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## Close, But No Cigar: Tobacco Usage During the Civil War Era

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## Close, But No Cigar: Tobacco Usage During the Civil War Era

### Abstract

Tobacco carried a range of gendered, social, regional, and racial meanings in America during the nineteenth century, and these disparate meanings were symbolized through different forms of consumption. The cultural meaning inherent within chewing tobacco, cigars, pipes, and cigarettes, are the object of this research. I will examine the class associations linked to chewing tobacco, the manly identities symbolized through cigars and pipes, and explore cultural movement and racial meaning through the cigarette. Through tobacco, I will explain how nineteenth century Americans comprehended addiction, and establish the organic agency of consumable commodities to influence the consciousness of their users.

### Keywords

Tobacco, Chewing Tobacco, Cigars, Pipes, Cigarettes, Civil War

### Disciplines

Cultural History | History | United States History

### Comments

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## Close, But No Cigar

### Tobacco Usage during the Civil War Era

Tobacco carried a range of gendered, social, regional, and racial meanings in America during the nineteenth century, and these disparate meanings were symbolized through different forms of consumption. The cultural meaning inherent within chewing tobacco, cigars, pipes, and cigarettes, are the object of this research. I will examine the class associations linked to chewing tobacco, the manly identities symbolized through cigars and pipes, and explore cultural movement and racial meaning through the cigarette. Through tobacco, I will explain how nineteenth century Americans comprehended addiction, and establish the organic agency of consumable commodities to influence the consciousness of their users.

Dr. Peter Carmichael

HIST 425

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Ben Roy

Captain Frank Donaldson of the 118<sup>th</sup> Pennsylvania Infantry tried his first chew of tobacco during the battle of Chancellorsville. He was tired, hungry, and worst of all, out of tobacco for his pipe. Donaldson decided to try chewing tobacco out of desperation. He hoped it might satiate his riotous stomach and reinvigorate his exhausted mind. Donaldson wrote, “I am glad, or sorry, I don’t know which, just yet, that I took to it so kindly and was able to stand right up with any regular and ‘chaw’ right along.” Rather than sickened, Donaldson, “greatly relished my first chew of ‘flounder.’”<sup>1</sup>

Donaldson’s ambiguity about his first “chaw” ran deeper than nervousness about potential nausea. In antebellum America, chewing tobacco was linked to certain working-class professions, and Donaldson, a bourgeoisie pipe-smoker, explains this link through the terms he used to describe chew.<sup>2</sup> “Flounder” is an allusion to sailors and fishermen, and “regular” is a reference to professional soldiers, two groups of working men who were widely regarded as occupying the lowest ranks in American society.<sup>3</sup> Donaldson’s ambiguity about the experience, indicates what he, as a middle-class observer, thought of the working class and their habits. To Donaldson, chewing tobacco was vulgar, and to undertake the habit was a dangerous inversion of status. Men like Donaldson smoked fragrant blends of pipe-tobacco in elegant and expensive pipes, reflecting their refined taste. In contrast, the sickly sweetness of chew, which necessitated constant spitting, epitomized the gruff pleasures of working men. Luckily for Donaldson, the extenuating circumstances of the war saved him for any unsavory social associations. But his mixed feelings indicate an understanding of tobacco’s addictive nature.

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<sup>1</sup> Francis Adams Donaldson, *Inside the Army of the Potomac: The Civil War Experiences of Captain Francis Adams Donaldson*. Edited by J. Gregory Acken. (Mechanicsburg PA: Stackpole Books), 242.

<sup>2</sup> Chewing tobacco was a symbol of a developing urban working-class counter-culture that celebrated rowdy male camaraderie through boxing, drinking, and other rituals that were deemed by the middle class to be vulgar, chewing tobacco salient among them. Elliot J. Gorn, “Working Class Culture in Antebellum Cities.” 129-136. *The Manly Art: Bare Knuckle Prize Fighting in America*. (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 1986). Stephen Rohs, 2003. “The Bold Soldier Boy: Performance and Irish Boldness in New York in 1855.” *American Studies* 44, No. 1/2 (Spring/Summer): 157-82. [Link](#).

<sup>3</sup> In the Anglo-American tradition, sailors and professional soldiers were regarded with wariness and disdain, and in popular culture, epitomized vice and sin. See Rudyard Kipling, “Tommy” in *Barrack-Room Ballads*. Project Gutenberg, 1892, 2018. [Link](#). Nick Mansfield, *Soldiers as Workers: Class, Employment, Conflict and the Nineteenth Century Military*. (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2016), 2-3. Gerald E. Linderman, *Embattled Courage: The Experience of Combat in the American Civil War*. (New York: The Free Press, 1987), 276.

Nineteenth century Americans respected tobacco as a commodity with a peculiar power to influence the consciousness of its user. For Donaldson, the power was somewhat nefarious because no matter the form of consumption, the result was the same: sensual pleasure and satiation of addictive craving. Donaldson could smoke the finest Latakia tobacco out of a well-seasoned meerschaum, but a “quid” of molasses-soaked-chew produced the same sensory effect, confusing the distinct cultural meanings nineteenth century American associated with the different forms of tobacco.

The language used to describe tobacco, the rituals that dominated its use, and the silent standards that regulated its consumption – although unspoken, amorphous, and perpetually evolving – are the object of this research. I will argue that chew, cigars, pipes, and cigarettes often served as manifestations of prevailing discourses on gender, regionality, and race. I will explore the performative aspect of tobacco usage to access the ways that rituals of consumption reinforced cultural meaning. Finally, I will argue that tobacco’s addictive properties allowed it to influence the consciousness of Civil War era Americans, deepening its racial, gendered, and social meanings, and forming a common sensory experience that smokers and chewers used to comprehend each other’s identities and characters. I will explain these arguments through an exploration of the cultural fluidity of chewing tobacco, the manly characteristics of cigars and pipes, and the Latin sensuality of the cigarette. The constant theme of this research is Civil War era American’s awareness of their unique relationship with tobacco, and an analysis of how they comprehended addiction in themselves and others.

Donaldson’s cheeky experiment is an event that would have never occurred if not the for the unique circumstances of the American Civil War. “War is the best subject of all. It groups the maximum material and speeds up its action and brings out all sorts of stuff that normally you have to wait a lifetime to get,” Ernest Hemingway once observed.<sup>4</sup> This research uses the Civil War as precisely such an accelerative event. It threw together Americans from every region, social class, racial,

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<sup>4</sup> Matthew J. Bruccoli, *Fitzgerald and Hemingway: A Dangerous Friendship*. (New York: Carroll & Graff, 1994), 38.

ethnic, and cultural background, and these men, women, and children, smoked, spat, and snuffed, watched each other do the same, and then wrote about it, making the Civil War a catalyst that buoyed latent gendered, racial, and social implications to the surface. Further, the Civil War created periods of material deprivation, as in the case of Captain Donaldson, demonstrating how craving for tobacco prompted men to rethink social prohibitions and rework cultural constructions. The Civil War also occurred at an important moment in the evolution of tobacco usage: the aristocratic obsession with snuff was fading, the relatively understudied cigar, pipe, and chewing tobacco reigned supreme, and the cigarette was only developing the dominance it would finalize in the twentieth century. However, there is a historical Heisenberg principle at play. Novel conceptions of tobacco usage originated organically during the conflict, and antebellum notions were transformed by the war. In order to stabilize the cultural evolution generated by the Civil War, sources will be drawn from before and after the conflict. This research is located in the United States during the American Civil War, but it will draw sources from as far back as the Mexican-American War, and as far forward in the nineteenth century as the Gilded Age. It will draw heavily from shared Anglo-American bourgeoisie values related to cigar and pipe smoking, and will investigate cultural links between Latin America and the American South through the cigarette.

This research builds on the well-established field of American cultural history during the Civil War era. This research is particularly interested in gender and constructions of manliness, and is informed by the work of historians Gail Bederman and E. Anthony Rotundo. Their nuanced histories of American men give this research a grounding in how depictions of American manliness intersected with racial ideology, and how the objectives and aspirations of young men during the nineteenth century revolved around the aspiration of independence and respectability. I aim to extend the arguments laid out in Bederman's *Manliness and Civilization* and Rotundo's *American Manhood*, by illustrating how depictions of tobacco and the rituals of its consumption, were manifestations of

prevailing discourses on manliness. I will also draw on Stephen Berry's *All That Makes a Man*, as a guide to the intimate and vulnerable dimensions of young men in the Civil War era, and illustrate how cigars and pipes functioned as outlets for emotional and sensual desire.<sup>5</sup> The arguments of these scholars are not totalizing definitions of what gender meant to nineteenth century Americans. The arguments of the selected books are within themselves contradictory, and betray an elite, educated, and bourgeoisie focus. But for the purposes of this research, the strength of their individual findings, bundled together, forms a functional knowledge of American manhood in the Civil War era well suited for this analysis. Although all of these scholars touch on tobacco usage, or even use it to advance their arguments, none dedicate serious analysis to the topic. The value of this research, therefore, is in its synergy, drawing together manhood, race, and class around one product to demonstrate how these constructions were baked into the performative rituals and literary depictions of tobacco. Further, it takes men out of the world of discursive language and puts them into motion, examining how manliness was performed through rituals of consumption in everyday practices.

Historian Daniel Wickerberg, through his scheme of sensibilities, reminds us that culture infuses the world of historical actors often in ways that they themselves do not fully recognize or appreciate. Wickerberg's definition of sensibilities is well suited for a study of tobacco usage, a cultural ritual that was "both ubiquitous and yet strangely invisible."<sup>6</sup> This research aims to work within the historical scheme of sensibilities, studying tobacco as a cultural expression that reveals gender, racial, and class dynamics in everyday life. Tobacco, as a commodity, had its own vernacular meaning that symbolized power in ways that were often subtle, but, nonetheless significant. An investigation of the cultural

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<sup>5</sup> Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995). E. Anthony Rotundo, *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era*. (New York: Basic Books, 1993). Stephen Berry, *All That Makes a Man: Love and Ambition in the Civil War*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 2003).

<sup>6</sup> Daniel Wickberg, 2007, "What Is the History of Sensibilities? On Cultural Histories, Old and New." *The American Historical Journal* 112, No. 3 (June): 661-684. [Link](#). P. 669.

meaning inherent in the everyday consumption of tobacco must also necessarily account for the physical effects of the commodity, and the addiction it engendered. The experience of consuming tobacco was couched in sensory pleasure, and the cultural meaning inherent in tobacco was deepened by the physiological processes of addiction. Examining how Civil War era Americans experienced that physiological craving and satisfaction requires reference from sensory history. The sensory histories of Mark Smith and Evan Kutzler, focused on the nineteenth century provide the relevant vocabulary and methodology to investigate how Americans understood craving, satiation, and pleasure during the Civil War era.<sup>7</sup> In particular Smith's *Smell of Battle, The Taste of Siege* and Kutzler's *Living by Inches*, provide important reference due to their placement in the Civil War and thorough discussions of hunger and craving within the sensory universe of America during nineteenth century.

The cultural historiography of tobacco is underdeveloped; however, some scholars have made important inroads in exploring the meaning of consumption. One of the foremost books on this subject is Matthew Hilton's *Smoking in British Popular Culture*. Hilton uses smoking as a barometer of popular culture in Britain from 1800-2000, for example, studying the pipe as a manifestation of the bourgeoisie ethic of individuality and refinement.<sup>8</sup> Another important title is Joel Bius's *Smoke 'Em If You Got 'Em*, a history of the US military's cigarette ration. Bius explores how government sanctioned smoking in the military influenced American smoking habits in society more broadly. Although neither faction ever officially or consistently issued tobacco during the Civil War, Bius's illustration of how American society and its military interacted through smoking is a useful example of how to approach

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<sup>7</sup> Mark M. Smith, *The Smell of Battle, The Taste of Siege: A Sensory History of the Civil War*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015). Mark M. Smith, *How Race is Made: Slavery, Segregation, and the Senses*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006). Mark M. Smith, *Listening to the Nineteenth Century America*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001). Evan Kutzler, *Living by Inches: The Smells, Sounds, Tastes, and Feeling of Captivity in Civil War Prisons*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2019). The sensory history of the First World War by Santanu Das, *Touch and Intimacy in the First World War Literature*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), also informs how this research approaches the stimulation of the senses during conflict.

<sup>8</sup> Matthew Hilton, *Smoking in British Popular Culture: 1800*. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 8.



military tobacco consumption and its relation to civilian culture.<sup>9</sup> Michael Reeve's, "Special Needs and Cheerful Habits: Smoking and the Great War in Britain, 1914-18," offers an anthropological approach to smoking in wartime.<sup>10</sup> Michael Reeve's use of smoking as "a visual repertoire, both of images and gestures that was utilized by servicemen and those on the home front to define elements of self-identity and communal cohesion during the Great War," provides an example of how to approach tobacco usage as an expression of identity.<sup>11</sup> These three works, taken in concert, give me the methodological tools to reconstruct tobacco culture in the United States during the Civil War.<sup>12</sup> Hilton's use of visual and literary sources is a useful guide for my intended use of photographs, art, and literature from the Civil War era and Reeve's essay is an example of how to approach consumption through anthropological methods, notably Clifford Geertz's thick description.<sup>13</sup>

This research is an important and original contribution to the historiography of tobacco. It contributes a cultural analysis dedicated to an understudied geographic area and period: the United States in the nineteenth century. Histories of tobacco are generally focused on either the colonial era, or the twentieth-century, where a myopic obsession with cigarettes has generated titles like, *Cigarette Century*, *The Cigarette*, *The Cigarette Book*, *Cigarette Country*, and *Cigarettes, Inc.* Historians have studied

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<sup>9</sup> A notable exception is the United States Navy, which had been issuing sailors tobacco as a part of their ration for decades. Tobacco also became an official ration for Confederate troops in February of 1864, however, Government policy rarely reflected real goods received by Rebel soldiers. "Veteran and Tobacco." November 11, 2014. *Florida Tobacco Prevention Training for Educators: An Online Professional Development for K-12 Educators*. [Link](#). Matthew Brenckle, "Food and Drink in the U.S. Navy, 1794 to 1820." (2018): [Link](#).

<sup>10</sup> Hilton, *Smoking in British Popular Culture*. Joel R. Bius, *Smoke 'Em If You Got 'Em: The Rise and Fall of the Military Cigarette Ration*. (Annapolis MD: Naval Institute Press, 2018). Michael Reeve, 2016. "Special Needs and Cheerful Habits: Smoking and the Great War in Britain, 1914-1918." *Cultural & Social History* 13, No. 4: 583-501. [Link](#).

<sup>11</sup> Reeves, "Special Needs and Cheerful Habits," 490. Reeve's methodology is densely anthropological. Smoking and tobacco consumption are not the true center of his analysis, as he is more focused on "Englishness," and smoking as an expression of that identity. His work is an excellent example of Karl von Frisch's principle, "If we excessively elaborate apparatus to examine simple natural phenomena, nature herself may escape us." Quoted in Collin Ellard, *You Are Here: Why We Can Find Our Way to the Moon but Get Lost on the Mall*. (New York: Anchor Books, 2009), 101.

<sup>12</sup> Hilton, *Smoking in British Popular Culture*, 8. Bius' study is fundamentally a sub-letting of Hilton's cultural analysis within a military "sub-culture." Bius' history highlights observations about the influence of warfare and "interactions between the military and American society." *Smoke 'Em If You Got 'Em*, 3.

<sup>13</sup> Hilton describes his approach to literary evidence as a "recognition of the extent to which the social history of smoking has been intertwined with the history of popular literary culture." *Smoking*, 8.

tobacco through its economic and environmental effects, agricultural and technological innovations associated with the plant, social and political impacts of the commodity, and the devastating medical effects of its usage.<sup>14</sup> Cultural histories of tobacco are generally popular, anthropological, or severely outdated.<sup>15</sup> All of these texts inform the pursuit of this study, aiding in the comprehension of the material realities of tobacco and its consumption. Further, the global genealogies of tobacco culture by Jordan Goodman, Eric Burns, and Iain Gately, provide important cultural reference and context.<sup>16</sup> This research bridges chasms in the current historiography of tobacco through an analysis of usage as a cultural practice in America in the nineteenth-century. It also contributes a serious examination of the ways historical actors wrote about addiction and the sensory pleasures of tobacco.

This essay is structured into three sections, with each section dedicated to a specific form of tobacco. The first section, centered on chewing tobacco and dipping snuff, argues that chew was used to denigrate Southern manhood in the lead up to the American Civil War, and insult the pedigree of Southern women during the conflict. These cultural jabs were accomplished through an antebellum association of smokeless tobacco with working class vulgarity and degeneracy. The second section is

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<sup>14</sup> Economic/Environmental: Alan Kullikoff, *Tobacco and Slaves: The Development of Southern Cultures*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986). Drew A. Swanson, *A Golden Weed: Tobacco and Environment in the Piedmont South*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014). Watson W. Jennison, *Cultivating Race: The Expansion of Slavery in Georgia, 1750-1860*. (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2012). Agricultural/Technological: Pete Daniel, *Breaking the Land: The Transformation of Cotton, Tobacco, and Rice Cultures since 1880*. (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1985). Barbara Hahn, *Making Tobacco Bright: Creating an American Commodity, 1617-1937*. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011). Social/Political: Frederick F. Siegel, *The Roots of Southern Distinctiveness: Tobacco and Society in Danville, Virginia, 1780-1865*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987). Nan Enstad, *Cigarettes, Inc.: An Intimate History of Corporate Imperialism*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018). Steven C. Rubert, *A Most Promising Weed: A History of Tobacco in Colonial Zimbabwe, 1890-1945*. (Athens OH: Ohio University Press, 1998). Sarah Milov, *The Cigarette: A Political History*. (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2019). Medical/Scientific: Alan M. Brandt, *The Cigarette Century: The Rise, Fall, and Deadly Persistence of the Product that Defined America*. (New York: Basic Books, 2007).

<sup>15</sup> Popular: Eric Burns, *The Smoke of the Gods: A Social History of Tobacco*. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2007). Iain Gately, *Tobacco: A Cultural History of How an Exotic Plant Seduced Civilization*. (New York: Grove Press, 2001). Chris Harrald and Fletcher Watkins, *The Cigarette Book: The History and Culture of Smoking*. (New York: Skyhorse Publishing, 2010). Anthropological: Gloria L. Main, *Tobacco Colony: Life in Early Maryland*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982). Paul B. Steinmetz, S. J., *The Sacred Pipe: An Archetypal Theology*. (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1998). Outdated: Joseph C. Robert, *The Story of Tobacco in America*. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1949). Susan A. Wagner, *Cigarette Country: Tobacco in American History and Politics*. (New York: Praeger Publishing, 1971).

<sup>16</sup> Jordan Goodman, *Tobacco in History: The Cultures of Dependence*. (New York: Routledge, 1993). Gately, *Tobacco*. Burns, *Smoke of the Gods*.

dedicated to cigars and pipes, and examines the twin manly identities of outer confidence and inner sensitivity that young men associated with tobacco. The third section will discuss the cigarette, tracking its spread into the American South before and during the Civil War, and examine how American observers perceived the product as uniquely addictive. Throughout, I will argue that tobacco influenced the consciousness of its users, and I will examine how Civil War era Americans experienced craving, wrote about sensual satisfaction, and illustrated their deep dependence on tobacco through dramatic action.

“Have Mercy Upon Me, A Miserable Spitter! A Slaveholder!” Chew, Class, and Regionality.

Chew was one of the most popular forms of tobacco in the United States during the nineteenth century. In 1860, half the leaf grown in the United States was pressed into chewing tobacco.<sup>17</sup> But chew was strictly an American peculiarity.<sup>18</sup> “I have never known a person here to chew, unless he was an American,” a New Yorker in Paris noted, “chewing tobacco is hardly to be found at the shops, and they say they leave that filthy habit to sailors, who are not permitted to smoke.”<sup>19</sup> Conversely, European visitors were shocked by the prevalence of chew. “In all the public places of America, this filthy custom is recognized,” a disgusted Charles Dickens wrote after his tour of the young republic.<sup>20</sup> Dickens was one of many British visitors who took particular note of “the prevalence of chewing tobacco,” and it became a well-worn joke in England that American boys only claimed manhood after they had chewed tobacco for two years.<sup>21</sup> The musings of American travelers, and the disgusted

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<sup>17</sup> Burns, *Smoke of the Gods*, 115.

<sup>18</sup> Gately, *Tobacco*, 172-177.

<sup>19</sup> “A New Yorker in Paris.” *National Anti-Slavery Standard* (New York, New York), January 28, 1860: 3. *Readex: America's Historical Newspapers*. [Link](#). A pamphlet published for the advisement of soldiers going to war also noted, “Chewing is little known, except among sailors, in any country but America.” E.Y. Robbinbs, *The Soldier's Foe: A Pocket Treatise on Health and Hygiene for Camps & Camp Life*. (Cincinnati: Moore, Wilstach, Keys & Co., 25 West Fourth Street., 1861), 103.

<sup>20</sup> Gately, *Tobacco*, 174.

<sup>21</sup> Hugh Drubville, *Ambivalent Nation: How Britain Imagined the American Civil War*. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2018), 5. “They have a few stock jokes on the Americans. That of Crocket and the spittoon; that of precocity of the boy whose right to be a man was based on the ground of his ‘having *chewed* tobacco these two years;” George Francis Train, *Geo. Francis Train, Unionist, on T. Colley, Grattan, Secessionist*. (Boston: Lee & Shepard, 1862), 32. [Link](#).

guffaws of Europeans, indicate two important themes related to chew: its perception as an essentially American practice, and its depiction as a vile habit. During the Jacksonian era, chew was celebrated as quintessentially American. The vulgarity of chew was of no consequence, since “etiquette was not sissified to Americans,” one historian explains.<sup>22</sup> Charismatic American chewers like Andrew Jackson and Zachary Taylor gloried in the open defiance of European decorum, and embraced chew’s links to the working-class.<sup>23</sup> In Europe, only men engaged in labor that required intensive use of the hands, or that was conducted in flammable conditions, chewed tobacco; Sailors aboard sunbaked wooden vessels, miners working amid banks of explosive gas, and factory hands, chewed and spat, and in the process, offended their social betters.<sup>24</sup> Chew was linked to these professions in the United States as well, but Americans, at least during the first half of the nineteenth century, were more likely to celebrate this than denigrate it.

But the taste of chew started to sour in the years leading up to the American Civil War. Tobacco usage, but chew in particular, was linked to an indulgent degeneracy and moral malaise in American men. Young middle-class American men began to associate the fate of the republican experiment with their own individual futures, and when they reviewed their moral fitness for the task of empire building, they often found themselves wanting. The theme was particularly pronounced among college students, whose obsession with moral reformation was accelerated by an antebellum curriculum that emphasized the perfection of man.<sup>25</sup> The anxiety was also common south of the Mason Dixon, where the general opinion prevailed among elite men that something was lacking in

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<sup>22</sup> Burns, *Smoke of the Gods*, 114.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 110.

<sup>24</sup> Hilton, *Smoking in British Popular Culture*, 50-51.

<sup>25</sup> Alfred L. Brophy, *University, Court, & Slave: Pro-Slavery Thought in Southern Colleges & Courts & The Coming of the Civil War*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 97, 101. Benjamin M. Roy, 2020. “Students, Parents, Faculty, and Chickens: Parental Discipline at Indiana University during the 1850s.” *Macksey Journal* 1, Article 36. Link.

their sons and younger peers.<sup>26</sup> Historian Stephen Berry explains, “this concern was especially common among the planting class, where wealth allowed young men to display their impertinence in all its foppish finery.”<sup>27</sup> The use of tobacco was intimately associated with such decadence; one editor joked that Southern babies swaggered, “into the nursery redolent of cigar smoke.”<sup>28</sup>

However, few advocated for the total exorcism of “the great god Nick-O-Teen.”<sup>29</sup> Instead particular forms were identified as problematic, and chew was systematically isolated from other, more refined forms of consumption. In a poem published in the *Detroit Tribune*, titled “My Friendly Pipe,” the author pleads for “a rare old bowl, to warm my soul, a meerschaum brown and ripe – nor good plug cut, no stump of butt, nor filthy gutter snipe.”<sup>30</sup> If chew was once an expression of young, virile American manhood that cared little for civility, its essential Americanism was surgically removed, and just as in Europe, chew was branded as vulgar and vernacular. “Mrs. Melinda Broadskirt,” in an editorial for *Harper’s Weekly*, challenged New York’s chewers to “endeavor to reform one of the most detestable nuisances that mankind ever inflicted upon all that class of unfortunate females” who rode the ferry to cross the Hudson river. Mrs. Broadskirt maintained that no woman,

no matter how ordinarily dressed she may be, but what must suffer from being compelled to wade through the streams of tobacco juice that are constantly ejected from the moss-covered lips of a very large majority of the ‘Lords of Creation’ that throng this great thoroughfare. They do not seem satisfied in subjecting us to the trouble of clearing our skirts from the huge balls of moist tobacco that are scattered in profusion from one end of the boat to the other, but oftentimes compel us to wade ankle-deep through streams of filth that would disgust a Hottentot.

Broadskirt suggested that chewers be relegated to “the four-footed tribe where they belong,” and concluded that chew was, “a nuisance that can no longer be tolerated.”<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Eugene D. Genovese, *The Slaveholders’ Dilemma: Freedom and Progress in Southern Conservative Thought, 1820-1860*. (Columbia SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1992). Peter S. Carmichael, *The Last Generation: Young Virginians in Peace War and Reunion*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005).

<sup>27</sup> Berry, *All That Makes a Man*, 32.

<sup>28</sup> Berry, *All That Makes a Man*, 32.

<sup>29</sup> Rudyard Kipling, *Rudyard Kipling’s Verse, Inclusive Edition, 1885–1918*. (Garden City NJ: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1922). [Link](#).

<sup>30</sup> Arthur Gray, *Tobacco in Song and Story*. (Rahway NJ: The Mrrshon Company Press, 1896), 67-8.

<sup>31</sup> Letter from Mrs. Melinda Broadskirt to Mr. Lounger. December 25, 1857. Published in *Harper’s Weekly*, January 16, 1857. Harp Week, Text Cartoon & Ads from the pages of *Harper’s Weekly*, 1857-1912. [Link](#).

The polemics of the doubtfully named Mrs. Broadskirt, typify the bourgeoisie critique of chewing tobacco. Chewers are stripped of their status as civilized men through a comparison to animals and are sarcastically derided as “moss lipped ‘Lords of Creation.’” Further, Broadskirt accuses them of exposing women to circumstances that would disgust a savage African “Hottentot,” utilizing a racial ideology that sorted the white and civilized from the black and primitive.<sup>32</sup> Chewers are even marginalized within the working class through the author’s insistence that the habit offends all women, “no matter how ordinarily dressed.” The central theme of the editorial is that the conditions that women are being subjected to are unacceptable. Prevailing bourgeoisie values understood women as uniquely invested with the values of the prevailing culture – reserve, decency, and civility.<sup>33</sup> Transgressions against the refined sensibilities of women, were not only transgressions against domesticity, but the foundations of civilization.<sup>34</sup> The message was plain: Chew was incongruous with middle-class morality.<sup>35</sup> But in the critique, the mobilization of multiple discursive elements to regulate social behavior is illustrated. Broadskirt reinforced her class-based attack on chew with an equation to racial savagery, and justified her critique as a defense of womanhood, denigrating the manhood of those who would chew in their presence of women.

Because chewing tobacco was predominantly manufactured in the South, it was particularly popular in that region. As sectional tension intensified, Northern writers and foreign observers easily rebranded chewing tobacco as a *Southern* vice. The manipulation was deft, and the working-class baggage associated with chew migrated south intact. Mark Twain’s *Huckleberry Finn* offers a rich

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<sup>32</sup> Brian Wallis, “Black Bodies, White Science: Louis Agassiz’s Slave Daguerreotypes,” *American Art* Vol. 9 No. 2 (Summer, 1995), 38-61. Smith, *Making Race*.

<sup>33</sup> Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, “Beauty, the Beast, and the Militant Woman: A Case Study in Sex Roles in Jacksonian America.” 185-198 in *Women and Power in American History: A Reader, Vol. 1 to 1880*. Edited by Kathryn Kish Sklar and Thomas Dublin. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1991).

<sup>34</sup> Thavolia Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage: The Transformation of the Plantation Household*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 18-31.

<sup>35</sup> An excellent example of this principle is exhibited in Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, 49-58, when Ida B. Wells applied a similar paradigm to criticize lynching utilizing conceptions of manhood to influence popular sentiment and political attitudes.

example of how chewing tobacco's lowly vulgarity was refashioned into the habit of poor southern whites,

There was empty dry-goods boxes under the awnings, and loafers roosting on them all day long, whittling with their Barlow knives; and chawing tobacco, and gaping and yawning and stretching – a mighty ornery lot. They generally had on yellow straw hats most as wide as an umbrella, but didn't wear no coats nor waistcoats; they called one another Bill, and Buck, and Hank, and Joe, and Andy, and talked lazy and drawly, and used considerable many cuss words. There was many a loafer leaning up against every awning post, and he most always had his hands in his britches pockets, except when he fetched them out to lend a chaw of tobacco or a scratch. What a body was hearing amongst them all the time was:

'Gimme a chaw'v tobacker, Hank.'

'Cain't – I hain't got but one chaw left. Ask Bill.'

Maybe Bill gives him a chaw; maybe he lies and says he ain't got none. Some of them kinds of loafers never has a cent in the world, nor a chaw of tobacco of their own. They get all their chaw by borrowing – they say to a fellow, 'I wish't you'd len' me a chaw, Jack, I jist this minute give Ben Thompson the last chaw I had' – which is a lie, pretty much every time; it don't fool nobody but a stranger; but Jack aint no stranger, so he says:

'You give him a chaw, did you? So did your sister's cat's grandmother. You pay me back the chaws you've awready boyy'd off'n me, Lafe Buckner, then I'll loan you one or two ton it it, and wont charge you no back instrust nuther.'

'Well, I *did* pay you back some of it wunst.'

'Yes, you did – 'bout six chaws. You borry'd store tobacker and paid back nigger-head.'

Store tobacker is flat black plug, but these fellows mostly chaws the natural leaf twisted. When they borrow a chaw, they don't generally cut it off with a knife, but they set the plug in between their teeth, and gnaw with their teeth and tug at the plug with their hands till they get it in two – then sometimes the one that owns the tobacco looks mournful at it when its handed back, and says, sarcastic:

'Here, gimme the *chaw*, and you take the *plug*.<sup>36</sup>

Class and regionality collide in Twain's description of the loafers – an archetypal group of poor southern white men. The loafer's poverty is a result of his own laziness and immorality, traits exhibited through his perpetual scrounging for chewing tobacco. The object of his ambition is only to obtain yet another "quid" through any means but honest ones. Nineteenth century men proved their manliness through independence, both economic and moral, and begging for a commodity that provided sensory pleasure was gluttony, and indicated a moral weakness, a dependency that owned the man.<sup>37</sup> Chew is merely the vehicle that Twain uses to open a critical review of poor white southern manhood. Later in the story, the same crowd of loafers surround Colonel Sherburne's home, intent on lynching him. Sherburne is an archetypal bourgeoisie "good" man, and when the crowd surrounds

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<sup>36</sup> Mark Twain, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. (New York: Puffin, 1884, 2008), 215-6.

<sup>37</sup> Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, 77-121.

him home, he launches into a critique of their manliness. “The idea of *you* lynching anybody! Its amusing. The idea of thinking you had pluck enough to lynch a *man!*” Sherburne derides the crowd, “your newspapers call you a brave people so much that you think you *are* braver than any other people. If any real lynching is going to be done, it will be done in the dark, Southern fashion.”<sup>38</sup> Chew symbolized the moral weakness of Southern men, and was linked to another Southern moral failing: mob violence and lynching. Poor white Southerners chewing habit hints at their lack of moral independence. This allowed Twain to open a plotline that identified them as excitable cowards, unable to exercise rationality or act with manly bravery. Anti-lynching advocate Ida B. Wells issued a similar critique of Southern manhood to call attention to lynching at the dawn of the twentieth century. Rather than rituals of a rugged manliness that cared little for decorum and rules, Twain identified chewing tobacco and lynching as signs of unmanly dependency and cowardice.<sup>39</sup>

Critiquing men through their use of tobacco was actually an old and established tradition in the South. Since the seventeenth century, Southern planters had been notorious for their degenerate habits and pastimes like horse racing, womanizing, and cockfighting, all accompanied by heavy drinking, smoking, and chewing.<sup>40</sup> Baptist and Methodist evangelicals were disgusted by these excesses, and entered the Southern backcountry in the latter half of the eighteenth century preaching radical sermons on political equality and righteous morality. These sentiments readily resonated with Appalachian Southerners, who felt disenfranchised by a gluttonous and corrupt planter elite.<sup>41</sup> These missionaries established a tradition of critiquing planter “oligarchs,” through their irreligious decadence, and upcountry unionists harnessed this theme in 1861 to ridicule secessionists.<sup>42</sup> Religion,

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<sup>38</sup> Twain, *Huckleberry Finn*, 225-227.

<sup>39</sup> Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, 45-77.

<sup>40</sup> Rhys Isaac, *The Transformation of the State of Virginia: 1740-1790*. (Chapel Hills: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), 101-104.

<sup>41</sup> Bertram Wyatt-Brown, “Paradox, Shame, and Grace in the Backcountry.”106-135 in *The Shaping of Southern Culture: Honor, Grace, and War, 1760s-1880s*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

<sup>42</sup> W. Todd Groce, *Mountain Rebels: East Tennessee Confederates and the Civil War, 1860-1870*. (Knoxville TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1999), 88.



politics, and manliness were inseparable to upcountry unionists, who identified their moral and physical superiority in their Christian upbringing.<sup>43</sup> George Train explained the difference between himself and secessionists, “I was taught that not to curse, or lie, or steal, or drink, or smoke, or chew, was the right way to become a great man.”<sup>44</sup> Train even made chewing tobacco into a dramatic symbol of slaveholding, declaring, “have mercy upon me, a miserable spitter! A slaveholder!”<sup>45</sup> Upcountry authors pushed the equation of tobacco with moral weakness, deriding chew in particular, as one of the planter elite’s self-indulgent and aristocratic pastimes, clearly indicative of a flawed and incomplete manhood. William Brownlow, a prominent East Tennessee Unionist, wrote, “I never had a cigar or chew of tobacco in my mouth. I never attended a horse-race, and never witnessed their running, save on the fair grounds of my own county. I never courted but one woman, whom I married.”<sup>46</sup> The moral degeneracy that some saw as inherent in the planter class’s lifestyle seemed to be physical degeneracy as well, and this physical decomposition was linked to chew. “I walk erect, have but few gray hairs, and *look* to be younger than any whiskey drinking, tobacco chewing, profane-swearing Secessionist in any of the Cotton states, of forty years,” Brownlow wrote in 1862.<sup>47</sup>

The upcountry critique of the Southern planter elite through their chew found a receptive audience in the North after the attack on Fort Sumter. Northern publishers readily put authors like Brownlow and Train into print because their critique of Southern manhood was cast in terms understandable to a Northern middle class, who already associated chew with immorality. If these bourgeoisie Yankees imagined their rebel opponents as “miserable spitters,” they were shocked to find

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<sup>43</sup> Daniel W. Crofts, *Reluctant Confederates: Upper South Unionists in the Secession Crisis*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 44.

<sup>44</sup> George Francis Train, *Geo. Francis Train, Unionist, on T. Colley, Grattan, Secessionist*. (Boston: Lee & Shepard, 1862), 12. [Link](#).

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 27. [Link](#).

<sup>46</sup> William Granaway Brownlow, *Sketches of the Rise, Progress, and Decline of Secession: with a Narrative of the Personal Experiences of W.G. Brownlow, Editor of the Knoxville Whig*. (Philadelphia: George W. Childs, 628 & 630 Chestnut St. Cincinnati Applegate & Co., 43 Main St., 1862), 19.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 92. [Link](#).

it amongst their new comrades. Middle class men, conditioned to regard chewing tobacco with disgust, and its users with wariness, carried these conceptions with them into the military. Volunteers were warned in a treatise entitled *The Soldier's Foe*, “the habits of Drinking and Smoking (or Chewing, which is quite as bad,) and indeed every species of intemperance and excess within their reach, are habits to which soldiers have strong and peculiar temptations.”<sup>48</sup> To morally conscious young officers, looking to set an example of soldierly conduct, chewing tobacco was not the way to inspire their men. Lieutenant S. Millett Thompson of the 13<sup>th</sup> New Hampshire wrote of his two favorite fellow officers, “They are the only two young men whom I have made such acquaintance with, who neither drink, smoke, chew, nor swear – so we match exactly. ‘Good company or none,’ is my motto.”<sup>49</sup> Collision and close contact with men who chewed tobacco did not necessarily breed acceptance of the habit.<sup>50</sup> Many middle-class young men, now citizen officers, stuck to their pipes, cigars, and principles.

Proximity actually tended to breed contempt. The real collision of Northern soldiers and Southern civilians forced yet another minute shift in the depiction of chewing tobacco and its users. Northern soldiers were horrified when they witnessed Southern women “dipping snuff” and understood their use of chewing tobacco as evidence of their “ignorance.” Female use of tobacco was frequently interpreted as evidence of the superiority of Northern women, and Northern culture. John King, stationed in the impoverished hill country of North Alabama, wrote in his diary, “There was a custom among Southern women entirely unknown to Northern women. It was the habit of snuff dipping.” To King, “it seemed like a horrible and filthy custom.” King described the creation and use of snuff, explaining how a small twig was chewed and wetted with saliva, dipped into the snuff, then

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<sup>48</sup> E.Y. Robbins, *The Soldier's Foe: A Pocket Treatise on Health and Hygiene for Camps & Camp Life*. (Cincinnati: Moore, Wiltach, Keys & Co., 25 West Fourth Street., 1861), 99.

<sup>49</sup> S. Millett to [Emma G. Griffin], May 22, 1863. S. Millett Thompson Papers, Quoted in Andrew Bledsoe, *Citizen Officers: The Union and Confederate Volunteer Junior Officer Corps in the American Civil War*. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press), 114.

<sup>50</sup> The drawn distinctions between middle class and lower class men is explained by Lorien Foote in *The Gentlemen and the Roughs: Violence, Honor, and Manhood in the Union Army*. (New York: NYU Press, 2013).

painted onto the gums. Some of his comrades who chewed “took a sociable dip from the box but they always preferred making a new brush. The girls thought it was awful funny to have a genuine ‘Yank’ dip with them. The girls would giggle and boys would laugh.”<sup>51</sup> Although Northern soldiers and Southern women could share a strange encounter, the Northern feeling of superiority pervaded the interaction, evident through their refusal to share the application brush with their hosts.

King’s observations were echoed by other Northern soldiers who ventured deep into the rural corners of the South. A Major stationed in Tennessee wrote home that Southern women “don’t know much of anything excepting to ‘chew’ and ‘dip.’ This last seems more common than sewing among the ladies of Dixie.”<sup>52</sup> An Illinois Second Lieutenant, a schoolteacher in civilian life, wrote to a former female pupil about the young women of the South, “you might be surprised when I tell you that but few of them were ever at school. Consequently they have grown up in ignorance, very seldom I find one that can read, cannot not read, but they can smoke the pipe, chew tobacco and beat some of our profane soldiers swearing.” The lieutenant emphasized, “This may seem strange to you but it is as true as strange. You should feel thankful that you have enjoyed the benefits of school.”<sup>53</sup> Through the failings of Southern women, the ideal Northern woman is sketched in contrast. Southern women chewed tobacco, were ignorant, and performed none of the domestic duties of womanhood, and were therefore, the opposite of Northern women. Union officers made sure to specifically note what was so abhorrent about the conduct of Southern women in their letters to wives, sweethearts, and female friends, reinforcing what they wanted to come home to at the end of the war.

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<sup>51</sup> John M. King, *Three Years with the 92d Illinois: The Civil War Diary of John M. King*. Edited by Claire E. Swedeberg. (Mechanicsburg PA: Stackpole Books, 1999), 149-150.

<sup>52</sup> Letter from Major David Norton to Miss Mollie Chapman. January 1, 1864. Quoted in *In Their Letters, In Their Words: Illinois Civil War Soldiers Write Home*. Edited by Mark Flotow. (Southern Illinois University Press 2019).

<sup>53</sup> Letter from 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant William Browning to Miss Anna Simpson. July 22, 1863. Ibid.

From a distinctively American habit to the revolting vice of ignorant Southern women, chewing tobacco exhibited a cultural fluidity that few other commodities rivaled during the Civil war era. Northern bourgeoisie critiques of chewing tobacco highlight how multiple discourses could be mobilized through commodities and their consumption in order to marginalize certain groups and regulate social conduct. Upcountry Southerners well vintaged use of chewing tobacco to criticize the planter oligarchy illustrates how many cultural allusions related to tobacco drew their authority from regional stereotypes that had become accepted currency. Northern officers described southern women chewing to vindicate their superior culture, and remind their female correspondents how they expected women to behave. A consistent theme in critical depictions of chewing tobacco is the representation of chewers as illogically enslaved to a vile habit by their own sensual desires. The way chewers depended on such a repugnant commodity betrayed the weakness of their constitutions and the ignorance of their minds. The sensual pleasures of chew, different from the stimulation offered by pipes and cigars, made assertions of decadence and immoral indulgence more credible.

“A Woman is Only a Woman, But A Good Cigar is a Smoke.” Men and their Cigars.

Throughout the nineteenth century, cigars were synonymous with charismatic manly identity. Men smoking cigars exuded an outward nonchalance and confidence. But privately, they described their relationship with cigars using the language of romantic fidelity and pseudo-erotic sensual pleasure, offering insight into the intimate and sensitive dimensions of nineteenth century manhood. The cigar's thick gendered meanings made it an essential manly accessory during the Civil War, both in daguerreotype studios and on the battlefield. A stout stogie became a part of a young soldier's uniform, an important symbol of his martial manliness, and a signifier of a refined palate and a depth of feeling.

The cigar was introduced to the Anglo-American world through conflicts with Spain in the eighteenth century. Israel Putnam, future revolutionary war hero of Bunker Hill, discovered cigars in

Cuba during the Seven Year's War. When he returned to Connecticut, he started growing his own tobacco, founding the tradition of Connecticut leaf wrapped cigars.<sup>54</sup> British officers fighting on the Iberian Peninsula during the Napoleonic Wars readily took to the cigar as well, and by 1815, they were a feature of British society, particularly favored by the aristocracy and middle-class.<sup>55</sup> Homegrown industries in Great Britain and the United States arose to meet the new demand. An affection for cigars became a shared principle of a transatlantic Anglo-American bourgeoisie smoking culture.<sup>56</sup> In America, cigar production was a Northern aberration in a predominantly Southern industry, and Conestoga, Pennsylvania, in particular became a notorious cigar rolling hub, coining the slang term "stogies."<sup>57</sup>

The cigar had a particular appeal for young men during the turbulent antebellum era. As stated earlier, middle class men during this period were prone to bouts of insecurity and melancholy, constantly yearning for respectability and independence.<sup>58</sup> "O why should man spend his best days, his youth at college," one Northern college student questioned in 1856, "break down his constitution, ruin his eyes, literally kill himself, commit protracted suicide to have the name of knowing more than

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<sup>54</sup> Burns, *Smoke of the Gods*, 106-107. and Gately, *Tobacco*, 172.

<sup>55</sup> Hilton, *Smoking in British Popular Culture*, 41.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 41-56.

<sup>57</sup> Burns, *Smoke of the Gods*, 106. "By 1860 the ten leading cigar manufacturing centers were, in the order of their importance, Philadelphia, New York, Baltimore, Cincinnati, Hartford County in Connecticut, St. Louis, Hampden County in Massachusetts, Newark, Albany and New Orleans." Joseph C. Robert, *The Story of Tobacco in America*. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1949), 97. One of the strangest and utterly unsubstantiated assertions made by Civil War historians is that the North did not have access to tobacco during the war. Nothing could be further from the truth. The cigar industry flourished in the North, and with imports from other tobacco producing countries, the North was never tobacco starved during the war. Further, more and more tobacco producing regions of the South were conquered during the war, passing their products to the North. Many Southern planters did not wait for conquest, but started illicit trade with the North for greenbacks. Indeed, tobacco was more of a problem than an asset for the South during the Civil War. The blockade cut off a huge venue for cash flow through tobacco exports to Europe, and planters consistently refused to plant crops instead of tobacco. Eventually the Confederate Government authorized the seizure and destruction of tobacco in order to staunch the inexorable rise of inflation. See R. Douglas Hurt, *Agriculture and the Confederacy: Policy, Productivity, and Power in the Civil War South*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press), 5, 13-14, 22-23, 55, 58, 90, 118, 120.

<sup>58</sup> Benjamin Roy, "Students, Parents, Faculty, and Chickens: Parental Discipline at Indiana University in the 1850s." *Macksey Journal*, 1, Article 36, Johns Hopkins University Press. [Link](#). Peter Carmichael, *Last Generation*. Berry, *All That Makes A Man*, 32.

you really do. To go forth from College dispirited, sickly, dyspeptic, skeeny sour feeble [and] pale.”<sup>59</sup> In reaction to this self-pitying sentiment, young men, clung to available talismans of manhood. In 1859, David Beem, a student at Indiana University, imagined himself defiantly leaving Bloomington before the end of the semester. When a friend confronted Beem in his daydream, Beem explained that he was skipping town before final examination. In response, the friend, “cocks his hat, puts his cigar in his mouth, says he dreads examination, and strikes a bee-line downtown.”<sup>60</sup> Against the ravages of uncertainty and self-doubt, young men in antebellum America fortified themselves with a commodity that physically stimulated their constitutions and gave them a visual symbol of their manliness. The air of nonchalance manifested by Beem’s character masks his “dread” about the coming examination. The cigar is part of a performance where the young student shields himself from responsibility with a cocksure disposition. For men like Beem, cigars were a manly talisman that lent confidence where it was lacking, or at least offered the appearance of it.

Bachelors clung to cigars because they signified outward manly confidence. But smoking in private was an entirely different ritual, one that cultivated a man’s inner, sensual dimensions. Cigar smoking was a delicious and mystical sensory experience for a confirmed smoker. “Do not ask me to describe the charms of the reverie, or the contemplative ecstasy into which the smoke of our cigar plunges us,” one author cautioned non-smokers, “Words are powerless to express or define these ‘states’; they are vague and mysterious, as unseizable as the sweetly scented clouds which are emitted from your “Mexico” or your “Panatella.”<sup>61</sup> The cigar, and its elegant flavor, was one of the “powerful agents in life” that Civil War era Americans were instructed by Newspaper editors to appreciate for

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<sup>59</sup> Entry of November 6, 1865. “Indiana University Student Diary.” 1856. MS, William Henry Smith Memorial Library, Manuscript and Visual Collections Department, Collection SC 2433, Indiana State Historical Society, Indianapolis, IN.

<sup>60</sup> David Beem, “Bloomington, March 27<sup>th</sup> 1859.” MS, David Enoch Beem Papers, M0015/OMB 0060, Manuscript and Visual Collections Department, William Henry Smith Memorial Library, Indiana State Historical Society, Indianapolis, IN.

<sup>61</sup> Gray, *Tobacco in Song and Story*, 74-5.

their ability to cultivate “refinement, standing, and character.”<sup>62</sup> Addictive craving and desire for refined taste collided in tobacco, and young men developed a powerful relationship with their pipes and cigars, and wrote about them in a language of romantic affection and sensual pleasure. For one smoker, his pipe was the “object of my warm desire,” with a “lip of wax and eye of fire: and thy snowy taper waist, with my finger gently braced; and thy pretty swelling crest.” Tobacco smoke was “the sweetest bliss of blisses, breathing from thy balmy kisses.”<sup>63</sup> Bachelors lived within a circumscribed world of respectability and repression, and just as they longed for manly independence, they thirsted for sensual pleasure. E. Anthony Rotundo explains that bachelorhood “created an almost unmanageable problem for young men in coping with sexual feeling. On the average, a middle-class man lived as a bachelor for ten to fifteen years after puberty, and he did so in a culture with stringent rules against premarital sex.” Cigars and pipes gave bachelors an acceptable outlet to indulge their desires, and an object and ritual through which they could safely explore erotic feeling and physical pleasure.<sup>64</sup>

The pseudo-erotic nature of a bachelors’ relationship with tobacco was a manifestation of his desire for sensual pleasure, but his emotional appreciation of pipes and cigars often made him feel unavailable for romantic love with a real woman. A motif emerged in Victorian poetry that dwelled on the paradigm that cigars and potential spouses were diametrically opposed; placing the bachelor in the agonizing position of having to choose one over the other. Rudyard Kipling articulated the idea in his famous poem, *The Betrothed*, in which a young bachelor is forced to choose between his potential bride and smoking, selecting the latter and uttering the now immortal lines, “a woman is only a woman, but a good cigar is a smoke. Light me another Cuba -- I hold to my first-sworn vows. If Maggie will

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<sup>62</sup> “The Cultivation of the Senses,” *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine*, 6, no. 31 (December 1852), p. 81. Quoted in Smith, *The Smell of Battle, The Taste of Siege*, 1.

<sup>63</sup> Gray, *Tobacco in Song and Story*, 37-8.

<sup>64</sup> Rotundo, *American Manhood*, 115-116. See also Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, 77-120.

have no rival, I'll have no Maggie for Spouse!"<sup>65</sup> Kipling was far from the only Anglo-American poet who cast tobacco and women as naturally opposed. Edmund Day, writing for the New York *Dramatic Mirror*, penned a poem titled "A Bachelor's Soliloquy," lamenting, "my oldest pipe, my dearest girl, Alas! Which shall it be? For she has said that I must choose betwixt herself and thee. Farewell, old pipe; for many years you've been my closest friend, and ever ready at my side thy solace sweet to lend."<sup>66</sup> During the antebellum period, young women were "advised to curb their passions," and seek to remain "emotionally distanced" from their male suitor, historian Mark Smith explains.<sup>67</sup> For some antebellum bachelors, this made the choice between tobacco and women easier. One young man wrote, "woman teases as well as consoles. Woman makes half the sorrows which she boasts to soothe . . . if thou give preference to woman, all I can say is, the next time Juno ruffles thee, O Jupiter! Try the weed."<sup>68</sup>

Why did young men, who professed a desire for independence and the power to establish a household, cling to their cigars and pipes like scared children? The answer has much to do with addiction, which created a sensory pleasure and emotional attachment that mimicked what these men imagined sexual contact and romantic love would feel like. "He who doth not smoke hath either known no griefs, or refuseth himself the softest consolation, next to that which comes from heaven," wrote one smoker, who was also likely a virgin.<sup>69</sup> But the young man's affectionate relationship with cigars was also linked to the emotionally tumultuous period of bachelorhood, and his male friends from that period. In *The Betrothed*, Kipling recalls, "the gloom of my bachelor days is flecked with the cheery light of stumps that I burned to Friendship and Pleasure and Work and Fight." Cigars and male

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<sup>65</sup> Kipling, "The Betrothed." *Rudyard Kipling's Verse*.

<sup>66</sup> Gray, *Tobacco in Song and Story*, 69-70.

<sup>67</sup> Mark Smith, *Writing the American Past: US History to 1877*. (Malden MA: Wiley Blackwell, 2009), 104.

<sup>68</sup> Gray, *Tobacco in Song and Story*, 31-32.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.



companions formed outlets for the romantic impulses of bachelors, and frequently, the two mixed.<sup>70</sup>

Volney Streamer (likely a pseudonym) captured the sentiment in a poem “A Stub of a Cigar.”

You ask what it means, and a look of scorn mars your fair face, dear Lady Disdain;  
but to me it recalls a bright summer morn . . .  
A face kindly tender, and manly, and true –  
A friendship once vowed that was given to last,  
and blue eyes that reflected the heaven’s own blue.  
As two sailing ships in mid-ocean meet,  
Salute, and pass on to far distant lands,  
We met, to find only friendship was sweet,  
When we were compelled to clasp parting hands.  
And the voice of that comrade who strolled by my side  
Comes again to my ear, thro’ days vanished afar,  
And that is why I cherish it, almost with pride,  
This poor, little, wasted, sad stub of a cigar!<sup>71</sup>

Streamer’s poem is an excellent example of what historian E. Anthony Rotundo styles “intimate attachments that verged on romance” among nineteenth century bachelors. They indulged in “gentle (even ‘feminine’) emotions of the heart” for each other, Rotundo explains, and this theme is evident in the writing of Kipling, Day, and Streamer. Where a woman was lacking, there was a male friend, and where he was lacking, there was a cigar.<sup>72</sup> For young men preparing to exit bachelorhood, parting with cigars and friends felt like infidelity to what had reliably provided them emotional warmth and sensual pleasure.

The intimate and outward utility of cigars for young men made the product synonymous with manliness. Men, especially bachelors, were seldom depicted in the antebellum era without a cigar. When the Civil War began, the cigar became an essential symbol of a newly minted volunteer’s status as a soldier. “The coat, hat, and accoutrements” of the Civil War soldier, historian Peter Carmichael explains, conveyed “a spirit of martial masculinity that imbued Northern and Southern recruits with a sense of manly pride that encouraged feelings of superiority.”<sup>73</sup> Carmichael might have easily added a

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<sup>70</sup> “Rotundo, *American Manhood*, 75.

<sup>71</sup> Gray, *Tobacco in Song and Story*, 49-50.

<sup>72</sup> Rotundo, *American Manhood*, 75.

<sup>73</sup> Peter Carmichael, *The War for the Common Soldier: How Men Thought, Fought, and Survived in Civil War Armies*. (Chapel Hill: University of the North Carolina Press, 2018), 20.

cigar to the description, judging by its prevalence in photographs and the life writings of soldiers. Photographs of soldiers with cigars, especially Northerners, are ubiquitous, so much so that a stogie might be mistaken for an essential part of the soldier's issued equipment. Many of the poses dramatically visualize the intimate relationships that bachelors established with tobacco and their friends. Soldiers lie atop one another, embrace and touch each other, even hold lit cigars in one another's mouths. Through photographs, the sensual pleasure of the cigar, and its association with manly bonding, is represented visually.



Ninth-plate tintype by an anonymous photographer. The Liljenquist Family Collection, Library of Congress. [Link](#).



Carte de visite by Washburn of New Orleans, La. D.L. Daily Collection.



Carte de visite by Montgomery P. Simons of Philadelphia, Pa. The Liljenquist Family Collection at the Library of Congress.

Through poses, cigars, and embrace of comrades, young men manifested their inner desires for emotional and physical intimacy. Appreciating cigars and loyal friends cultivated the refined dimensions of man – exhibiting his capacity for depth of feeling and ability to appreciate rich sensory experience. The cigar, however, had a double meaning, and also functioned as an outward symbol of masterful manliness, communicating the nonchalant confidence of the smoker. For this reason, posing with cigars in uniform was particularly popular among black servicemen of the Union Army and Navy. For a black man, wearing a uniform of the United States military was an assertion of martial manliness and a claim to citizenship. Frederick Douglas explained, "once let the black man get upon his person the brass letters, U.S., let him get an eagle on his button, and a musket on his shoulder and bullets in his pockets, and there is no power on earth which can deny that he has earned the right to citizenship in the United States."<sup>74</sup> A cigar was another symbol of martial manliness, but also functioned as a subtle claim to the emotional nuance of bourgeoisie manhood.<sup>75</sup> The cigar hinted at the black man's ability to appreciate delicate flavor, and draw on a depth of feeling normally associated with whiteness. This theme is particularly pronounced in one photo of a black sailor, who holds in one hand, a cigar, and in the other, a daguerreotype of Confederate soldiers. His expression, uniform, cigar, and daguerreotype communicate a manly mastery of seamanship, cultivated sensory refinement, and a domination over his enemy.

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<sup>74</sup> "Frederick Douglas." People, African American Civil War Memorial. National Park Service. [Link](#). Perceptions of black men during and after the Civil War revolved around their claim to manhood and citizenship, see Hannah Rosen, *Terror in the Heart of Freedom: Citizenship, Race, Sexual Violence, and the Making of Race in the Postemancipation South*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 182-185.

<sup>75</sup> Alan Trachtenberg, "Albums of War: On Reading Civil War Photographs." *Representations* No. 9, Special Issue: American Culture Between the Civil War and World War I (Winter, 1985), 27-9. For a further discussion of African Americans soldiers, the link between uniforms, manhood, citizenship, and race, see Ronald S. Coddington, *African American Faces of the Civil War: An Album*. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012), and Ronald S. Coddington, *Faces of the Civil War Navies: An Album of Union and Confederate Sailors*. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016).



*Sailor With Cigar in Hand Holding a Double Case Image of Confederate Soldiers.* United States, None. [Between 1860 and 1870] Photographs. Library of Congress [Link](#).

Cigars were omnipresent in studios and galleries during the Civil War, but the outward significance of cigar smoking also made it useful for soldiers in combat, particularly officers attempting to inspire confidence in their subordinates. Smoking under fire became a performative ritual that accomplished multiple things for both the officer and the men beneath his command. Officers lit up during battle in order to justify the preferential treatment and deference given to them, calm their own

riotous nervous, and demonstrate their emotional control. No man was more influential in the creation of this ritual than Ulysses S. Grant. Whether Grant actually smoked a cigar during the battle of Fort Donelson is irrelevant. After the capture of Donelson and Henry “no caricaturist who drew Grant without a cigar could hope to rise in his profession” testified one author.<sup>76</sup> The Grant that most of the North saw, was a frumpy Ohioan on horseback, chewing a cigar, and inspiring resolution in every soldier who saw him.<sup>77</sup> Grant exuded military success and was notorious for coolness under fire, and his otherwise subtle charisma was bolstered by his furious cigar smoking, twenty a day by 1864.<sup>78</sup>

Other soldiers and officers followed suit, capitalizing on the manly symbology of cigars. During the battle of Gettysburg, General Dan Sickles suffered an abrupt amputation via cannon ball, but when he was carried off the field, he gamely smoked a cigar and exhorted his men to keep fighting.<sup>79</sup> Across the lines, Major Adolph Proskauer of the 12<sup>th</sup> Alabama, led his men against Federal positions on Culps Hill, and smoked cigars under fire to provide an example of manly conduct for the men beneath his command. One of his subordinates wrote, "I can see him now as he nobly carried himself at Gettysburg, standing coolly and calmly with a cigar in his mouth at the head of the 12th Alabama amid a perfect rain of bullets, shot and shell. He was the personification of intrepid gallantry and imperturbable courage."<sup>80</sup> Captain Robert Emory Park, serving alongside Proskauer, wrote that “Our gallant Jew Major smoked his cigars calmly and stood in the thickest of the fight.”<sup>81</sup> Historian Drew Bledsoe argues that, during the Civil War, “above all, officers had to lead on the field with the

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<sup>76</sup> Gray, *Tobacco in Song and Story*, 71.

<sup>77</sup> William S. McFeely, *Ulysses S. Grant: An Album*. (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2004), 58.

<sup>78</sup> Shelby Foote, *The Civil War: A Narrative, Volume III Red River to Appomattox*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1974, 1986), 159.

<sup>79</sup> James A. Hessler dedicates 6 pages to discussing whether or not Dan Sickles smoked a cigar as he was removed from the battlefield at Gettysburg, and cites over 30 sources, from the official records to the *Gettysburg Star and Sentinel*, *Sickles at Gettysburg: The Controversial Civil War General Who Committed Murder, Abandoned Little Round Top, and Declared Himself the Hero of Gettysburg*. (New York: Savas, 2009), 206-212.

<sup>80</sup> Robert N. Rosen, *The Jewish Confederates*. (Columbia SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2000), 107.

<sup>81</sup> Marc Jordan Ben-Meir, *The Sons of Joshua: The Story of the Jewish Contribution to the Confederacy*. (New York: Xilbris, 2012), 43.

same mixture of authority, composure, and compassion that their volunteers expected of them in camp.”<sup>82</sup> Smoking a cigar in battle, while conspicuously exposed to the enemy’s fire, was to physically meet this expectation.<sup>83</sup> But the cigar was a stiffener for the smoker as well. Nicotine sharpened the senses, soothed frayed nerves, and gave trembling hands something to do. It should also be recalled that cigars were understood as loyal companions through a bachelorhood of lonely suffering. The cigar stabilized a fevered mental state through its physiological effects, but also embodied the warm presence of an old friend, who had seen the young man through trying times before.

The cigar was the manliest form of tobacco usage during the Civil War era, and the inward and outward dimensions of cigar smoking points to two discrete, yet mutually constitutive male identities within nineteenth century manhood. Historian Jessica Meyer argues in *Men of War*, that British men in the First World War depicted themselves through two masculine “ideals to be emulated and striven towards”: the heroic and the domestic.<sup>84</sup> The heroic was the courageous man, who confirmed his martial identity by confronting danger stoically. The domestic was oriented towards the home, the family, and the intimate. Although focused on different soldiers in a different war, her arguments apply to Civil War era men as well. Through the cigar, the domestic and militant dimensions of men are clearly exhibited, but also uniquely tied together through one object. Through the consumption of cigars, men demonstrated their refined taste and emotional nuance, and established a claim to bourgeoisie respectability and character. But by smoking them under fire, men cast themselves as militant and heroic, the incarnation of the “bold soldier boy.” Cigars were able to symbolize private sensuality and outward confidence, and achieved this duality through the physical sensations’ consumption evoked.

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<sup>82</sup> Bledsoe, *Citizen Officers*, 167.

<sup>83</sup> Earl J. Hess, *The Union Soldier in Battle: Enduring the Ordeal of Combat*. (Lawrence KS: University of Kansas Press, 1997), 75-82.

<sup>84</sup> Jessica Meyer, *Men of War: Masculinity and the First World War in Britain*. (London: Palgrave Macmillian, 2011), 2.

## “The Perfect Type of Perfect Pleasure”<sup>85</sup> Cigarettes, Addiction and Cultural Movement

On February 3, 1865, the New Orleans *Times Picayune*, published the poem, “Cigarette.” The author wrote, “unsatisfying thing! six whiffs and one no more exists . . . and yet for you I left my pipe, that brown and ancient bowl, of ample size and colors ripe, that oft had soothed my soul. . . Avant ye, cigarette and pipe with whome I woo the night, my likeness forget!”<sup>86</sup> The anonymous Louisiana poet captured the nineteenth century Anglo-American perception of the cigarette as a uniquely addictive tobacco product, superior to other forms like the pipe. The author is seduced by the powerful sensations of the cigarette, and is convinced to part with his old flame, the pipe. The poem also captures the American perception of cigarettes as foreign, as the cigarette is called forward with a French “avant.” Uniquely potent, seductively foreign, yet marginal and limited in geographic scope, cigarettes were an intriguing, if vaguely threatening, form of tobacco consumption to Civil War era Americans. The cigarette offers us unique insights into cultural movement in the American South, and Anglo-American perceptions of the Latin races and their culture.

Most Americans during the Civil War era maintained a wariness of the cigarette because of its foreign origins, and its addictive power, but few felt immediately threatened by them.<sup>87</sup> During the 1860s, American cigarette consumption was still dwarfed by the popular preference for pipes, cigars, and chewing tobacco, but the cigarette was beginning to work its way between American fingers. One of the strangest assertions made by historians studying tobacco is that the cigarette came to America through European sailors, who passed along the practice from Parisian and Spanish urbanites.<sup>88</sup> This assertion is no doubt true of the North-Eastern coastal cities, where cigarettes were first produced

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<sup>85</sup> Oscar Wilde, *A Picture of Dorian Gray*. (1890), 81.

<sup>86</sup> "Cigarette." *Times-Picayune* (New Orleans, Louisiana), February 3, 1865: 1. Readex: America's Historical Newspapers. [Link](#).

<sup>87</sup> Milov, *The Cigarette*, 23.

<sup>88</sup> Gately, *Tobacco*, 204. Enstad, *Cigarettes, Inc.*, 17. Wagner, *Cigarette Country*, 32. Swanson, *A Golden Weed*, 229-230.



and sold commercially.<sup>89</sup> But there are more plausible explanations for the presence of cigarettes in other regions of the United States. Cigarettes were also native to Latin America and the Caribbean, and as interactions between American and Hispanic culture accelerated during the first half of the nineteenth century, the cigarette migrated north and settled in areas of the American South. The cigarette became a fixture in Louisiana, where Franco-Spanish traditions eased its integration.

When men from these areas of the South went to war in 1861, they brought their cigarettes with them and introduced them to their fellow Confederate soldiers and citizens. Elizabeth Frances Andrews, a girl living in Macon, Georgia, was taught how to roll cigarettes by a General Yorke of Louisiana, and she rolled them for refugees from Mississippi and wounded Confederate veterans. After Appomattox, she considered selling them to Union occupiers, “only, I could not bear the humiliation.”<sup>90</sup> Cigarettes also spread within the Confederate military. Alan Carter Redwood, a native of Lancaster, Virginia, fell in with the 6<sup>th</sup> Louisiana during the Second Manassas Campaign and wrote, “the tedium of this last service my companions relieved by games of 'seven-up' with a greasy, well-thumbed deck, and in smoking cigarettes, rolled with great dexterity, between the deals.”<sup>91</sup> Redwood went on to become one of the foremost illustrators of the Civil War, and his depiction of a “Louisiana Pelican” included a cigarette.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> The first advertisement for cigarettes appeared in the New York Herald in 1845: "Advertisement." New York Herald (New York, New York), February 23, 1845: [4]. *Readex: America's Historical Newspapers*. [Link](#). The First ad in the Richmond Examiner ran in 1861, perhaps appealing to the influx of new troops from throughout the south:

"Advertisement." *Richmond Examiner* (Richmond, Virginia), February 5, 1862: [4]. *Readex: America's Historical Newspapers*. [Link](#). Even Cigarette manufacturers admitted in their advertisements, “Their introduction to this country has not become general.” “The following. Opinions of the Press Are About Breg & Co.’s Celebrated Patent Cigarettes." *Evening Union* (Washington (DC), District of Columbia), February 1, 1865: [2]. *Readex: America's Historical Newspapers*. [Link](#).

<sup>90</sup> Entries of Jan. 13<sup>th</sup>, 1864, May 6<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, and 13<sup>th</sup>, 1865, Eliza Frances Andres, *Diary of a Georgia Girl, 1864-1865*. (New York, NY: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1908). [Link](#).

<sup>91</sup> Allen C. Redwood, “Jackson’s Foot-Cavalry at The Second Bull Run,” 535 in *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War: Volume Two*. Ehistory, Ohio State University. [Link](#).

<sup>92</sup> “Biography.” Allen (Carter) Christian Redwood, [1844-1922] American Author/Illustrator, “The Open Door” Circa 1900. *David Smernoff: Art & Objects for a Modern Era*. [Link](#).



A. C. Redwood, *A Louisiana Pelican*, Battles and Leaders of the Civil War.

The spread of cigarette smoking from Latin America into the American South is an example of cultural exchange in the “American Mediterranean,” as historian Matthew Pratt Guterl styles the region.<sup>93</sup> His work, along with the histories of Adam Rothman and Matthew Mulcahy, has established the myriad connections between the American South and Latin America during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.<sup>94</sup> These authors dwell on economic ties and the spread of slavery, but have often

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<sup>93</sup> Matthew Pratt Guterl, *American Mediterranean: Southern Slaveholders in the Age of Emancipation*. (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2008).

<sup>94</sup> Adam Rothman, *Slave Country: American Expansion and the Origins of the Deep South*. (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2005). Matthew Mulcahy, *Hubs of Empire: the Southeastern Lowcountry and British Caribbean*. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014). Also see, Megan Kate Nelson, *The Three-Cornered War: The Union, the Confederacy, and the Fight for the West*. (New York: Scribner, 2020).

failed to account for cultural movement within the region. The migration of the cigarette into the American South, and subsequent spread during the Civil War is an excellent example of cultural interchange within this region.

However, the cigarette did not enter the United States as a culturally barren commodity. Americans viewed cigarettes through a transatlantic discourse based on their association with Latin races. Anglo-American racial theory organized the white race into sub-groups. Anglo-Saxons were anointed as the master race, while the Latin races (including Hispanics) were subordinated due to their perceived proclivity towards sensual gluttony, violent rituals like bullfighting and dueling, and religious superstition.<sup>95</sup> The prevalence of cigarette smoking in Latin countries like France and Spain and their colonies in the New World gave Anglo-American observers a symbol of their moral weakness and sensuality. Further, the cigarette was closely linked to attractive Latin women, and became synonymous with seduction, sensuality, and compulsivity.

Anglo-Americans often noted that Latin American women and children smoked cigarettes, reflecting their shock and concern. Antebellum discourses on women and children understood them as morally weak and susceptible to corruption.<sup>96</sup> Ulysses S. Grant, traveling through Corpus Christi during the Mexican-American War, observed that “almost every Mexican above the age of ten years, and many much younger, smoked the cigarette.”<sup>97</sup> American soldiers in Mexico specifically noted smoking among children, manifesting an anxiety that the uniquely addictive cigarette was corrupting their underdeveloped constitutions and prematurely introducing them to adult vice. Similar ideas applied to women as well, but women also possessed the power of seduction, and could destroy men by tempting them into degenerate sensuality. Cigarettes were used to accent the seductive traits of

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<sup>95</sup> Neil Irvin Painter, “Ralph Waldo Emerson’s Saxons.” *The Journal of American History* Vol. 95, No. 4 (Mar., 2009), pp. 977-985.

<sup>96</sup> Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, 77-121.

<sup>97</sup> Ulysses S. Grant, *Personal Memoirs of Ulysses S. Grant*. Edited by E. B. Long. (New York: De Capo, 2001), 43.

Latin women. Another American soldier fighting in Mexico observed, “Everyone smokes, and the gracefulness with which a young maiden handles her cigarette is remarkable.”<sup>98</sup> Americans in California similarly noted the omnipresence of cigarettes on the lustrous lips of Hispanic women. William Kelly, visiting California in 1851, wrote, “It was observable in the Spanish houses that ladies set down to monte, betting, and smoking their tiny cigarettes with a most nonchalant air.”<sup>99</sup> Henry Vizetelley, went further, “The best part in the faces of the women are their eyes, which are black and very lustrous. The Californian belles, I am sorry to say, spoil their teeth by smoking cigarettos.”<sup>100</sup> These authors wrote within a stereotypical depiction of Latin women within Victorian literature: the Jezebel, a cigarette smoking temptress who was usually Spanish, Hispanic, or French.<sup>101</sup> Above all, Anglo-American observers in Latin America saw the weakest and most vulnerable segments of society smoking cigarettes, making the product synonymous with seduction, physical corruption, and moral degeneration.

Anglo-American observers also noted that Latin/Hispanic people smoked cigarettes in public in a compulsive and casual manner. Public smoking wasn’t necessarily taboo in the Anglo-American world, however the way Latin people smoked their cigarettes in public constituted a temporal and spatial differentiation that made the sensuality of the cigarette vulgar. Charles Dickens wrote from Spain in 1859, that the Spanish preferred the cigarette for “their suitability for smoking at odd moments when there was no time for a cigar.” Dickens explained that Latin cigarette smokers lit up casually and compulsively, “at church-doors, for instance; before going into mass; in the market over a bargain; at lunch over a ‘nip’ of aguardiente flavoured with aniseed; or between the acts of a sword-

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<sup>98</sup> R. W. Johnson, *A Soldier's Reminiscences: in Peace and War*. (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippencott, 1886), 67. American Civil War Collection, 1860-1922: From the AAS, no. 359. [Link](#).

<sup>99</sup> William Kelly, *An Excursion to California Over the Prairie, Rocky Mountains, and Great Sierra Nevada: With a Stroll Through the Diggings and Ranches of that Country*. (London: Chapman and Hall, 1851). [Link](#).

<sup>100</sup> Henry Vizetelley, *Four Months Among the Gold-finders in California: Being the Diary of an Expedition from San Francisco to the Gold Districts*. (New York: 1849). [Link](#).

<sup>101</sup> Gately, *Tobacco*, 197.

and- cloak comedy."<sup>102</sup> This jarred Anglo-American readers, who associated smoking with meditative intentionality, whether in public or in private. Constant and meaningless smoking was illogical, and signaled dependence and weakness. Among the Spanish, it seemed the cigarette dictated consumption habits. This was a dangerous inversion of the Anglo-American bourgeoisie conception of man's relationship with tobacco. When an Englishman asked his Spanish host how many cigars a "tobacco debauchee" smoked daily, his patron responded at most twelve, and mocked the incredulous response of the Englishman, "I see, you stare;—you English throw away a cigar after a few puffs," a nonsensical waste of "flavour" to the Spaniard, who smoked the "last burning puff of a cigarette when the bit of paper all but scorches your lip."<sup>103</sup> The Englishman's amazed reaction is a reflection of the ideal relationship the Anglo-American man maintained with tobacco. The cigarette exercised a modicum of control over its Latin user, evoking lust and a desire to extract all the "flavour" the tobacco offered. Anglo-American smokers dominated their relationship with tobacco by maintaining control of their discerning senses despite the pleasurable stimulation tobacco offered. Cigars were discarded when the flavor was exhausted, and custom blends of fine pipe tobacco were only to be smoked out of ornate pipes made of specific materials that ensured a quality smoking experience. The Latin smoker, caught in destructive lust, dragged on cheap and abrasive cigarettes, extracting every sensation of pleasure and satisfaction it offered, and damaging themselves in the process.

Anglo-American observers perceived that there was a noticeable difference in a smoker's relationship with their cigarettes, and were wary of the cigarette's seductive charms. The nature of cigarette smoking, in all of its public and compulsive iterations shocked Anglo-American observers, articulating by contrast their own vision of what an ideal relationship with tobacco looked like. Men

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<sup>102</sup> Charles Dickens, *Up and Down the Giralda*. 1/22/1859, Household Words, Volume XVIII, Page 789. Dickens Journal Online. The University of Buckingham.

<sup>103</sup> Charles Dickens, *Sherry*, 11/12/1858. Household Words, Volume XVIII, Page 511. Dickens Journal Online. The University of Buckingham.

were supposed to dominate their relationship with tobacco, and experience sensory pleasure without developing unmanly dependence. What they saw in cigarette smokers was the tail wagging the dog, a relationship dominated by tobacco with man enslaved by his own sensual cravings.

“Man is the Only Animal Who Smokes, Or Needs To.”<sup>104</sup> Conclusion

What is consistent in American depictions of chew, cigars, and cigarettes during the Civil War era, is an awareness of the unique relationship that tobacco generated with its users. In 1859, a reporter for the *Mobile Register*, quipped, “People say, ‘Oh I can leave off using tobacco at any moment.’ Let them try it on and see if they will soon *see* or *feel* that a habit is not so easily gotten rid of or laid aside.”<sup>105</sup> Through chew, cigars, and cigarettes, the diverse meanings that tobacco accrued during the nineteenth century is illustrated. However, depictions always focused on the pleasurable sensations evoked by tobacco, reflecting how nicotine deepened the cultural meaning behind depictions of different forms of tobacco. The general trend with tobacco was to create communities of taste and physical stimulation, differentiating the elegant from the vulgar, and the refined from the degenerate. However, the addiction tobacco generated could just as easily blur cultural distinctions, or cause them to be jettisoned wholesale. This is illustrated by occasions during the Civil War when soldiers became, in the words of Confederate soldier Sam Watkins, “thirsty for tobacco.”<sup>106</sup> During the siege of Chattanooga, Union soldier John Otto could not procure tobacco for his pipe, so he started recycling used quids of chewing tobacco, washing them in water, drying them in the sun, and smoking them with satisfaction and pleasure. “Now I suspect good many will sniff their noses and call this a vile, nasty and vulgar proceeding,” but Otto defended his action, “it was simply ‘making virtue out of

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<sup>104</sup> Mark Twain quoted in Gately, *Tobacco*, 175.

<sup>105</sup> Author’s emphasis. “The Use of Tobacco.” *Times-Picayune* (New Orleans), October 9, 1859: 10. Readex: America’s Historical Newspapers. [Link](#).

<sup>106</sup> Sam Watkins, *Co. Aytch: A Side Show of the Big Show*. Edited by Bell Irvin Wiley, (Wilmington NC: Broadfoot, 1882, 1994), 89.

mud.”<sup>107</sup> The filth of chew was washed away, and became refined and virtuous through the user and his efforts, but only acute craving could reduce cultural inhibitions so easily. When the men of a Pennsylvania Regiment came upon the debris of a routed unit during the battle of Chancellorsville, they noted a knapsack stenciled with the name “B. C. Thompson,” who left behind his underwear and Bible, but judging “from the scraps scattered about it was evident that Thompson had not forgotten his tobacco.”<sup>108</sup> The spiritual comfort of a bible and even the physical comfort of clean underwear were handily beaten by tobacco in a split second cost benefit analysis, illustrating the physiological power tobacco wielded over its user. For these soldiers, physical craving overcame cultural inhibitions regarding cleanliness and the importance of some material items.

The value of analyzing tobacco is in its power to establish the agency of material culture. Historian Jules Prown explains that artifacts are what we make of them, and “do not just happen; they are the results of causes. There are reasons why an object comes into existence in a particular configuration.”<sup>109</sup> This is true of tobacco, demonstrated through the various identities that were linked to different forms. But it is misguided to not account for the ways that a commodity’s organic attributes can influence the consciousness of a consumer. Few familiar with famines will doubt the power of physical impulses to overcome cultural prohibitions, and although tobacco addiction and starvation are two radically different physical phenomenon, they both point to the same theme: the power of commodities to influence the consciousness of historical actors. The sensory stimulation tobacco generated in nineteenth century Americans deepened and nuanced cultural meaning, but also blurred it, and demonstrated how cultural constructs could be forced to bow before physical impulses.

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<sup>107</sup> John Henry Otto, *Memoris of a Dutch Mudsill: The ‘War Memories’ of John henry Otto, Captain, Company D, 21<sup>st</sup> Regiment Wisconsin Volunteer Infantry*. Edited by David Gould and James B. Kennedy. (Kent OH: Kent State University Press, 2010), 202.

<sup>108</sup> *History of the Corn Exchange Regiment 118<sup>th</sup> Pennsylvania Volunteers: From Their First Engagement at Antietam to Appomattox*. (Philadelphia: J L. Smith Publisher, 1888), 177.

<sup>109</sup> Jules David Prown, “The Truth of Material Culture: History or Fiction.” 1-19 in *History from Things: Essays on Material Culture*. (Washington DC: Smithsonian Institute Press, 1993), 3.

Historians, authors, and anthropologists like William Thomas Okie, Mark Kurlansky, and Sidney Mintz, have all examined human relationships with consumable commodities, interrogating their connections to regional identity, globalization, power and cultural hegemony.<sup>110</sup> But what is lacking in these analyses is an accounting for the power of a commodity to influence the consciousness of the consumer. Tobacco illustrates how the definition of a commodity is created through a dialogue between the commodity's natural attributes and the cultural consciousness of its consumer. Conceptions of tobacco were inseparable from its physical effects, making tobacco partner in its own cultural depiction.

Tobacco is an insight into how nineteenth century Americans understood the physical impulses of addiction and comprehended their relationship with tobacco. Without a thorough understanding of nicotine and the neuroscience of addiction, Civil War era Americans perceived addiction as dependency, a trait of the user, not the product. Tobacco was not the issue, as the middle-class men who depicted chew as vulgar and cigars as elegant, demonstrated. Tobacco was not itself degenerate, but particular forms and the people who used them, were. Perceptions of tobacco were filtered through the physical experience of its consumption, illustrating Jules Prown's principle, "instead of our minds making intellectual contact with their minds, our senses make effective contact with their sensory experience."<sup>111</sup> Middle class men experienced the pseudo-narcotic properties of nicotine as an enlightening and ecstatic ritual that refined their sensibilities. In contrast, the vile pleasure of chew was offensive to taste and sight, degraded the senses, and generated unmanly dependency. Cigarette smokers were a parable about the ways a racially weak constitution could be seduced and destroyed by tobacco's sensual pleasures. When Civil War era Americans wrote about

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<sup>110</sup> William Thomas Okie, *The Georgia Peach: Culture, Agriculture, and Environment in the American South*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016). Mark Kurlansky, *Cod: A Biography of the Fish that Changed the World*. (New York: Penguin, 1997). Mark Kurlansky, *Salt: A World History*. (New York: Penguin, 2002). Sidney W. Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History*. (New York: Penguin, 1985).

<sup>111</sup> Prown, "The Truth of Material Culture," 17.



tobacco, they operated off a shared understanding of its sensory effects. The middle-class cigar smoker need not imagine what the pleasure of chew felt like, he only needed to explain how the pleasure offered by his cigar, was different.

A Confederate veteran worried that historians of the Civil War, ““would hardly stop to tell how the hungry private fried his bacon, baked his biscuit, smoked his pipe.””<sup>112</sup> The spirit of that Confederate veteran can hopefully rest easy now with at least an attempt made. But his words imply that the experiences and rituals of consumption that dominated his life were important, that the commodities being consumed had real and variable meaning, and that the bacon, biscuit, and tobacco, were crucial to an authentic understanding of the soldier’s experience. Beyond accenting identities and functioning as a sort of cultural grammar, Civil War era Americans maintained a unique relationship with their tobacco. Cultural meaning was created through a dialogue between the user’s consciousness and the organic traits of a consumable commodity. A cultural history of tobacco points to a more reactive and rich historical reality, where commodities wield an agency, and the historical actor develops a more nuanced relationship with material culture. Although inanimate, tobacco was anything but inert, and points to an entire universe of food, clothing, and consumables that influence their users, hinting at a dynamic that could shift our understanding of material culture, and the lived realities of historical actors. If “sometimes, a cigar is just a cigar,” then we must first understand what a cigar means, and more importantly, what it does for the user.

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<sup>112</sup> Quoted in Bell Irvin Wiley, *The Life of Johnny Reb: The Common Soldier of the Confederacy*. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1943, 2008), 3.

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