Self-Fashioning in Sarah Goodridge’s Self-Portraits

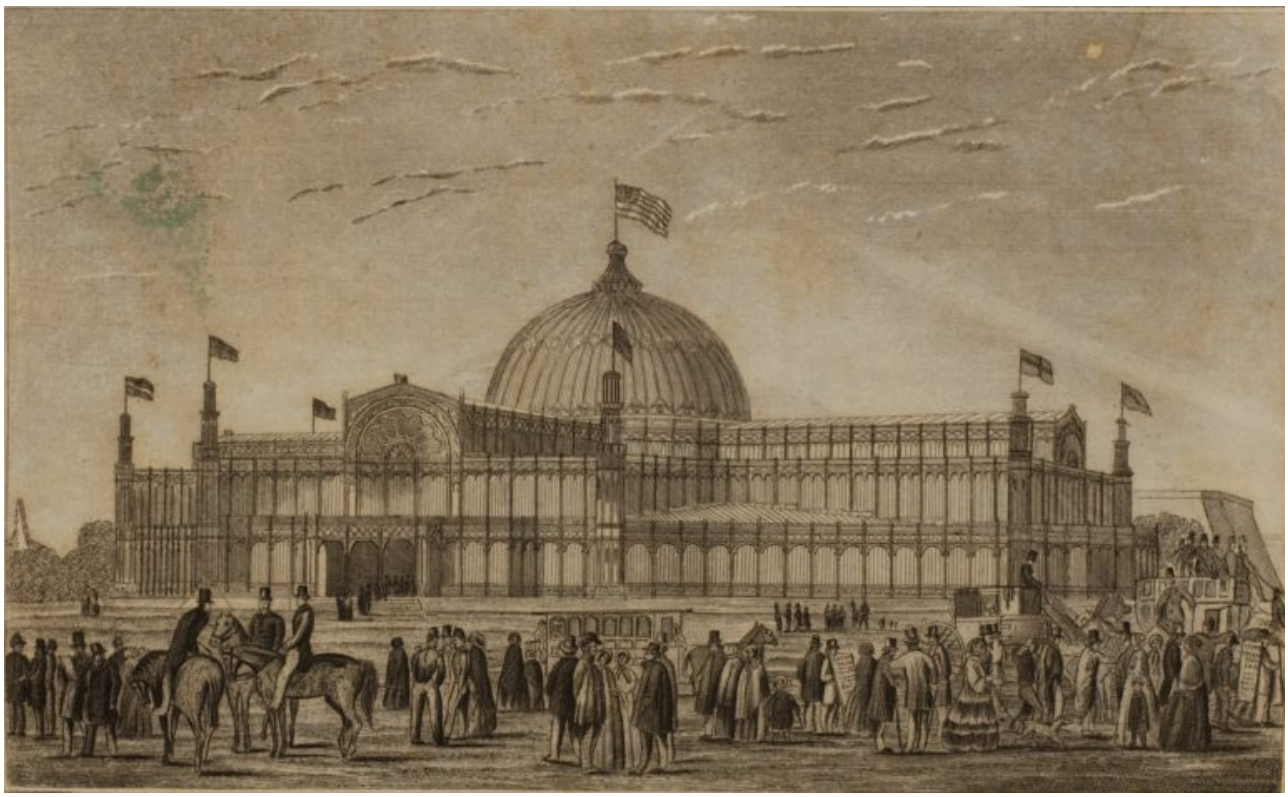
“Unlike West, Peale, and Trumbull, who gaze piercingly outward at viewers, Goodridge refuses a returning gaze, due not to modesty but to distraction.”

Self-portraiture and Self-Fashioning

For Fisher as well as for Parsons making a self-portrait was, finally, an act

of self-memorialization.

Best in Show



Nationalists […] aimed to rally Americans with the cry that the young nation could teach Old Europe a lesson or two about the industrial age on its own turf.

True Pictures

Fig. 1. Photographer unknown: subjects unknown (boxers), quarter plate ambrotype, c. 1860-65. Collection of Greg French.

Man is the only picture-making animal in the world. He alone of all the inhabitants of the earth has the capacity and passion for pictures . . . Poets, prophets, and reformers are all picture-makers, and this ability is the secret of their power and achievements: they see what ought to be by the reflection of what is, and endeavor to remove the contradiction.

—Frederick Douglass

In the late summer of 1839, at an extraordinary joint meeting of the Academy of Science and the Academy of Fine Arts in Paris, Louis Jacques Mandé Daguerre presented to the public and to the world the first truly successful photographic process: the daguerreotype. It is hard for us to grasp now, after more than 160 years of photography, the astonishment and enthusiasm that greeted Daguerre's discovery. On a small plate of metal, Daguerre coaxed the sun's rays, guided by the lens of a camera, to produce an image whose detail was as minutely faithful to reality as the reflection in a mirror—only in black and white. In an age of soaring expectations of science, the daguerreotype symbolized the possibility that human ingenuity might capture the very essence of nature. The daguerreotype is truly a marvel: strictly speaking, it is impossible to reproduce one, since a daguerreotype image sits on a silver surface that reflects like a mirror; one therefore sees oneself in the image, too. The only way to appreciate a daguerreotype properly is to see it, as it were, in person. This personal intimacy and immediacy lent much of the fervor to what Frederick Douglass called the new "passion for pictures." While the inventor of the daguerreotype was a Frenchman, nowhere did this passion catch on as it did in the still young United States. For Douglass, the former slave and abolitionist orator, photography, as a mirror of reality, would serve as a new weapon in the fight for freedom and human dignity. Samuel F. B. Morse, the American inventor and painter, happened to be in Paris in 1838-39 to promote his own invention, the electromagnetic telegraph. There he met and befriended

Daguerre. Morse tried his hand at the process as soon as Daguerre made it public, and, on his return to the States, he successfully spread word of Daguerre's genius to his fellow Americans. Scores, then hundreds, and finally thousands of American practitioners took up the art, improving the technique so rapidly that by the early 1840s a skillful daguerreotypist could earn a respectable income as a portraitist. The American public hungered unrelentingly for portraits. Douglass explains this passion well: "The great discoverer of modern times, to whom coming generations will award special homage, will be Daguerre. Morse has brought the seeds of the earth together, and Daguerre has made it a picture gallery. We have pictures, true pictures, of every object which can interest us . . . What was once the special and exclusive luxury of the rich and great is now the privilege of all. The humblest servant girl may now possess a picture of herself such as the wealth of kings could not purchase fifty years ago." By the 1850s and 1860s, American ingenuity had led to an explosion of photographic techniques including the ambrotype, tintype, and carte de visite—all to feed the endless American appetite for portraits. Tens of millions of images were produced. Once, portraiture had been the "special and exclusive luxury" of the rich or the noble in the form of paintings or sculptures that cost a small fortune to commission; now Americans could assert their egalitarianism in self-representation. For a day's wages, even a mill worker could confirm her dignity and make her bid for immortality (fig. 2).

Fig. 2. Photographer unknown: subjects unknown (mill workers in Winooski, Vermont), tintype, c. 1875. Collection of Gregory Fried.

As Frederick Douglass saw it, Morse and Daguerre were two facets of the same democratizing revolution, a revolution that was fast uniting the world in communication (Morse) and in image (Daguerre). For Douglass, this universalizing and democratizing revolution involved more than a breaking down of class divisions; it also meant attacking what we might call the optics of racism, that is, how white Europeans had come to see black Africans as a nearly

separate species, a view which corrupted painted portraits: “Negroes can never have impartial portraits at the hands of white artists. It seems to us next to impossible for white men to take likenesses of black men, without most grossly exaggerating their distinctive features. And the reason is obvious. Artists, like all other white persons, have adopted a theory respecting the distinctive features of Negro physiognomy.” When Douglass complained about how white artists “take likenesses” of blacks, he meant painters, sculptors, and engravers—all artists *except* photographers, because in all other art forms, the artist’s preconceived way of seeing necessarily intrudes upon the representation of the subject matter. In voicing this complaint, Douglass echoed a widely held notion about photography, one that persists to this day: that unlike other techniques in art, photography is a true mirror of nature whose method, because it relies on the nonpartisan effectiveness of rays of light rather than the hand of human beings, can present us with what Douglass calls “true pictures” of reality. Many contemporary theorists would now question that assumption. They would claim that photography is more art than science by pointing to how the subject matter is arranged, how the lighting is manipulated, to what type of lens or printing-out paper is employed, even to the way the scene is composed and framed. All these factors play as much of a subjective role in producing and seeing the work of art as does the hand of the artist with a paint brush or a mallet and chisel. The photograph, then, is no more a “true picture” of reality than a cubist painting by Picasso. But, at least for now, let us give Douglass the benefit of the doubt. After all, there is for most of us, in our pre-theoretical experience of photography, something of that experience of immediacy and revelation of reality that so astonished and inspired him, as well as so many other Americans, a century and a half ago.

Fig. 3. Photographer unknown: Frederick Douglass, sixth plate daguerreotype, c. 1845. Collection of Greg French.

Douglass was photographed often. One of the very earliest known portraits of

him was taken in the mid-1840s, probably just around the time that the publication in 1845 of *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave Written by Himself* made Douglass a national and then an international celebrity. This austere portrait of the still youthful Douglass, who meets our gaze so forcefully, epitomizes his hope and expectation that photography might bestow a public dignity upon African Americans that would provide a pictorial argument for their inclusion in the promise of the Declaration of Independence: that the only legitimate government is one that gives support to the self-evident truth that all men are created equal. Many other portraits make the same visual argument, such as this one of an unnamed self-confident horn-player (fig. 4).

Fig. 4. Photographer unknown: subject unknown, sixth plate daguerreotype, c. 1845-49. Collection of Greg French.

With his complicated instrument and sheet music, his portrait proclaims the capacity for refinement and self-cultivation. Or consider this portrait of an unidentified African American woman whose strength and resilience break through the stiff pose of conventional portraiture (fig. 5).

Fig. 5. Photographer unknown: subject unknown, sixth plate daguerreotype, c. 1847-52. Collection of Greg French.

These portraits, and others such as this one of a man holding a book, show sitters who have attained something like middle-class respectability (fig. 6).

Fig. 6. Hooke and Co. (Francis Hooke, proprietor): subject unknown, sixth plate daguerreotype, 1850. Collection of Greg French.

Other portraits, such as this 1849 daguerrotype of a man in his work clothes and an apron (fig. 7) or the portrait of a fireman in his gear (fig. 8), illustrate that African American laborers and artisans could also afford to show themselves for who they were, with pride in their trade or their work in public service.

Fig. 7. Photographer unknown: subject unknown, sixth plate daguerreotype, c. 1849-55. Collection of Greg French.

Fig. 8. Photographer unknown: subject unknown, quarter plate tintype, c. 1860-65. Collection of Greg French.

When the Civil War broke out, Douglass lobbied President Lincoln passionately for the right of African Americans to bear arms and fight for the Union cause. “I have a right to ask when I . . . march to the battle field” for “a country or the hope of a country under me, a government that recognizes my manhood around me, and a flag of freedom waving over me!” By 1863, black regiments were forming and young African American men resolutely met the call to arms (fig. 9).

Fig. 9. Photographer unknown: subject unknown, quarter plate ambrotype, c. 1863-65. Collection of Greg French.

The national struggle over the political meaning of race found expression in all arenas of antebellum visual culture. In *The Octoroon*, a statue made by John Bell, a naked and apparently “white” woman, her arms in chains, her clothes on the pillar beside her, bows her head in a sorrowful yet dignified resignation to inspection before going to the auction block (fig. 10).

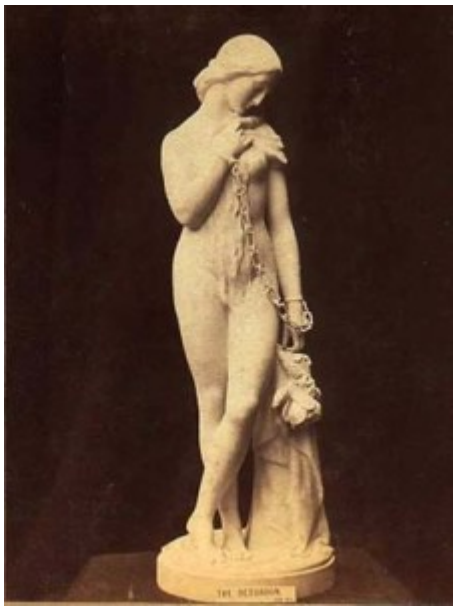


Fig. 10. Photographer unknown: The Octoroon (from a sculpture by John Bell), albumen print, one half of a stereograph, c. 1859-65. Collection of Gregory Fried.

As F. James Davis has explained so well in *Who Is Black?*, the American categorization of race is unique in the world. By the middle of the nineteenth

century, in reaction to the threat of abolition and to the fact of interbreeding between whites and blacks, the United States had developed the so-called “one drop rule,” stipulating that even a single African ancestor was enough to make a person black, not white—and legally a slave if born to a slave mother—no matter how distant that ancestor or how white-looking the subject. *The Octoroon* offers a challenge to the one drop rule by asking white Americans, Can’t you *see* that this person, whom the law and social convention treats as a slave and nearly another species from us, is in fact just like us? This same visual argument is made in a Civil War era photograph, “White and Black Slaves” (fig. 11).

Fig. 11. Kimball: subjects unknown (“White and Black Slaves”), carte de visite, 1863. Collection of Greg French.

The subjects here are liberated slaves from New Orleans—of very different skin color. The force of the title is the notion that the visual marker of skin color makes no sense as an indicator of race—and that, by extension, race itself makes no sense as a concept by which to organize society. “Slaves from New Orleans,” in which a very dark-skinned adult man reads with three lighter-skinned children, makes the same argument again: race and skin tone make no difference to the essential and universal dignity of human beings, all of whom deserve and are capable of education and uplift. Photographs like this can teach us about the fundamental ambiguity of race: it is conventional, not a natural category, but once convention gives race a social reality, race can make a terrible difference (fig. 12).

Fig. 12. Photographer unknown: Wilson [Chinn], Charley, Rebecca, and Rosa ("Learning Is Wealth"), carte de visite, c. 1863. Collection of Greg French.

Some images present difficulties for Douglass's hope that photography would serve as an unambiguous language of freedom. For example, consider this portrait of a slave from Missouri (fig. 13).

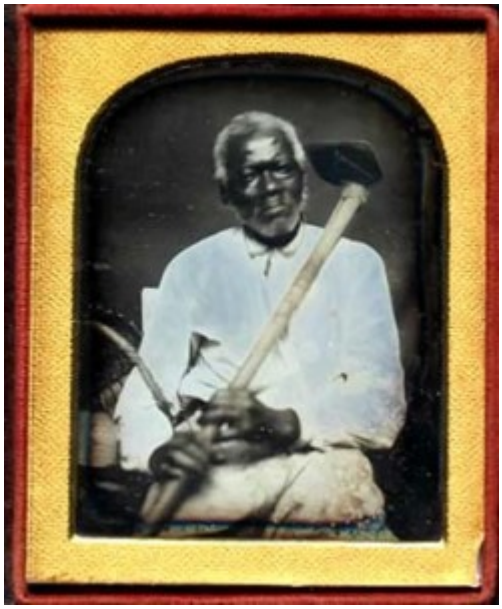


Fig. 13. Photographer unknown: subject unknown but identified as Richard's Family slave, Monticello (Lewis County), Missouri, quarter plate daguerreotype, c. 1850. Collection of Greg French.

The elderly man has been posed with a hoe, a symbol of his servitude, and a basket of produce at his side. We have to wonder: why did his owner make this portrait? As a mark of affection for this aging slave? As a token of the master's wealth and success? Other portraits of servants, whether slave or

free, also bear witness to a muted strength that speaks at the edges, as it were, of the subject matter of the photograph. The *intended* subject of this photograph (fig. 14) is obviously the wealthy white woman at the center; she or her family has paid for this portrait, and she has come with her dog and her servant to demonstrate her genteel status. The woman's attention is focused on the dog, not the person directly beside her, and yet it is the servant who meets our eye and makes human contact, a connection that her mistress refuses to her.

Fig. 14. Photographer unknown: subjects unknown, quarter plate ambrotype, c. 1857-61. Collection of Greg French.

Something similar takes place in this antebellum "nanny portrait," in which the intended subject is the white child, and the client includes the family's black slave or servant to indicate a class status: we are rich enough to afford this nanny (fig. 15).

Fig. 15. Photographer unknown: subjects unknown, quarter plate ambrotype, c. 1857-61. Collection of Greg French.

Here, the young nanny (possibly a slave, possibly a servant) meets our gaze. Her demeanor, with her hands folded protectively across the squirming toddler in her lap, is not one of defiance but rather of reserved supportiveness. But what do we make of the extraordinary element of the human hair sealed under the glass, between the brass mat and the image, arranged as a kind of halo around the two figures? Perhaps it is the child's, but it has the texture of an adult's hair rather than the wisps of a toddler. If the hair is the nanny's, then, that surely indicates the important place she held in the family, however subordinate. Three images from the Civil War era illustrate the national debate over the line between black and white (figs. 16, 17, 18).

Fig. 16. Kimball: Wilson Chinn, carte de visite, 1863. Collection of Greg

French.

Fig. 17. Kimball: Isaac and Rosa, carte de visite, 1863. Collection of Greg French.

Fig. 18. Photographer unknown: subjects unknown, carte de visite, c. 1861-65. Collection of Greg French.

All are cartes de visite, the products of a photographic process that allowed for mass reproduction, whether for sale at a profit or for raising charitable funds. Printed text on the reverse of the first two cards—of the branded slave, Wilson Chinn, and of the emancipated children, Isaac and Rosa—reads: “The proceeds from the sale of these Photographs will be devoted exclusively to the education of colored people in the Department of the Gulf, now under the command of Major-General Banks.” These two cards represent one contemporary interpretation of the goals of the war: on the one hand, to end the outrage of slavery perpetrated on men like Wilson Chinn (who is, by the way, the same Wilson as in Figure 12), and, on the other, to right an historical injustice by giving the liberated slaves a future as productive citizens of the nation. The

third image is more ambiguous. No maker takes credit for it, as the photographer Kimball does on the other two. The photograph depicts two youths in horrendously tattered rags. They are almost certainly contrabands—slaves who have taken the opportunity of war to escape from their masters to seek refuge with the advancing Union armies. Beneath the portrait someone has written in pencil, “All men are created equal.” This direct quotation from the Declaration of Independence seems to support the abolitionist position on the war—until one turns the card over and reads further: “This is not exaggerated in the least — : not one out of ten of the niggers here, who have run away from their masters (and there are thousands of them) can boast of such good clothes. Shove them into the army, I say, and let them do the fighting in this hot Department.” This was probably written by a Union soldier who bought the card at the front from a camp merchant and sent it home in the mail. His caption about “all men” being created equal is at best darkly ironic; he clearly refuses to accept equality with these unfortunates, thereby repudiating the idealistic interpretation of the American founding as truly universalistic. While Frederick Douglass wanted former slaves to fight to affirm and confirm their dignity and equality as citizens, this anonymous writer wants them to fight purely because he sees them as expendable—and precisely because he deems them beneath human dignity. This is the tragic and enduring contradiction of race as represented in antebellum photographs: the same image can arouse at once pity and righteous indignation or contempt and arrogant dismissal. Perhaps it is too much to ask for an image alone to conquer the prejudices that we bring to bear in our seeing. Consider this tintype produced around the end of the Civil War period: it depicts a grinning white man in blackface (fig. 19).

Fig. 19. Hathaway: subject unknown, gem tintype in paper mat, c. 1865. Collection of Gregory Fried.

Although the Jim Crow character as a feature of minstrel shows became popular in the generation before the Civil War, early photographic images of people in

blackface are quite rare. Of course, minstrelsy "sees" the darkness of the African complexion. But by appropriating that complexion and superimposing it upon a white face—whose whiteness the viewer is never really meant to forget—all the participants in the performance of minstrelsy, both actors and viewers alike, attempt to make invisible the human dignity of the truly black faces who share their world and whose presence calls out for equality. The Civil War ended slavery, as Douglass had hoped, but Reconstruction failed to give former slaves the civic equality that Douglass believed the Declaration of Independence required as due to all human beings. Instead, there descended the long night of Jim Crow segregation, enforced by the terror of lynching. Was Frederick Douglass naive to hope for a revelation of human dignity from photography? Only if we believe that the failures of the past must be our failures, too. We can look carefully at these portraits. We can search in them for the echoes of human presence. We can affirm, celebrate, and restore the hidden, the neglected, and the anonymous. In this way, their past can be our present. And our future. Douglass said that we can "see what ought to be by the reflection of what is, and endeavor to remove the contradiction," and surely it is not too late for idealism like that. We are still the picture-making animal that can envision a future by seeing the present clearly in reflection on the past. *The author wishes to thank his colleague and friend, Greg French, for permission to employ so many images from his collection in writing this essay.*

Further Reading: See F. James Davis, *Who Is Black? One Nation's Definition* (University Park, Pa., 1991); Frederick Douglass, "Life Pictures," holograph dated 1861, in *The Frederick Douglass Papers*, Library of Congress, microfilm accession no. 16377, reel 14, frames 394-412; Frederick Douglass, "Pictures and Progress," in John W. Blassingame, ed., *The Frederick Douglass Papers*, ser. 1, vol. 3 (New Haven, 1979-92); Merry A. Forresta and John Wood, eds., *Secrets of the Dark Chamber: The Art of the American Daguerreotype* (Washington, D.C., 1995); O. Henry Mace, *Collectors' Guide to Early Photographs*, 2d ed. (Iola, Wis., 1999); Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (New York, 1993); Beaumont Newhall, *The Daguerreotype in America*, 3d ed. (New York, 1976) and *The History of Photography*, 5th ed. (New York, 1994); John Stauffer, "Race and Contemporary Photography: Willie Robert Middlebrook and the Legacy of Frederick Douglass," in John Wood, ed., *The Journal of Contemporary Photography: Culture and Criticism*(Brewster, Mass., n.d.); Colin Westerbeck, "Frederick Douglass Chooses His Moment" in Susan F. Rossen, ed., *African Americans in Art* (Chicago, 1999).

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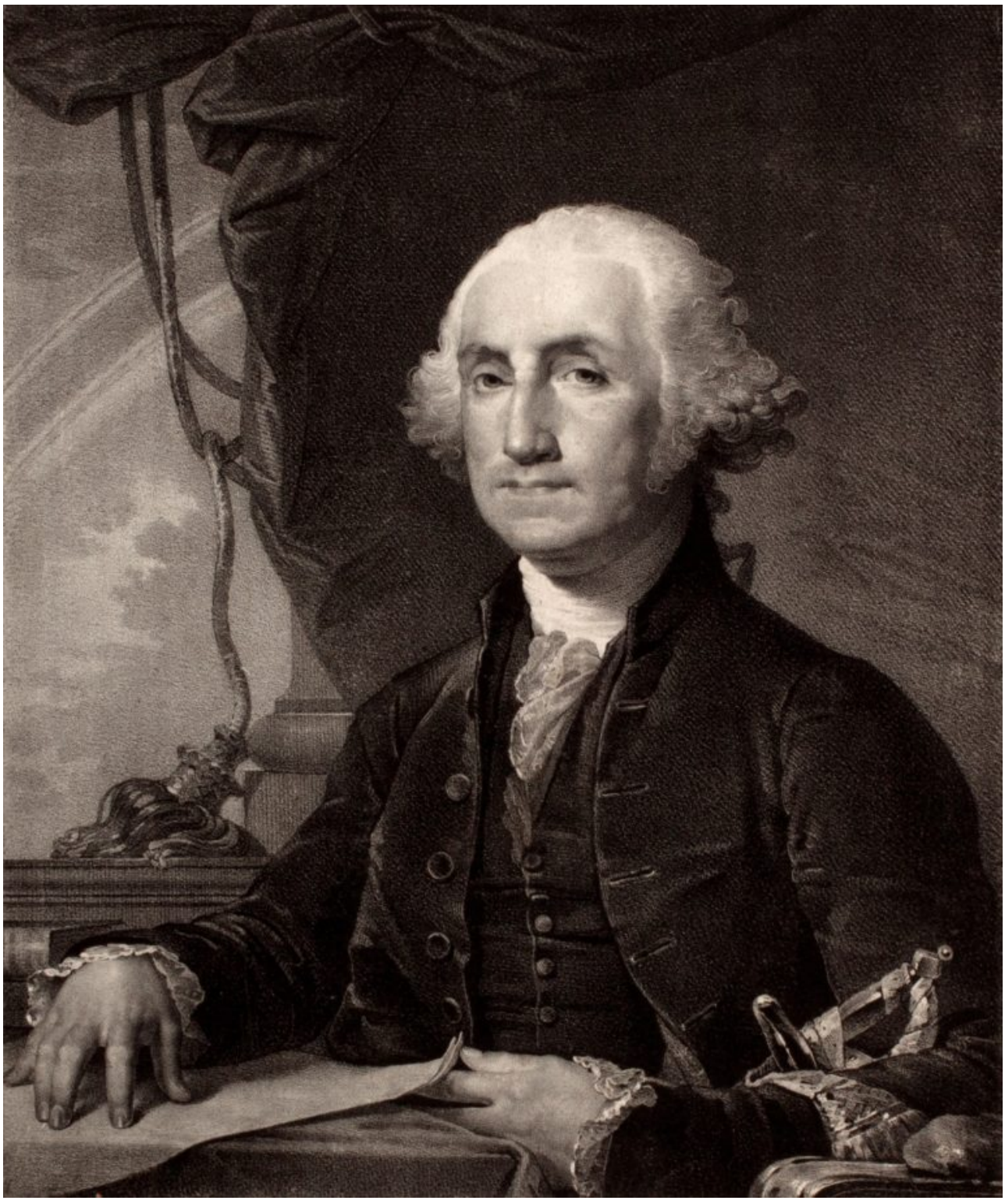
Face Value



Presented as part of the Special Issue: “Revolution in Print: Graphics in Nineteenth-Century America”

It was far less labor intensive—and therefore less expensive—for a painter or engraver to render a head than a full figure posed against an elaborate background.

Before Photography: Visualizing Black Freedom

Jasmine Nichole Cobb

Picture Freedom

REMAKING BLACK VISUALITY IN THE EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURY

Jasmine Nichole Cobb views early photography as an especially potent visual technology for the expression of black agency.

War Stories and Love Stories: Captain Oliver Perry and the Making of American Patriotism

How, and why, did the language of love and romance become the language of war?

Soldiers' Tales: "What Did You Do in the War, Great-Great-Great-Great-Grandpa?"

It might have been old age that dimmed his memory and robbed him of a garrulousness that likely tired his grandchildren. It might have been the diffidence of a habitual loser unaccustomed to telling officialdom something good about himself. It might have been a posttraumatic reluctance to delve too deeply into old memories of terror and pain.

Civil War Veterans and the Limits of Reconciliation

By the summer of 1881, news of the recently discovered Luray Caverns in Virginia's famed Shenandoah Valley had spread throughout the East Coast. Hundreds of curious visitors read accounts of the spectacular grottoes and began to flood the small farming town to see what was being touted as one of the world's geological wonders. The Union veterans of Carlisle, Pennsylvania, were no exception—but theirs was not to be a sightseeing adventure alone. In June, the Carlisle post of the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR) wrote to the prominent men of Luray proposing an excursion of the ladies and gentlemen of Pennsylvania's Cumberland Valley to the caverns. They suggested "a friendly exchange of greetings" with "yourself and other surviving members of the Confederate army." There was no need for "ostentatious show" or "expensive reception." Rather, they merely desired a "friendly hand-shaking." "We will furnish a band of music," the GAR post gladly wrote. "If you think favorably of meeting us there, with as many comrades as you can conveniently muster, we should be pleased to form the new acquaintances."

On July 21, nearly 2,000 people, most of them Confederate veterans from the Shenandoah Valley, gathered at the newly opened Luray train station to greet 600 Pennsylvanians—their former enemies. Lieutenant Andrew Broaddus, Confederate veteran and editor of the local paper, delivered an address calling upon the veterans of both sides to forget the war, reminding them "that only cowards bear malice, and that brave men forgive." He ardently believed that

partisan leaders continued to employ political issues to “keep down the cry of peace that comes from every section,” but hoped that this meeting would do much to end such sectional animosities. In language that would prove representative of Blue-Gray reunions for decades to come, GAR Post Commander Judge R. M. Henderson concurred with Broaddus, but added that the veterans should “forget everything except the lessons of the past.” Veterans might gather on the former fields of battle to ceremoniously shake hands over the proverbial bloody chasm, but as Henderson observed, they would not surrender their cause.

> Rather than fostering a memory of the war that erased the causes and consequences of the conflict, Blue-Gray “love fests” often created a deeper attachment to the respective Union and Lost Causes.

Throughout the 1880s and 1890s, such affairs helped convince Americans on both sides of the Mason-Dixon Line that the horrors of war and the upheavals of Reconstruction were behind them. The creation of the first national military parks, popular magazines, plays, and even political campaigns encouraged northerners and southerners to embrace their former foes in the spirit of brotherly love and American progress. In recent years, historians such as David Blight, Nina Silber, and Timothy Smith have interpreted these gestures as evidence of a new national memory of reconciliation that triumphed over earlier memories of the war. Forgotten was the Union Cause with its emphasis on preserving the republic and ending slavery, they argue. Buried were the disputes over the war’s causation. Instead, northerners appeared to buy into the Lost Cause sentiments that extolled the battlefield bravery and valor of all (white) soldiers. Reconciliation, these scholars contend, offered both a white-washed memory of the war and a vision of sectional healing on Confederate terms.

This vision of sectional harmony premised on amnesia about the war’s causes, however, was not shared by most veterans. Instead, the majority adamantly defended their own cause as righteous and just while refuting that of their opponent as without merit. Rather than fostering a memory of the war that erased the causes and consequences of the conflict, Blue-Gray “love fests” often created a deeper attachment to the respective Union and Lost Causes. While they might occasionally meet in the spirit of reconciliation as they did at Luray in 1881, neither Union nor Confederate veterans were willing to forget—much less forgive—all that had happened. True, heart-felt feelings of reconciliation were rare indeed.

Setting the soldiers' monument in place at Gettysburg in 1869. Courtesy of the Gettysburg National Military Park (1997), Gettysburg, Pennsylvania.

Reunion of the 87th Pennsylvania in 1869. Courtesy of the Gettysburg National Military Park (T-2792-B), Gettysburg, Pennsylvania.

To understand the role of Reconciliationist sentiment in shaping the memory of the Civil War, it is helpful to recognize the various memory traditions of the conflict. The Lost Cause, a romanticized interpretation of the war in which Confederate defeat was presented in the best possible terms, emerged even before the soldiers of the Army of Northern Virginia had stacked their weapons and signed paroles. On April 10, 1865, Robert E. Lee read his General Order No. 9 to his men at Appomattox Court House, Virginia. In it, he lauded the loyalty, valor, and "unsurpassed courage and fortitude" of "the brave survivors of so many hard-fought battles" and assured his men that the surrender was through no fault of their own. Instead he insisted that the army had been "compelled to yield to overwhelming numbers and resources." By the 1870s, through the efforts of elite white southern women of the Ladies' Memorial Associations who helped establish Confederate cemeteries and the first Memorial Days, as well as such former Confederate leaders as Jubal A. Early, most white southerners had embraced the Lost Cause. Defenders of this version of the war's history repeatedly maintained that states' rights, not slavery, had caused the conflict

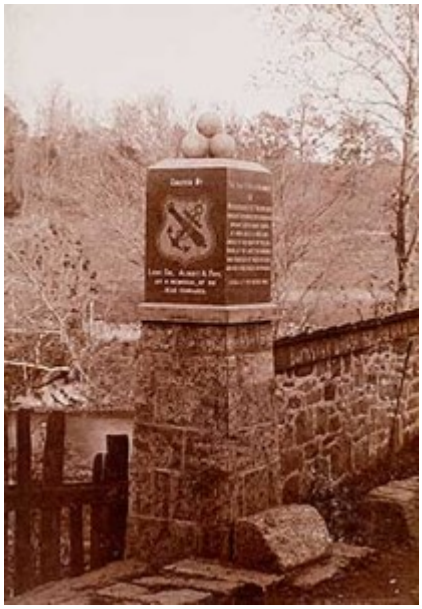
and held that most slaves remained faithful to their masters even after emancipation. They claimed that Confederate soldiers had fought honorably and bravely and that the South had not been defeated but overwhelmed by insurmountable odds (and therefore was destined to lose). They maintained that, throughout the war, southern white women remained loyal and devoted to the cause. Finally, they heralded Robert E. Lee as the epitome of a southern gentleman and the greatest military leader of the war.

White northerners likewise began to memorialize their cause in the postwar period. But instead of women, the Union army performed the burials while veterans' organizations, such as the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR), orchestrated Memorial Days. As former Confederates sought to explain their defeat, the triumphant North needed to elaborate on what victory meant for the nation. Most northerners celebrated the Union Cause, which argued that the war had been fought to preserve the republic from secessionist fanatics who threatened the Founding Fathers' vision, and therefore, the future viability of democracy. Many of those who espoused the Union Cause included emancipation of the slaves within the accomplishments of victory, but others, such as Frederick Douglass, believed that emancipation was the *most* important cause and accomplishment of the war, and as such, espoused an Emancipationist memory.

By the early 1870s, these were the three clear memories of the war: the Lost Cause, Union Cause, and Emancipationist Cause. After federal troops withdrew from the South in 1877, a fourth memory of the war appeared: Reconciliation. In the 1880s and 1890s, a heightened spirit of national reconciliation peaked in the United States. Union and Confederate veterans commenced participating in joint Blue-Gray reunions, while popular magazines such as *The Century* increasingly valorized the battles and leaders of the war. In the 1890s, extolling the bravery of former foes would reach its zenith at the first national military parks—Chickamauga and Chattanooga, Gettysburg, Antietam, Shiloh, and Vicksburg—created through the joint efforts of Union and Confederate veterans. But when the two groups met at Blue-Gray reunions, they agreed to remain silent on the divisive political issues that had caused the conflict as well as the turmoil of Reconstruction. Instead they commiserated about the severity of camp life and marches while commending each other for their bravery on the field of battle. For Reconciliation to flourish, white northerners and southerners had to reach a compromise predicated upon the exaltation of military experience and the insistence that the causes of the war as well as the postwar consequences, namely Reconstruction, be ignored.

But this reverence for Reconciliation was never complete, nor was it without qualifications. Union veterans continued not only to espouse their allegiance to the Union Cause (and in many cases, emancipation) at monument dedications and Memorial Days, they also maintained that theirs was the only good and noble cause. In southern periodicals and at Confederate reunions, former rebels persisted in their tributes to the Lost Cause. The Blue-Gray reunions and Reconciliationist rhetoric did not mean that animosity between the former foes had vanished. Instead, sectional animosity continued to linger, a fact made

evident in the former Confederate capitol in the mid-1890s, during the so-called heyday of Reconciliationist sentiment.



“Marker Erected by Lt. Col. Albert A. Pope As A Memorial of His Dead Comrades at Antietam.” Photograph No. 20 taken from album “Views of Antietam Battlefield,” by W.B. King, Hagerstown, Maryland (1870). Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts.

1st Massachusetts Monument at Gettysburg, dedicated in July 1886. Well into the 1890s, Gettysburg was chiefly a Union memorial park dedicated to the memory of those who fought for the United States. Courtesy of the Gettysburg National Military Park (T-1969), Gettysburg, Pennsylvania.

On May 30, 1894, tens of thousands of former Confederates gathered in Richmond for the unveiling of the Soldiers’ and Sailors’ Monument on Libby Hill. It was not the monument itself that would cause so much friction; rather, it was the

words of the day's orator, Rev. R. C. Cave, that sparked a national debate and stirred the embers of sectional animosity, violating the unspoken truce of Reconciliation. In the course of his address, Cave spoke the standard lines about soldiers' bravery and devotion common at every monument dedication, be it Union or Confederate. But he went further that day, delivering what many northern writers described as a eulogy for the Confederacy. Appomattox had not been a divine verdict against the South, he argued; instead it had been the triumph of the physically strong. Going beyond the traditional Lost Cause message of overwhelming northern resources, he intoned that "brute force cannot settle questions of right and wrong." "The South was in the right," he maintained, noting that "the cause was just; that the men who took up arms in her defense were patriots." And yet he still went further, denouncing the character, motives, and actions of the North and suggesting that it was southerners, not northerners, who had been more devoted to the Union. "Against the South was arrayed the power of the North, dominated by the spirit of Puritanism," he intoned, "which … worships itself and is unable to perceive any goodness apart from itself, and from the time of Oliver Cromwell to the time of Abraham Lincoln has never hesitated to trample upon the rights of others in order to effect its own ends." When he was finished, newspapers reported that the crowd leapt to their feet in thunderous applause.

As news of Cave's remarks made its way northward, a storm of denunciation flowed from every corner of the nation. From newspapers in Milwaukee, Philadelphia, Washington, D.C., and Portland, Oregon, came headlines of "Unreconstructed Rebel" and "The Rebel Yell is Heard: Treason Preached at Richmond's Monument Unveiling." The *Washington Post* declared Cave's statements out of place in this "era of reconciliation," reminding southerners that Union soldiers had recognized the "valor, the devotion, and the fine manhood of the Confederates" and tried to spare "them every possible humiliation in their defeat." Surely the South would denounce such brazenly treasonous speech, the paper observed. A handful of southern papers did dismiss Cave's remarks as ill-conceived and hardly representative of the South, but many southern newspapers either reprinted his speech without any commentary or explicitly endorsed him. And each time they did, northern papers responded in turn. With each salvo, the conflict continued to escalate.

The *Richmond Times* rushed to defend Cave and to reject claims of northern magnanimity at Appomattox—part of the foundation for reconciliation. "What did that 'affectionate' and 'magnanimous victor' next do?" the paper asked, "He subjected people of the South to a rule of thieving carpetbaggers, voted into place by a population of ignorant, semi-barbarous slaves and sustained in place by the bayonets of that 'affectionate and magnanimous enemy.'" By invoking the "evils" of Reconstruction, the Richmond paper had broken the precarious compromise implicit in the Reconciliationist memory of the war. Similarly ignoring the compromise, the *Chicago Daily Tribune* fired back, attacking both Confederate soldiers' honor and their cause: "They were not defending their common country," the *Tribune* declared, "They were trying to disrupt it … The Confederates fought for the perpetuity of slavery and the destruction of the

National Union.” The paper went on to forcefully declare, “[the Confederate] cause was wrong.”

The real battle, however, erupted not between newspapers but among veterans. In early June 1894, the Columbia Post GAR of Chicago wrote to the Lee Camp of Confederate Veterans in Richmond; the letter was republished in northern newspapers. Two years earlier, the Columbia Post had travelled to the former Confederate capital, where they enjoyed “the hospitality and generous welcome” of the Lee Camp. But upon hearing of Cave’s oration they were outraged. The Columbia Post informed the Lee Camp that on the very day Cave had delivered his oration, they had joined with Confederate veterans in Chicago to decorate the graves of Confederate prisoners of war without mentioning the cause of the conflict or its final settlement. Certainly, they felt, the Lee Camp that had so graciously hosted them would not endorse Cave’s statements. “If the sentiments uttered by Rev. Cave … and [the] ‘tremendous applause’ from the audience assembled there, be the true sentiments of the average ex-Confederate veteran,” they noted, “then will it indeed be hard to ever heal the breach between ‘brothers of one land,’ engendered by that awful conflict, and the generous action of our Union veterans seems truly wasted.” Invoking Reconciliationist sentiment as a way to contest Cave’s combative Lost Cause rhetoric, the Union veterans noted that, “While anxious to look with pleasure upon these reunions in your sunny South land, we cannot but regret such disloyal sentiments as these, and must protest in the name of the fallen of both sides.” In the estimation of the GAR, the Confederate veterans’ insistence on defending Cave’s statement displayed a new surge of rebel disloyalty, more than thirty years after secession.

“Reunion of Company B 25th Mass. Vols. and Generals William F. Draper, Packett and Sprague.” Photograph taken at their reunion at Northboro, Massachusetts, June 5, 1903. Courtesy of the Regimental Photographs of the Civil War Collection, American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts.

Reunion of Regimental Co. C51, Worcester, Massachusetts. Photograph taken at their reunion in 1908. Courtesy of the Regimental Photographs of the Civil War Collection, American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts.

Upon receiving the letter, the Lee Camp was at first unsure how to respond. Some favored tabling the discussion in order to avoid a national controversy, while others remained indignant. But continued newspaper coverage stirred the debate, with one southern paper referring to the Chicago GAR post as “a lot of hoodlums, cattle, and vulgarians.” Soon other Confederate organizations began to rally behind Cave. The Southern Women’s Historical Society of St. Louis sent the reverend their “heartfelt thanks,” while the Pickett Camp of the United Confederate Veterans voted to remove the photograph of a Federal officer from its camp walls.

Finally, in July—more than a month after the unveiling—the Lee Camp responded to the Columbia Post. Expressing shock at the post’s response to Cave’s speech, the Confederate veterans observed that while they did not suspect “any purpose on your part to provoke sectional controversy or add fuel to the dying embers of sectional hate; but such seems to be its natural tendency.” The Lee Camp proclaimed itself unable to understand how Cave’s words could be interpreted as “disloyal” and affirmed his contention that Appomattox had settled the military questions but not the Constitutional ones. “Physical might cannot determine the question of legal or moral right,” they observed. They noted that both sides had erected monuments to their respective causes, and that they too had laid flowers on the graves of their former foes. But most importantly, the camp noted that Cave had not spoken on Memorial Day or a monument unveiling at a battlefield in which both sides were meant to be honored. Instead, “his oration was delivered *at the unveiling of a monument to the private soldiers and sailors* who died in behalf of the Southern cause, in resistance to an armed invasion of their native land, and in defense … of their personal liberties and constitutional rights.” It was therefore right, they argued, that “he should also refer to and vindicate ‘the cause for which they fell.'”

This was the crux of the matter. Confederates believed that they were free to observe, defend, and memorialize their cause when speaking only to other Confederates. For them, the Lost Cause was the primary memory of the war. When they came together at Blue-Gray reunions or battlefield dedications, they were

willing to embrace Reconciliation and remain silent on the issues of causality and consequence. But when honoring their cause among their brethren, they would not be silent. And the same held true for Union veterans. They, too, espoused not only the righteousness of the Union cause—and in many instances, Emancipation—at GAR functions and monument dedications, but they readily held that the Confederate cause had been wrong and without moral worth.

Perhaps it is not surprising to find Confederates defending their cause or Union veterans doing likewise. But the commotion caused by Cave's remarks and other such incidents force contemporary Americans to reevaluate our understanding of Reconciliation and larger patterns of Civil War memory. They reveal that even though Reconciliationist sentiment might have reached its apex in the 1880s and 1890s, it was never complete nor uncontested. Nor was it the dominant interpretation of the war. Instead, veterans and civilians from both sides tenaciously clung to their own cause, whether that was the Union, Lost, or Emancipationist. Attention to continued divisiveness among veterans also reminds us that Reconciliation was not solely based upon a white-washed memory of the war, as historians have argued. In this case, as in countless others, northerners had not forgotten (or agreed to forget) that slavery caused the war. This was not the issue that stirred so much antagonism; rather, it was the GAR Post's insistence that rhetoric such as Cave's was disloyal. Reconciliation was therefore built on a compromise much more tenuous than the veterans who met at Luray in 1881 predicted, and much more complicated than historians have so far acknowledged.

The battles that ensued in the decades after the war were more than just semantics, boasting, or even nostalgia. Instead, veterans of both sides employed competing memories of the war, its causes, and its consequences to advance their own personal and political agendas. At monument dedications, GAR post meetings, or Confederate reunions, veterans revived the animosities of 1861-1865 for reasons ranging from rousing partisan furor in the name of political power to fear that their sacrifices were being forgotten by the next generation. Union veterans simultaneously recalled their pride in the American flag and their loathing of the slaveholding oligarchy when they waved the bloody shirt. Former Confederates defended their actions as sanctioned by the Constitution and rejected the notion that Union soldiers had marched off to war to free the slaves. In the process of remembering and defending their respective causes, the veterans of both sides ensured that Reconciliation would not come to dominate the landscape of Civil War memory—at least during their lifetimes.

But where do we stand 150 years after the war? So far, the sesquicentennial has left us with a mixed legacy with which to judge war memory. Countless journalists, event organizers, and other public figures have embraced Reconciliation, resurrecting the images of the Blue-Gray love fests. There was no right or wrong cause, they argue—northerners and southerners both believed they were right. Others have emphasized Emancipation, using commemorations to correct what they perceive as versions of the war that focus only on white

combatants, highlighting instead slavery as the war's primary cause as well as the contributions of African Americans to both emancipation and the overall war effort. Still others have feared offending either those who still promote the Lost Cause or those who advocate an Emancipationist memory, electing to forego any observance of the 150th anniversary. Hence there is no national sesquicentennial commission, and only a handful of state commissions devoted to marking this moment in American history.

Union veterans at the 1913 Gettysburg reunion. Contrary to many images of veterans shaking hands over the proverbial bloody chasm, many veterans elected to spend their time with their comrades, not their former enemies. Courtesy of the Gettysburg National Military Park (2693), Gettysburg, Pennsylvania.

It is too soon to tell exactly what the sesquicentennial's overall impact will be on the course of Civil War memory. But several issues remain clear. First, Reconciliation never was, nor has it ever been, the predominant memory of the war. Try as they may, Americans have never succeeded in finding a memory of the war that absolves all parties of blame and is palatable to northerners and southerners, white and black, men and women. Second, slavery was not forgotten by the war generation—not by white Union veterans, Confederates, or African Americans. To somehow "discover" that slavery was at the center of the conflict is patronizing to those men and women. Finally, it is clear that the Civil War is far from forgotten. Indeed, it seems likely that for decades and perhaps generations to come, Americans will continue to grapple with questions of the war's memory, of what to commemorate and what to condemn.

Confederate veterans at the 50th anniversary of Gettysburg in 1913. While the occasion celebrated reunion, sectional discord lay just beneath the surface for many veterans on both sides. Courtesy of the Gettysburg National Military Park (2694), Gettysburg, Pennsylvania.

Further Reading

On reconciliation, see Nina Silber, *Romance of Reunion: Northerners and the South, 1865-1900* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1993); David Blight*, Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American History* (Cambridge, Mass., 2001); Timothy B. Smith, *The Golden Age of Battlefield Preservation: The Decade of the 1890s and the Establishment of America's First Five Military Parks* (Knoxville, Tenn., 2008).

The literature on the Lost Cause is voluminous. Readers might begin with Gary W. Gallagher and Alan Nolan, eds.,*The Myth of the Lost Cause and Civil War History* (Bloomington, Ind., 2000); and Gaines M. Foster, *Ghosts of the Confederacy: Defeat, the Lost Cause, and the Emergence of the New South* (New York, 1987).

For historians who have discussed the Union cause at length, see Gary W. Gallagher, *The Union War* (Cambridge, Mass., 2011); and John R. Neff, *Honoring the Civil War Dead: Commemoration and the Problem of Reconciliation* (Lawrence, Kansas, 2005): 8-10.

On the Emancipationist Cause, see Blight (Cambridge, Mass., 2001); and Kathleen Clark, *Defining Moments: African American Commemoration & Political Culture in the South, 1863-1913* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2005).

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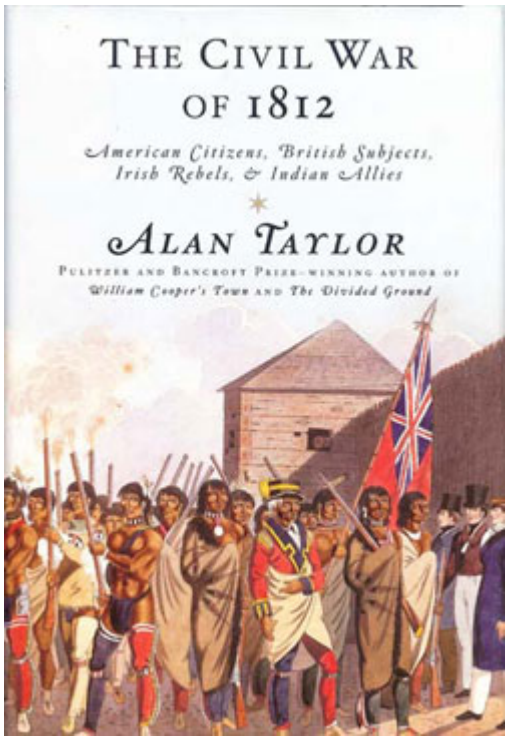
The Not-So-Civil War



British flogging of impressed American sailors was particularly resented because of its association with the treatment of slaves in the southern states.