sentiment. Fortunately, fifty years later, our nation has begun to recognize the real cause of the Civil War, but the “unfinished work” is not done.

I affirm that I have upheld the highest principles of honesty and integrity in my academic work and have not witnessed a violation of the Honor Code.

A hundred years after the Civil War, a nation united still felt the strains of sectionalism as African Americans' patience wore thin and finally erupted into a full civil rights movement. Amidst this racial turmoil, the Civil War Centennial commenced, questioning the futility and meaning of a war, which was supposed to bring justice and freedom to all Americans, black and white. The Centennial celebrations presented an opportunity for not only African Americans, but all Americans, to address their failure to continue the "unfinished work" Abraham Lincoln willed the nation to advance. Instead of emancipation, freedom, and equality for all, white segregationist Southerners, defending their Southern way of life through the romanticized Lost Cause, exploited the Centennial celebrations. The federal government was more concerned with Cold War, anti-communist sentimentality and used the Centennial to unify the nation, employing themes of reconciliation and American exceptionalism. Meanwhile, the civil rights movement "interfered" with the celebrations, eventually driving American attention away from commemorating the Civil War, thus ending all hope of finally recognizing the real meaning and importance of the Civil War. Americans had the perfect opportunity to confront the racial turmoil that enveloped the nation during the Centennial of the Civil War, yet with the pressure from Southern whites, the race question was to a great extent ignored during the Centennial commemorations. In its stead, the Cold War era influenced Centennial organizers to emphasize patriotism through unity and reconciliation.

The legacy of the Civil War through the civil rights movement of the 1960s may seem overly recognizable, but only a few recent scholars have addressed the topic in relation to the Civil War Centennial celebrations. Robert Cook presents the first full study of the Civil War

Centennial in his book *Troubled Commemoration*.¹ He analyzes the creation of the U.S. Civil War Centennial Commission (CWCC), the controversial events of the Centennial and the eventual failure of the whole commemoration. Different groups manipulated the Centennial for their own political advantages. The Southern segregationists exploited the Centennial advocating states' rights and segregation, while African Americans tried to use the commemorations to advocate for equal rights. Cook explores the Southern ideology towards the Centennial and its relation to Southern memory of the Civil War. Southerners, racist or not, wanted a say in the celebrations, which some feared would only glorify Abraham Lincoln.² Based on pressure from the South, the CWCC appeased Southerners. With initial controversy in Charleston, there was the possibility that the Centennial would be "called-off." Although new leadership took control after the Charleston Crisis, efforts were limited in fully celebrating the Civil War in relation to its current legacy in the civil rights movement. African American efforts to seize the anniversary celebration of the Emancipation Proclamation were not enough to connect the Civil War to the current inner strife. Americans failed to unite, black and white, over a celebration of the most important turning point in American history.

Written at the beginning of the sesquicentennial, David Blight's *American Oracle* invited Americans to remember the meaning of the Centennial and the questions, arguments and stories it left behind.³ Blight claims scholars, by the civil rights era, had accepted slavery as the ultimate cause of the Civil War, but social memory had not.⁴ He confirmed that the "official Civil War Centennial could never find adequate, meaningful ways to balance Civil War remembrance with

1. Robert Cook, *Troubled Commemoration: The American Civil War Centennial, 1961-1965* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, c2007).

2. Cook, *Troubled Commemoration*, 59.

3. David Blight, *American Oracle: The Civil War in the Civil Rights Era* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2011).

4. Blight, *American Oracle*, 3.

civil rights rebellion.”⁵ Racism along with reconciliation and patriotism around the Cold War came before recognizing civil rights. President Kennedy also needed the support of Southern Democrats and did not want to offend them. Blight focuses on four influential writers from the Centennial period, Robert Penn Warren, Bruce Catton, Edmund Wilson, and James Baldwin. Each author approached the Civil War with different themes; Warren viewed the war as tragic, while Catton painted it as dramatic. Wilson wrote from the perspective of futility, claiming the war was not worth it, while Baldwin illuminated the African American perspective of the war. As each of these scholars tried to untangle the myth and romanticism that ensnared the memory of the Civil War, so too should we today. With the end of the sesquicentennial we can look back on the Centennial and see how far we have come in recognizing the real causes of the Civil War.

During the Civil War’s Centennial, Robert Penn Warren wrote his own interpretation of the memory of the Civil War in his essay *The Legacy of the Civil War*.⁶ He coined two ideological interpretational phenomena that emerged out of the war on both sides: the Treasury of Virtue and the Great Alibi. By inventing the Treasury of Virtue the North felt redeemed. It was virtuous to conquer the sin of slavery in the South, yet Warren warns us that the North overlooked the sins it committed and the real beliefs soldiers and northern civilians held during the war. The North did not intend to make blacks equal, and initially President Lincoln swore he would not interfere with the institution of slavery. Warren calls the North’s ideology “moral narcissism” because the North based their beliefs on moral superiority over a vanquished nation that did not match historical reality.⁷ On the other hand, the South used the Great Alibi, or Lost

5. Blight, *American Oracle*, 11.

6. Robert Penn Warren, *The Legacy of the Civil War* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998).

7. Warren, *Legacy*, 71.

Cause, to turn military defeat into victory.⁸ The South blamed their loss on economics and population rather than social and racial issues. Slavery was going to die a natural death anyway, claimed the South. Every negative aspect about the Southern way of life including slavery was brushed aside in the Lost Cause to create a romantic invented tradition of the South where honor and duty were victorious. Both the Treasury of Virtue and the Great Alibi are what Warren called “maiming liabilities,” that affect the current memory of the Civil War. They filled and continue to fill the void of guilt; the North and the South need them because they do not want to face reality. Without these maiming liabilities, there would be no attraction to the Civil War. Fifty years after Warren published his *Legacy*, his work remains influential. Chris Mackowski claims “Warren’s words still ring solid and true.”⁹ These two ideologies shaped the celebrations of the Centennial beginning in 1961. Both the North and the South were not able to recognize their flawed memories of the war, and thus left out a vital part: slavery and emancipation.

Demands for a Centennial commemoration began in the late 1950s mainly from Civil War round table groups and other Civil War buffs. Members of the Civil War Centennial Association, including Allan Nevins, Bruce Catton, and Bell Irvin Wiley also lobbied for a formal commemoration of the war. In September of 1957, President Dwight Eisenhower signed into law a congressional joint resolution establishing the US Civil War Centennial Commission (CWCC). The Commission would be in charge of sponsoring and helping other state Centennial Commissions with their celebrations. Before 1961, many other states had created their own Centennial Commissions to sponsor formal celebrations. It was the hope of the CWCC to not “reawaken memories of old sectional antagonisms and political rancors, but instead strengthen

8. Warren, *Legacy*, 55.

9. Chris Mackowski, “Warren’s *Legacy* Still Asks Urgent Questions,” *Emerging Civil War*, July 30, 2012, accessed November 21, 2015, <http://emergingcivilwar.com/2012/07/30/warrens-legacy-still-asks-urgent-questions/>.

both the unity of the Nation and popular devotion to the highest purpose of the Republic – a republic that, between Sumter and Appomattox, had watched hundreds of thousands of young men lay down their lives in devotion to a cause.”¹⁰ However, a reconciliationist anniversary had already occurred with the seventy-fifth anniversary in 1911. Now it was time for one that recognized, especially during the civil rights movement, the efforts of African Americans. Unfortunately, this was not to be. The official beginning of the commemorations commenced with Major General U.S. Grant III laying a wreath on his grandfather’s grave on January 8, 1961, followed by a succession of speeches emphasizing reconciliation.¹¹ General Grant said the “fundamental importance of the Civil War lay in the fact ‘that the country was able to reunite itself after four years of civil strife.’”¹² The segregationist Virginia Congressman and anticommunist William Tuck reminded his audience that R.E. Lee “urged southerners to bury the bitterness of the past and work to strengthen the Union.”¹³ Unity and reconciliation became the major themes, especially in the North, for the Centennial celebrations. Cook claims these themes became “an increasingly illusory objective during America’s civil rights years.”¹⁴ The government used these themes to exploit the Centennial and unify a nation over Communist threat.

10. The Civil War Centennial Commission, *The Civil War Centennial: A Report to the Congress* (Washington, 1968), 3.

11. Cook, *Troubled Commemoration*, 50.

12. Robert Cook, “Unfinished Business: African Americans and the Civil War Centennial,” in *Legacy of Disunion: The Enduring Significance of the American Civil War*, Susan-Mary Grant and Peter J. Parish, eds. (Baton Rouge: University of Louisiana Press, 2003), 54.

13. Cook, “Unfinished Business,” 54.

14. Robert Cook, “From Shiloh to Selma: The Impact of the Civil War Centennial on the Black Freedom Struggle in the United States, 1961-1965,” in *The Making of Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Civil Rights Movement*, Brian Ward and Tony Badger, eds. (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 134.

In the South, the Centennial began in Montgomery, Alabama in February 1961 with a weeklong celebration commemorating the creation of the Confederacy. There was a parade, a fair, and a pageant romanticizing the resistance to federal power. Four years after the Bus Boycott, Southern whites were now reacting with a “demonstration of white supremacy and states’ rights.”¹⁵ The Centennial coincided with resistance to the integration demands set forth in *Brown v. Board of Education*. Southern segregationist saw the Centennial as a means to continue their opposition and put down the civil rights movement. They used the Confederate flag as a symbol of states’ rights and segregation, and “...few could doubt that the segregationists’ fondness for the Confederate flag reflected the close interconnection between myth, symbol, and contemporary power relations in the defiant South.”¹⁶ Rev. John Morris from Atlanta wrote to *The New York Times* claiming segregationists were using the centennial as a “sounding off on present-day issues more than for commemorating a bygone event. The passions that brought forth the war between Americans are not dead and will only be exploited by many who are still grieving that the South failed to win.”¹⁷ Thus, the original hope of the CWCC was dashed. No unifying theme surrounded the Centennial, and certainly no emphasis was placed on the growing strife within the nation and its relation to the Civil War.

In the “Cradle of the Confederacy,” Alabama’s commemoration activities represented the Southern sentiment for the Centennial. Alabama utilized the Lost Cause mythology to combat the civil rights crises occurring in its own state. Parades, pageants, and balls romanticized the Confederacy and its cause. Montgomery, Marion, and Bridgeport all held weeklong commemoration events in 1961, claiming the Centennial as their own. Kristopher Teters claims

15. Blight, *American Oracle*, 12.

16. Cook, “Unfinished Business,” 57.

17. *Ibid.*, 55.

that white Alabamians were “intent on presenting this romantic version of their heritage” because “[a]midst the turmoil of the civil rights movement and the Cold War, Alabamians found reassurance and a safe haven in celebrations of a glorious and uncomplicated time....Romance allowed them to escape to an ideal past from which hopefully they could better weather the stormy present.”¹⁸ Albert B. Moore, the executive director of the Centennial Commission in Alabama organized these romantic celebrations. He believed the Centennial offered a “great education endeavor; a national effort to understand the most profound experience of the nation.”¹⁹ However, emancipation and slavery was not part of this “education endeavor.” Neither did Alabama Governor George Wallace emphasize the African American struggle. A segregationist himself, Wallace, throughout the Centennial, advocated for states’ rights and unity between white Northerners and Southerners.

The Centennial celebrations started on a rocky note when controversy erupted over the discrimination of a black delegate from the New Jersey Centennial Commission who was not allowed to stay in the hotel hosting the CWCC’s fourth annual meeting in Charleston. When New Jerseyans announced they were boycotting the event, President John F. Kennedy interceded and declared “that the CWCC was a government body using federal funds and that, as a consequence, it had an obligation to hold its meetings at places free from racial discrimination.”²⁰ The Centennial Commission rebuffed Kennedy’s claim by saying it “has no authority or jurisdiction by which it can dictate to the hotel keepers as to the management of their

18. Kristopher A Teters, “Albert Burton Moore and Alabama’s Centennial Commemoration of the Civil War: The Rhetoric of Race, Romance, and Reunion,” *The Alabama Review* 66, no. 2 (April 2013): 137.

19. Albert B. Moore, *Reasons for the National Centennial Commemoration of the Civil War: Its Basic Objectives and Potential Values* (Tuscaloosa, 1963), 2, in Teters, “Alabama’s Centennial,” 128.

20. Cook, “Unfinished Business,” 56-7.

property.’”²¹ A compromise was forged, and the national assembly meeting was moved to a U.S. naval station in Charleston. While everyone seemed content with the compromise, *The New York Times* lashed out claiming:

The Charleston hotels will thus not be compelled to recognize that nearly a century ago ‘this nation, under God [had] a new birth of freedom.’ They will not have to violate local principles and customs by admitting Negro members of a federally sponsored agency, coming in good faith to honor the heroic dead of the South as well as the North and to celebrate a hundred slow years of reconciliation.... Yet, this is a bad start for a five-year observance.²²

Such a crisis doomed the Centennial from the start, demonstrating that such a celebration could not continue without recognizing the current civil right movement erupting around it. Executive Director Karl S. Betts resigned along with Representative Tuck, the vice chairman. Chairman General Grant also resigned, allegedly due to the failing health of his wife.²³ Dr. James I. Robertson, Jr. became the new executive director and President Kennedy appointed historian Allan Nevins as the new chairman.²⁴ Nevins announced that the Commission’s new “central theme will be unity, not division, for out of the brothers’ war slowly emerged the basis of a firm union of hearts instead of an uncertain union of jarring political elements.” Nevins appeal for unity is ironic because he continued by saying “we shall allow the just pride of no national group to be belittled or besmirched. A host of white southerners died for what they believed a just cause; a host of white northerners died for what they held a sacred duty; a host of Negroes died, many in the uniform of the United States, for the achievement of freedom and human equality.

21. Alvin Shuster, “Civil War Centennial Rebuffs Kennedy’s Desegregation Plea,” *The New York Times*, March 22, 1961, accessed November 21, 2015, <http://ezpro.cc.gettysburg.edu:2139/docview/115351464/9AD1BA1541DA4F20PQ/1?accountid=2694>.

22. “Fort Sumter Revisited,” *The New York Times*, March 27, 1961, accessed November 21, 2015, <http://ezpro.cc.gettysburg.edu:2139/docview/115374210/23D2778A1730448DPQ/2?accountid=2694>.

23. CWCC, *A Report*, 12.

24. *Ibid.*, 13.

We must honor them all.”²⁵ Nevins hope was an idealistic one. Yet, the unity theme was employed as reconciliation between the North and the South, but not between black and white.

In May of 1861, the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) organized the Freedom Rides. As the buses entered Alabama one was stopped and burned near Anniston. The Freedom Riders were then stopped again and beat in Montgomery and Birmingham. With this in the backdrop, the centennial of First Manassas was celebrated. The reenactment program ignored race relations completely:

There was a curious thing about the men who came against each other here a hundred years ago. Whether they wore the blue of the gray they were all deeply in love with their country. *And the country they loved was America*, though they saw America in segments then. Now it is wonderful to know that out of the misery of their differences came the magic and miracle of Union...as one wide, majestic land of infinite opportunity for all.²⁶

In response, newspapers and magazines criticized the reenactment. *Holiday*, a tourist magazine, said “the Centennial’s general ‘holiday mood...[was] cheered on by gleeful commercial interests, and blessed by sentimentalists who prefer to forget...that some of us even now are being brutally denied certain personal freedoms.” The *New York Herald-Tribune* claimed “it was ‘not enough to condemn this puerile show’ and maintained that ‘the issues it [the war] was fought for are still scars across our body as a nation,’” while *The New York Times* held the reenactment as “‘a grisly pantomime’ and ‘a grotesque evasion of the more challenging task before us at this juncture in history.’”²⁷ First Manassas was the last significant commemoration until the Emancipation Proclamation. Soon after 1862, segregationists lost interest in the Centennial as, historically, the South began to lose. The civil rights community took the opportunity to step up and began promoting emancipation themes.

25. CWCC, *A Report*, 13-14.

26. Blight, *American Oracle*, 14.

27. *Ibid.*, 15.

Civil rights activists knew the white South intended to exploit the Centennial to its own purposes. Lawrence Reddick, a friend of Martin Luther King's, tried to encourage the media to emphasize emancipation. When this failed, activists looked towards the Emancipation Proclamation centennial to make their mark. Unfortunately, the CWCC sponsored an event in front of the Lincoln Memorial commemorating the Emancipation Proclamation on September 22, 1962. The event caused more controversy because the CWCC booked a list of all-white speakers. In response, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) announced it would boycott the event. As compromise, the CWCC arranged for Thurgood Marshall to give a speech. Said the SCLC, "African-Americans were now demanding full equality within domestic society, not just a place on the sidelines."²⁸ The Confederate States Centennial Conference also did not support the commemoration, claiming it was "propaganda...to reopen the wounds of the war, and contrary to the 'true events of history.'"²⁹ Many Southerners feared the CWCC meant to attack segregation by highlighting the importance of the Emancipation Proclamation. However, while it was the CWCC's hope to recognize the importance of slavery to the Civil War, it also broadened the theme to include anti-communism and Cold War imperatives. Roy Davenport submitted a resolution to an executive committee of the CWCC in January claiming: "Time has given the Emancipation Proclamation a significance far broader than it had when issued. Originally, it connoted one kind of freedom for one group of people. Today its significance transcends these limitations."³⁰

Civil rights activists hoped President Kennedy would use the centennial to draft his own Emancipation Proclamation. King jibed at Kennedy when he said in a speech delivered at a

28. Cook, "Shiloh to Selma," 142.

29. Blight, *American Oracle*, 18.

30. Cook, *Troubled Commemoration*, 172.

dinner celebrating the preliminary Emancipation Proclamation: “No president can be great, or even fit for office, if he attempts to accommodate to injustice to maintain his political balance.”³¹ President Kennedy, however, made no remarks in relation to the racial turmoil in the country as the Emancipation Proclamation centennial was celebrated. Indeed Kennedy was not even present for the CWCC event. Instead, his message was recorded and delivered over the loud speaker to the crowd. Concerned about offending Southern whites when he needed them most for reelection, Kennedy merely “commended African Americans for working on civil rights issues within the framework of the Constitution.”³² The speakers at the commemoration could not wholly ignore the racial implications of the Proclamation. Nevertheless, they kept an overall Cold War tone to their addresses. The event resulted in a few remarks from Thurgood Marshall, the recitation of a poem by Archibald MacLeish, Adlai Stevenson’s address about the Cold War’s significance, and a video address by President Kennedy who was the only one to subtly recognize the importance of slavery to the Civil War.

The last major event of the Civil War Centennial was the anniversary of the Battle of Gettysburg in July 1963 and Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address the following November. In November of 1962, Bruce Catton gave a lecture at Gettysburg College during the 99th Dedication Day. He warned all those in attendance about over-celebrating a war whose problems still plague the nation:

As we proceed with the centennial observances, there is grave danger that a sentimental haze will cloud the landscape so that we fail to see the deep, tragic issues and the profound lessons which were involved...If we treat the whole business as a bright and moving pageant we will *waste* the whole centennial

31. Cook, “Shiloh to Selma,” 141.

32. Paul A. Shackel, *Memory in Black and White: Race, Commemoration, and the Post-Bellum Landscape* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2003), 45.

period, turning what should be a time for sober reflection into a gay party at a colorful musical comedy.³³

Unfortunately, as Brian Jordan claims, “Bruce Catton’s caution had fallen upon deaf ears,” as the town of Gettysburg and the surrounding area celebrated the Centennial with “brother against brother” sentiment through themes of reconciliation and unity.³⁴ In *The Gettysburg Times*, companies advertised by applauding the courage of both the Blue and the Gray. Alwine Brick Co. had a large advertisement exclaiming: “Today, and always, let us honor all Americans who bravely fought to preserve the liberty of free men for which they gave so much!”³⁵ Other articles in the same newspaper glorified Robert E. Lee while multiple articles were dedicated to women during the Civil War.³⁶ No mention was given to the importance of emancipation or slavery to the war. The African American newspapers made no comment on the anniversary of the battle. Jordan claims their “silence was strategic – a way to deny legitimacy to the entire observance.”³⁷ Prior to the official events on July 1-3, other events occurred during the last few days of June. A Memorial Service of the Jewish War Veterans of the United States of America was held at the Pennsylvania Monument at 2:30pm on Sunday, June 23rd. On the 29th, The University of Notre Dame sponsored an event in honor of Father William E. Corby, the chaplain of the 88th New

33. Bruce Catton, “The Irrepressible Centennial,” *Gettysburg Times*, Centennial Edition, June 29, 1963, quoted in Brian Matthew Jordan, “‘We Stand on the Same Battlefield:’ The Gettysburg Centenary and the Shadow of Race,” *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 135, No. 4 (October 2011): 481-2.

34. Jordan, “The Gettysburg Centenary,” 493.

35. *The Gettysburg Times*, The Battle of Gettysburg Centennial Edition, undated clipping, in Gettysburg Newspaper Clippings, vol. 11-63-B, Gettysburg National Military Park Archives, Gettysburg, PA.

36. See Lt. Gen. R.J. Wood, “Lee’s Lessons in Leadership Have Benefited Soldiers of All Nations Through the Years,” *The Gettysburg Times*, undated newspaper clipping in Gettysburg Newspaper Clippings, vol. 11-63-B, Gettysburg National Military Park Archives, Gettysburg, PA; “Women Bore Stern Tests of Civil War With Great Patience And Courage” and “Women Had Vital Impact on Civil War Activities” in same newspaper clipping.

37. Jordan, “The Gettysburg Centenary,” 507.

York Infantry, second regiment of the Irish Brigade. The Jewish Americans and the Irish were discriminated against during the Civil War and held in contempt by many, but while they were celebrated a hundred years later, there were no celebrations for the African Americans who not only fought in the war, but for whom the war was fought.

The Official Program for the Gettysburg Centennial included a vast parade, reenactments, rededications and dedications of monuments, and “Vignettes of History.” On June 30, former President Dwight Eisenhower began the celebrations with a speech at the Gettysburg High School, sponsored by the Gettysburg Fire Department. He spoke on the modern “perils of liberty,” referencing the Communist threats to American democracy, but did not mention the inner racial turmoil of the nation. Instead, he appeased Southern segregationists by commenting on the threats to self-government claiming they “are as real in 1963 as they were a century ago.” He continued: “The fact that much of the world lives under dictatorship is an obvious threat to individual liberty and the right of people to govern themselves.”³⁸ Multiple newspapers criticized Eisenhower’s speech including the *Washington Post* who claimed: “Mr. Eisenhower did not mention the big issue of this 100th year after Gettysburg – the Negro and his civil rights.”³⁹ *Newsweek* said the President made “a bland reference to the need for furthering ‘equality of opportunity among all citizens.’”⁴⁰ The Fredericksburg, Virginia, *Free Lance-Star* said the President “made an urgent call for sturdy self-reliance and struck out against ‘paternalistic government.” His self-government and Cold War American exceptionalism themes set the tone for the rest of the commemoration.

38. Edith Evans Asbury, “Eisenhower Cites Perils to Liberty: Risks as Great as in 1863, He Asserts at Gettysburg,” *New York Times*, July 1, 1963.

39. Jean White, “Eisenhower Preaches Self-Reliance in Speech at Gettysburg Battlefield,” *Washington Post*, July 1, 1963.

40. “Gettysburg: ‘The Task Remaining,’” *NewsWeek*, July 15, 1963, 19.

Throughout the commemoration ceremonies and events on July 1-3, various speakers failed to directly mention the more important aspects of the Civil War and its relation to current events in the country. It was to be expected that Governor Wallace's remarks at the Gettysburg Commemoration were segregationist. Yet, he was extremely popular at the Centennial; the crowds demanded his autograph everywhere he went. He claimed he felt safer at Gettysburg than at home after his "Schoolhouse Door" speech. It is telling, that in all places, Gettysburg – a Northern town, which became one of the most celebrated battles during the war, and where Lincoln gave his famous Address – was the place where "Segregation Forever" Wallace was widely popular. The Gettysburg Centennial was clearly a white celebration made up of either segregationists or those who preferred to remember the war through a romanticized, reconciliationist view. Wallace's speech at the dedication of the South Carolina Monument claimed: "South Carolina and Alabama stand for constitutional government and millions throughout the nation look to the South to lead in the fight to restore constitutional rights and the rights of states and individuals." He received a standing ovation from the audience.⁴¹

While Pennsylvania Governor, William W. Scranton "made only veiled references to the current conflict over Negro rights," New Jersey Governor Richard J. Hughes spoke mainly about the civil rights movement. He said: "The Civil War was not fought to preserve the Union 'lily white' or 'Jim Crow,' it was fought for liberty and justice for all." He continued: "It is a shame at this moment that the full benefits of freedom are not the possession of all Americans a full century after the war which was fought to save America's soul." Other speakers at the Gettysburg Centennial celebrations, including President Eisenhower, were "careful to deal out equal amounts of praise for the valor and high purpose of both Southern and Northern fighters in

41. Jordan, "The Gettysburg Centenary," 501-502.

the Civil War.”⁴² They neglected to mention the importance of the Civil War to the civil rights movement. John A. Carver, Jr., the Assistant Secretary of the Interior, was one of the only other speakers to mention the importance of the civil rights movement: “For a hundred years, the equality defined on this field has been withheld from millions of our fellow citizens. What they once patiently awaited, they now demand as a matter of right. Unrest is at large over the Nation – and over nothing that was not basically at issue here a century ago. We search for [a] peaceful solution to the civil rights issues of 1963.”⁴³ Even the remarks made by the Post Master General dedicating the 5-Cent stamp were primarily anti-communist and self-government oriented. J. Edward Day said: “In today’s world of a divided Germany, a divided Europe, a divided China, Gettysburg provides a beacon light of hope for reunification. In the face of disappointments and failures in our American efforts for a nuclear test ban treaty and for disarmament, Gettysburg should remind us never to lose heart, because the stakes are so momentous in the effort for peace.”⁴⁴ He made no mention of internal strife in the nation.

The “Vignettes of History” were short on-site interpretations of famous stories from the battle. By far the most popular of the events, they were reconciliatory in nature and highly romanticized. Offered daily from nine in the morning to noon, the program titles included “Brother Captures Brother,” “A Life Saved By A Gentleman” “A Valiant General...A Noble Man,” and “Friendly Enemies.” “Brother Captures Brother” told the story of the 45th New York Infantry, led by Corporal Rudolph Schwartz, who captured Confederate soldiers including Schwartz’s brothers. Another famous, romanticized myth, was the story of Confederate General

42. Edith Evans Asbury, “Hughes Charges Moral Failure to Aid Negroes Since Civil War,” *New York Times*, July 2, 1963.

43. Gettysburg Centennial Commission, *Gettysburg-1963: An Account of the Centennial Commemoration: Report of the Commission to the General Assembly*, Louis M. Simon, comp. (Harrisburg, PA: Gettysburg Centennial Commission, 1964), 82.

44. GCC, *Gettysburg-1963*, 77.

John B. Gordon saving Union General Francis Barlow on July 1st. “Years later they met at a Blue and Gray reunion dinner in Washington where a friendship which began in Gettysburg was resumed and cherished by both.”⁴⁵ There is not proof that any such friendship existed. “The Valiant General...A Noble Man,” depicted R.E. Lee after Pickett’s charge blaming the failure of the assault on himself. On another track, “Friendly Enemies,” portrayed the famous story about both Union and Confederate soldiers sharing a drink at Spangler’s Spring amidst the fighting. The reconciliationist imagery in these stories fueled the one hundredth anniversary, where emancipation and slavery did not belong. The overall atmosphere of the Gettysburg Centennial was, as Jordan says: “a festival of pomp and pageantry; of gushing sentiment and human feeling, a moment when Confederates were celebrated, not condemned; a moment when mutual heroism replaced ideological reflection, with rebel banners waving freely.... In the midst of the Cold War, it was a showcase of military might and national unity, broadcasting America’s greatness to the world while denying consideration of the injustices within.”⁴⁶ Indeed, the world did not forget what they did at Gettysburg, but it did forget why they gave their last full measure of devotion.

In November, 1963, Gettysburg continued its commemoration of the Centennial on the nineteenth, Dedication Day. The speakers at the dedication used the Gettysburg Address to claim the “unfinished work” that Lincoln spoke of was still unfinished. Yet, they used it to refer to communism in the world and not the black freedom struggle occurring in their own nation. Governor Scranton mentioned the cause of the Civil War as freeing “captive peoples wherever they are imprisoned,” but he used that cause to promote anticommunism.⁴⁷ President

45. GCC, *Gettysburg-1963*, 66.

46. Jordan, “The Gettysburg Centenary,” 510.

47. GCC, *Gettysburg-1963*, 118-119.

Eisenhower's address repeated his self-government stance from the July celebrations. He claimed Lincoln "knew that to live for country is a duty as demanding as is the readiness to die for it. So long as this truth is observed self-government will never die."⁴⁸ *The New York Times* criticized Scranton and Eisenhower yet again for avoiding the black struggle for civil rights.⁴⁹ While not present, President Kennedy's message treaded lightly over the civil rights movement. A 'new birth of freedom' was given to the nation, but Kennedy claimed "the goals of liberty and freedom, obligations of keeping ours a government of and for the people are never-ending."⁵⁰ Nothing these officials said could compare, however, with Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have A Dream" speech given just two months before, in August during the March on Washington. King referenced the Gettysburg Address, beginning his speech with: "Five score years ago, a great American in whose symbolic shadow we stand today, signed the Emancipation Proclamation." His first paragraph described the failure of the Civil War and Reconstruction to fully free the slaves because "100 years later the Negro still is not free." As famous as the speech is today, racial strife continued throughout the nation, and two months later, government officials could not follow King's lead and make a stand against racial injustice in their nation.

Interest in the Centennial dwindled after the celebrations in Gettysburg. Since it was the high water mark of the Confederacy, Southern whites did not want to reenact battles, which eventually led to their defeat. After Kennedy's assassination, Americans switched mourning for the dead from the Civil War to the death of their president and the increasing body count in Vietnam. In a speech at Bowdoin College on April 13, 1965, Professor Louis D. Rubin Jr. claimed, that "the Nation's Civil War centennial celebration...fizzled out because that war 'is not

48. Ibid., 120.

49. Edith Evans Asbury, "Negroes Join Eisenhower to Rededicate Gettysburg," *The New York Times*, November 20, 1963.

50. Ibid.

over yet.” In the nation of the 1960s he said there existed “the same attitudes, the same approximate lineup of forces, that produced the Civil War in the 1860s,” thus making celebrating the Civil War unappealing to many.⁵¹ In its report to Congress, the CWCC apologized for the “some men and communities [who] were slow in recognizing” that African Americans deserved an equal right in celebrating the Centennial.⁵² Today, even after the sesquicentennial, our nation still sees the brokenness left behind after the Civil War and Reconstruction era. While the sesquicentennial celebrations did not ignore slavery and emancipation as the major themes of the war, racial strife is still present throughout the nation.

The Civil War Centennial celebrations created much controversy surrounding how the Civil War was remembered, but also why it was important to the civil rights movement erupting in the 1960s. In reaction to the movement’s drastic events in the South, particularly Alabama, the South used the Centennial as an opportunity restate its belief in states’ rights and its romanticized view of the plantation south. Southern memorials like the commemoration of the creation of the Confederacy in Montgomery celebrated states’ rights. The North returned to reconciliation as its theme, which pervaded the commemorations of important battles, especially Gettysburg. The federal government, like the South, saw an opportunity to join Americans together with patriotism against communism in the world. African Americans were the only ones who tried to celebrate the Civil War Centennial for its true significance: slavery and emancipation. Without the support of the rest of the nation, especially the government and its officials, the Centennial failed to make Americans remember the real meaning of the war. In the midst of such racial turmoil, the Centennial lost a great opportunity to not only reflect on the “unfinished work” from

51. “What Ailed the Civil War Centennial,” *The Washington Post, Times Herald*, April 14, 1965.

52. CWCC, *A Report*, 6.

the Civil War, but to address the civil rights movement and rally the nation in support of freedom and justice for all Americans.

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