Poems



To Find You III

[O’Keeffe’s Abiquiu House, Abiquiu, NM; present day]

Bushes of mulberry, rosemary, cherry;
trees of filbert, plum, and peach. Beside
the ladder leading to the roof, blue
and yellow columbine; a head-high
stalk of hollyhock, the unblossomed
buds like pursed green stars.

In the back, the view unobstructed
is somehow less than the same view
framed by your studio window.

A bush of the sage that ranges
ragged across these basins is,
in your patio, trimmed like bonsai,
tame as a housecat. How did you see
into this once-ruin of adobe and mud,
used by villagers as a sty for their pigs,

and know—both the vision
of what it could be and that your will
could make it so? You hired local women
to daub and smooth, every surface
leveled by a woman’s hands. I stand
in the shadow of your patio door,
breathe its new coat of acrid shellac,
dust eddying up in the afternoon light.

To Find You IV (Georgia O’Keeffe Museum Research Center)

[Santa Fe, NM; present day]

Just beyond the windows, sprinklers arc steady intervals between the trees, which are all in full leaf. It does not feel like desert. The archive’s air is cold and dry, each of its three large tables covered in brown leather, topped with two lamps. Small brown moths flutter through the room. One lands on my foot.

In low gray rows with small white labels, the drawers are glass-topped, heavy. Regulations require I ask a security guard to pull each out for me, drawer by drawer.

G1: Source Materials/Animal Bones

Teeth sprout from the jaw like desert coral, the old bone fissured to woodgrain. Vertebrae like spongiform model airplanes, most no bigger than the large moth skating across the drawer’s glass. It is so quiet I can hear the flap-tapping of its wings.

G2: Source Materials/Animal Bones

A photo of O’Keeffe in the back of a car, a fragment of pelvis held to her eye like a monocle. That section of pelvis is in the center of the drawer. A card reads, “O’Keeffe used bones to explore the combination of near and far.” Propped next to it, a tiny replica of her painting *Pelvis IV*—giant foregrounded pelvis framing a tiny faraway moon.

Outside, a crow plucks grubs from the trunk of a catalpa tree, its leaves broad as a man’s palm. They shake in the breeze. A thousand hallelujah hands flushed through with light.

Polaroids, mostly, taken by O’Keeffe, blurred with chemical peel and streak.

“Skull and Chair:” A cow skull hung on the wall above a straight-backed wooden chair. Written on verso, “This is at the end of the Portal—beyond the ladder.

That chair I paid ninety-eight cents for 22 years ago. One thing I have that is worth its price. It isn't antique. It is from Montgomery Ward. G"

In Box 6, photos of the same chair. She set her paintings in the dirt, propped against its seat, to photograph them for Alfred.

One year of Stieglitz/O'Keeffe original correspondence—1944—in seven ringed archival boxes. Foxed and tea-colored in their acid-free sleeves, I can feel their corners through the plastic.

But the pages of three letters are too long, folded over in their sleeves. The archivist removes them—three sheets of onion skin on the large empty table. She held these. He held these. My breath flutters their edges. I have the urge to put the corner of one in my mouth. I resist this.

Her "I" whorls like an ear, making the letters so distinctly hers she didn't need to sign them. Two black moths stutter against the white window frame. I notice her abstract sculpture on the lawn outside—the same lopsided spiral. How can I care so much for people I have never met?

To Find You

[Georgia O'Keeffe Museum, Santa Fe, NM; present day]

In the great hall: your
navy canvas shoes, jeans, long-sleeved shirt,
polka-dotted kerchief. Your voice
from the screening room. *On this knife I might*

fall off on either side. But I'd walk it again.
I'd rather be doing something I really wanted.
Here is your resurrected campsite: canvas-wrapped
canteen, Sterno stove, miniature cast—

iron fry pan. Your tent roofed by a rough tarp,
walls of gray-black oilcloth. Your biography
broods the air. A tour guide mock-corrects himself,
"As Georgia, I mean, *Ms. O'Keeffe* always said …"

From the gift shop, two middle-aged men wear
monogrammed chambray shirts "just like the ones *she*
wore." An elderly woman cries in the corner
before the swirl of *White Rose*. Just this morning,

I had to explain, again, to a friend, that your paintings
are more than postcards writ large; that you
both are and are greater than your biography.
I'm tired. How did you make the choice

to be alone for your art? They've curated
a corner of the tent up. What would I produce
from such loneliness? There is the edge
of your sleeping bag, brown and tan. How

desperately I want to crawl in, to rest for a while
in your temporary bed, breathing in what you left.

To Find You II

[On Photography: A Questionnaire]

Georgia:
What is it like to be photographed?
To be dressed, posed, forced to move or be still?
Is your pose meant to convey a message?
If so, is it yours or one that Alfred has given you?
In photos of you with another person, whom do you see first?
Describe what it's like to look at photos of yourself
—right after they were taken.
—years later.

Alfred:
When you meet someone new, how long before you reach for your camera?
Describe
—the act of taking a picture.
—developing it, her face swimming up through the chemical waters.
When looking at a photo you've taken
—do you recall what happened before or after?
—can you remember past the frame of the shot?
When shooting, how cut-off or connected do you feel to your subject?
How does a moment change when you begin taking pictures?
How does a person?

To Find You

In silence, grow
transparent as an old-world

photographer's glass plate.
My edges going

hazy as the noon desert, salted
as a body beneath that zenith

sun—until I am prepared
to slot into the coal black

hold of a moonless night.
Naked in the barrens

until morning, ready
for what images

come with such
exposure.

…And Now For Something Completely Similar



Since the doleful events of September 11, one of the points made by almost everyone, from the president to television commentators to the freshmen in my survey class, has been the radical newness of the era in which we now find ourselves. “Four Days That Transformed a President, a Presidency and a Nation, for All Time,” ran one *New York Times* headline, by no means the most hyperbolic of the past two weeks. There is no denying that we all have been changed to some degree by what one hopes will stand for a long, long time as the deadliest single day for Americans outside of a battlefield. And few American

battlefields have ever come close. Though most other nations have had their cities attacked in the twentieth century—if not destroyed, invaded, or occupied—the United States has seen nothing like this since the Civil War. If foreign attack is the standard, then the last occasion can be pushed back to the Battle of New Orleans in January 1815, in which we lost exactly eight men. Perhaps most importantly, all the close rivals of September 11 in our history involved solder and sailors, who at least knew that they faced death, not office workers and airline passengers in peacetime who by rights should have been more concerned with where they were going to have lunch than whether they would survive the day.

The recent events are new to us, then, if not to the people of London or Paris or Berlin or Tel Aviv or Hiroshima. The last decade has been an era when many people seemed to feel that nothing "real" had ever happened to them, nothing that tested their limits and characters. Suffused with a somewhat facile sense of the insubstantiality of modern life (and politics), middle-class people seemed to yearn for experiences more intense than what their suburban lives provided. Bourgeois anomie is an old story, but it seemed particularly virulent in the 1990s. Vast audiences sought out extreme experiences as entertainment—from slasher movies, to first-person-shooter video games, to thrill rides, to so-called "reality" television, to popular military history. Until last month, there was even a transportation disaster-themed restaurant, The Crash Café, being planned for Baltimore's Inner Harbor. At the same time, there was a bull market not just on Wall Street, but in evangelical religion and other forms of spirituality and self-help, all promising to connect believers to a realer reality than anything we have down here.

In a bewildering variety of ways, Americans sought to find and identify with something authentic and serious in their own personal histories, from a childhood trauma to a psychological syndrome to an ethnic heritage to a record of wartime heroism and 1960s activism. Occasionally these bits of personal reality were invented or exaggerated, sometimes by historians, but even the scrupulously honest among authenticity-free Americans had the vicarious option. So baby boomers and their children embraced a burgeoning cult of their World War II era forbears, a cult that was just gearing up for another round of Greatness, related to the HBO series "Band of Brothers," when the terrorists struck. And for political guidance, at least during this past summer when David McCullough pushed crotchety little John Adams to the top of the charts and Joseph Ellis continued to attract huge audiences for tales of the founding fraternity, we were supposed to look all the way back to the "Even Greater Generation," the Founders.

Now something real really has happened, not to one of the great generations, but to us. And it is almost unbearable. With a political language devalued by decades of politicians declaring "wars" on every problem of the moment except those requiring military action, there is no available hyperbole that can contain our feelings in the face of such a tragedy, though most of them have been tried. But has September 11 really changed us forever? Has the nation set

off down a fundamentally new and different path?

Many early indications suggest not. While President Bush's spokesmen have mercifully eschewed the bombing-only tactics pioneered by Nixon and Kissinger (and pursued so frequently by Bush *père* and Clinton), their "new war" sounds suspiciously like most of the other ones since World War II: premised on vague but expansive abdications of congressional authority to the executive branch, and launched with little suggestion that the populace will be required to mobilize or sacrifice for the cause. The new war may go on for years, the administration says, and we might not be told much about it, and it will sometimes be dirty, but we can count on its not affecting us too much, since it will be conducted mostly through precision strikes, "special operations," and commando raids. Ironically, "war" seems to be the chosen term this time around, not because war will actually be declared or a fundamentally new approach taken, but because all the older euphemisms ("police action," "conflict," etc.) lost their magic in previous postwar stalemates and defeats. The American people are aware of the quagmires and disappointments that this nonwar warpath has led us into before—and in the Cold War conflicts we at least had the benefit of knowing pretty clearly who and how we were to fight.

Nor is the same old "new war" plan the only depressingly familiar aspect of the present situation. The warnings that began on the very day of the attack—injunctions that Americans would have to give up some of their freedoms and forgo some democratic niceties in order to combat the threat—have an American history predating the United States itself. Faced with unruly Boston tax protesters in 1768, Massachusetts Lieutenant Governor Thomas Hutchinson advised his superiors that there would have to be "an abridgement of what is called English liberty" if the colonies were to remain part of the British Empire. Thirty years later, it was the prospect of war with France—and fear of revolutionists and French sympathizers at home—that had influential figures not just calling for but actually achieving such abridgements, in the form of the Alien and Sedition Acts. (The French Jacobins were the very first modern "terrorists," of course, though they favored the state-sponsored variety. And while Robespierre probably could have given Osama bin Laden a run for his money, Vice President Thomas Jefferson was considered the likely American terrorist mastermind of that era.) Mobs did most of the wartime liberty abridging during the nineteenth century, but the early decades of the twentieth proved to be something of a golden age for the official variety in America. Faced with seemingly diabolical threats like communism, anarchism, and the Hun, the U.S. government engaged in periodic spasms of trampling on the rights of citizens and immigrants in the name of internal security, beginning with the post-World War I Red Scare that led to mass arrests and deportations and the creation of the FBI. In asking for broader powers to detain suspected terrorists without trial and to conduct electronic surveillance, John Ashcroft's Justice Department is only returning to the original mission behind its twentieth-century expansion. (Luckily for the country, the usual southern conservative base for crackdowns on the civil liberties of radicals and immigrants seems to be crumbling in Congress this time around.)


Figure 1: Jefferson’s “Terrorist” Plans Exposed: The Providential Detection. Political cartoon by unknown artists, ca. 1800.

Though always presented as clear-eyed wisdom borne of hard experience, calls for the restriction of civil liberties and the unleashing of government police powers have tended to come almost automatically from people with profound and preexisting doubts about whether liberal democracy and widespread individual freedom can survive in a world of hatred, war, and power politics. Alexander Hamilton, John Adams, and other Federalists, for example, had made their doubts about the staying power of the U.S. Constitution, as written, perfectly clear even before the French crisis of the late 1790s. On this and many later occasions, these doubts have arisen from an apparent distaste for debate, compromise, and individualism per se, with military crisis providing a golden opportunity to command greater political conformity and a more authoritarian style of governance. Over the past century, in fact, these retrenchments have been more easily accepted by the public and the political system than they were earlier in American history. The exposure of Hutchinson’s advice created a scandal that pushed the colonies toward revolution, while the Sedition Act inspired the expansion of the opposition press it was meant to suppress. But just over a century later, Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer, who oversaw the World War I Red Scare, became a serious presidential contender for his trouble, while his protégé J. Edgar Hoover remained a popular hero for a half century afterwards. In the 1950s, government repression of radical political groups was the stuff of popular books and films like *I Was a Communist for the FBI*, a hit in both media.


Figure 2: Poster for I Was A Communist for the F.B.I. (1951)

If answering terror by repressing civil liberties promises to take us back to the future, still another sadly familiar development can be detected in the present national mood. A certain note of grim self-congratulation has crept into many of the public commentaries and remembrances, a sense that a crisis like this might actually be rather healthy, a kind of exercise regimen for the body politic that will purge it of doubts and decadence and bring us back to more authentic values. “I didn’t think this country could come together like it has. I thought we were too cynical,” said the morning DJ on my car radio the week after the attacks, echoing the ecstatic paeans to national unity that began to issue from the media within hours of the World Trade Center’s collapse. Overnight, two of the roughest media images going, those of New York

City and its mayor, were transfigured to the point of sainthood, while all former political questions were declared to be petty disputes when compared to the coming struggle. A less benign side of the new era of good feelings was found by a *Seattle Times* reporter at a Colorado gun shop. While stocking up on ammunition in order to meet the present crisis, the regulars were debating whether Hitler or the Founding Fathers had said that "A country needs a war every 15 years to get united." They approved the sentiment, wherever it originated.

This is only the most recent occasion when war and crisis have been welcomed as opportunities for moral regeneration. Samuel Adams hoped that the Revolution would make Boston into the "Christian Sparta" that he imagined existed in the time of his Puritan forefathers. The Revolutionary War, and most of those that followed, opened with a sometimes brief but always fierce celebration of the nation's redemption from partisan division and weakness of character. This effect skipped the little-ballyhooed Vietnam conflict, but that omission was more than made up for by the orgy of unanimity around the previous President Bush during the highly debatable Persian Gulf War.

It remains to be seen whether the present mood will mature into a Revolutionary-style "*rage militaire*," as the Bush administration initially seemed to hope, or whether the self-centered habits of the Clinton age will reassert themselves. As of this writing, my money is on the latter. The administration has shifted over to assuring people that something will be done to Osama and the Taliban someday, while encouraging the American people to do their patriotic duty the new economy way, by getting out there and consuming for the common good. Perhaps this time we'll use shopping bags instead of carpet bombs. That might be something new after all, though probably no more effective as foreign policy.

Further Reading:

For two important works on the origins of the war-as-moral-regeneration theme in American history, see Charles Royster, *A Revolutionary People at War: The Continental Army and American Character, 1775-1783* (Chapel Hill, 1979) and Ann Fairfax Withington, *Toward a More Perfect Union: Virtue and the Formation of American Republics* (New York, 1991). For its presence even in the U.S.A.'s least successful conflict, the War of 1812, see Steven Watts, *The Republic Reborn: War and the Making of Liberal America, 1790-1820* (Baltimore, 1987) and Roger H. Brown, *The Republic in Peril: 1812* (New York, 1964).

For further evidence on the new era's lack of newness, and other political commentary, see "Publick Occurrences Extra," a new Weblog on the author's personal site.

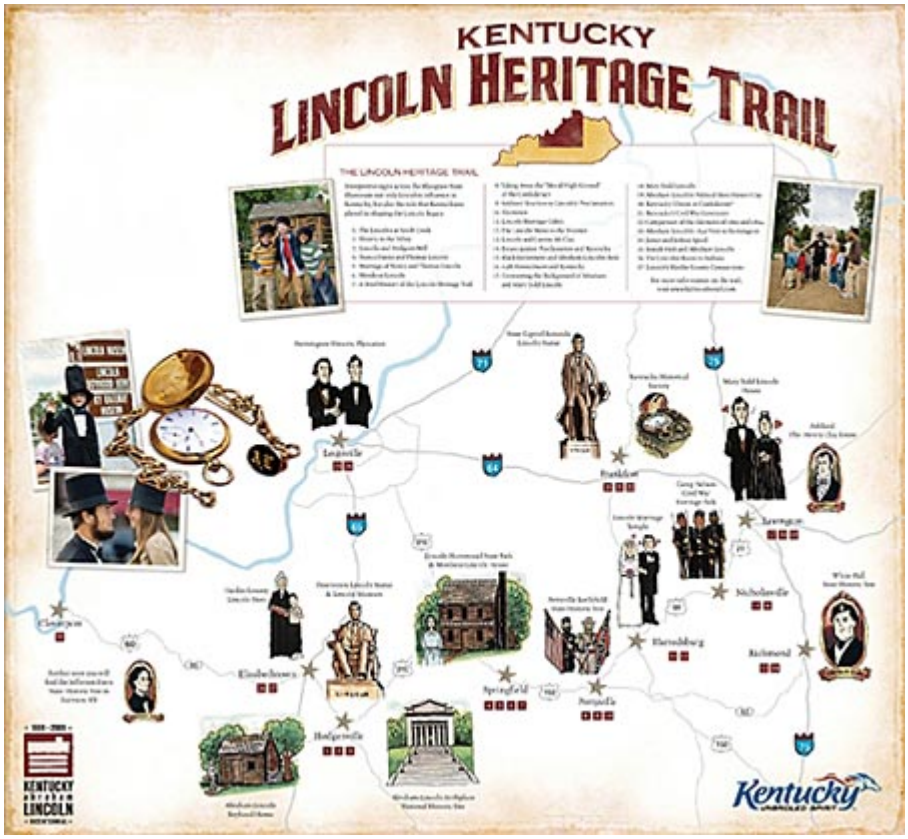
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Common-place injects a new issue into the political campaign as the 2016 presidential race enters its final stage.

“Gettysburg Wasn’t His First Address”



Kentucky’s Belated Embrace of Abraham Lincoln

Earlier this year, Skyler Hornback, a 12-year-old from Sonora, Kentucky, racked up $66,600 on a single day during *Jeopardy*‘s Kid’s Week competition. His feat made minor national news because his winnings amounted to the third-highest one-day total (for kids *and* adults) in the game show’s history. During his mid-show interview with host Alex Trebek, the affable, bespectacled Skyler professed his fascination with all things related to Abraham Lincoln. “Lincoln is a very intriguing figure because most people think they know him when they really don’t,” Hornback asserted. “There was just so much behind that beard and top hat that people just don’t realize.” He informed Trebek of his ability to recite the Emancipation Proclamation from memory. As luck would have it, the *Final Jeopardy!* category turned out to be “The Civil War.” Confident in his knowledge, Hornback wagered $30,000, and responded to the question: “Abraham Lincoln called this document which took effect in 1863, ‘A fit and necessary war measure,'” with the correct answer: the Emancipation Proclamation.

In some ways it does not seem surprising that a young man with a penchant for historical knowledge might know a lot about the United States’ sixteenth (and arguably most famous) president, especially when he has grown up in Larue County, Kentucky, the back yard of Lincoln’s birthplace, and graduated from Abraham Lincoln Elementary. But among white Kentuckians, such youthful ardor for Lincoln is a relatively recent phenomenon. Hornback’s generation may be the first in the history of the state to share both a widespread awareness and pride in their state’s claim to the “great Emancipator.”

For well over a century after Lincoln's death, white Kentuckians were disdainful, hostile, or just plain disinterested in highlighting the role their state had played in the life of the iconic president. While these attitudes began to change in the wake of the Civil Rights Movement and the revisionist Civil War history it spawned, in the early twenty-first century this trend coalesced into a whole-hearted celebration of the 200th anniversary of the president's birth. Between 2008 and 2010, Kentuckians feted Lincoln with galas, ceremonies, monuments, and highway signage that highlighted his Bluegrass State heritage. In doing so, they were not simply recovering a native son, but also turning their backs on a Confederate identity they had embraced for the past 150 years. They re-cast the state's Civil War era narrative, and finally chose to remember and raise the public consciousness of painful and complicated historical topics such as slavery and emancipation.

> The generous outpouring of affection Kentuckians showed him during the bicentennial would certainly have surprised Lincoln if he had been around to see it.

The generous outpouring of affection Kentuckians showed him during the bicentennial would certainly have surprised Lincoln if he had been around to see it. He was born in 1809 in a tiny log cabin located near Hodgenville, in the lush, rolling hills of central Kentucky. A few years later, the Lincoln family moved to a second cabin at nearby Knob Creek, and they remained there until Thomas Lincoln moved his family to Indiana in 1816 when Abraham was only seven.


Daguerreotype of Abraham Lincoln, frontispiece ("From a Rare Daguerreotype in the Collection of Oliver R. Barrett"), Lincoln and His Wife's Home Town, William H. Townsend (1929). Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts.


"Mary Todd Lincoln at Nineteen Years of Age," ("From a Portrait by Her Niece, Katherine Helm, Now in the Collection of the Author") between pages 68 and 69 of Lincoln and His Wife's Home Town, William H. Townsend (1929). Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts.

The fact that Lincoln married a Lexingtonian, Mary Todd, and understood well the habits and views of white Kentuckians did not help his popularity in the state during his political career. In the summer of 1860, as he was running for president, he wrote to a resident of Elizabethtown, Kentucky, who had asked him to campaign there: "You suggest that a visit to the place of my nativity might be pleasant to me. Indeed it would." Then he joked, "But would not the people lynch me?"

At the heart of white Kentuckians' dislike of the Republican candidate was his untrustworthy position on slavery—his insistence that the Constitution bound the government to protect slavery where it existed, but that the government should prohibit the spread of the institution to all new territories and states. This did not suit most white people in a state strongly wedded to the peculiar institution. Though a plantation economy did not dominate the state, many white Kentuckians depended on slaves to assist them in their small-scale agricultural and industrial endeavors. Twenty-eight percent of all Kentucky households owned slaves in 1860, and many more relied on hired-out slave labor, so the economic and cultural attachment to slavery was very strong in the Commonwealth.

As a consequence, while Lincoln may not have been in danger of losing his life to angry Kentuckians in 1860, he was not in danger of winning their votes, either. That November, most of the state's white men proved their allegiance to latter-day Whiggery and to Unionism by voting for Constitutional Union candidate John Bell. Lincoln captured fewer than two percent of their votes, and only two voters in Mary Todd's hometown cast their ballots for him. In early 1861, with secession sentiment swelling throughout the South, the victorious Lincoln penned some remarks that he hoped to deliver in Kentucky on his way to take office in Washington, D.C. He got as close to the state as Cincinnati, just over the river, but he never got to deliver his message appealing to Kentuckians to remain loyal in the face of his election. "Who amongst you would not die by the proposition that your candidate, being elected, should be inaugurated soley on the conditions of the Constitution, and laws, or not at all?" he had planned to ask them. "What Kentuckian, worthy of his birthplace would not do this? Gentlemen, I too, am a Kentuckian."

Most white Kentuckians would have been loath to acknowledge solidarity with the incoming president based on his natal origins. They did, however, cling to the Union and to Lincoln's promise to protect slavery where it existed. Indeed, for many Kentuckians, the conviction that the Union would continue to be the best protector of slavery—as it had for over eighty years—inspired their loyalty. In turn, as the war began, Lincoln trod very lightly in his handling of his birth state. He respected the state's early policy of neutrality and once famously explained: "I hope to have God on my side, but I must have Kentucky." In the face of strategic and tactical needs on the part of both the Union and Confederate armies, neutrality became impossible to maintain. Luckily for Lincoln, the tradition of Unionism in Kentucky was a strong one, and by the war's end the number of Kentucky white men who fought for the Union was at least twice that who had fought for the Confederacy.

Thus, from the beginning of the conflict, the loyalty of white Kentuckians to the Union was precarious and patchy. Many civilians aided Rebel forces, compelling the Union military government, which occupied the state beginning in September 1861, to crack down on disloyal activity. People suspected of Confederate sympathies could neither hold elected offices nor serve as teachers, ministers, or jurors. Federal authorities suspended freedom of the

press. Despite Lincoln's kid-gloved approach, many white Kentuckians—even loyal ones—became resentful of what they saw as federal interference in civilian affairs.

Of course, what really caused whites to turn against Lincoln as the war dragged on was his evolving position on slavery. Kentuckians were well represented in the group of border state congressmen Lincoln called to meet with him at the White House in 1862 to discuss a plan for compensated emancipation in their states. The state legislature appointed a committee to respond to the proposition and they pledged to combat the plan "by all peaceable means," and promised that should that course of action fail, "Kentucky [would] rise up as one man and sacrifice the property, and, if need be, the lives of her children in defense of the Constitution under which alone we can ever hope to enjoy natural liberty." When Lincoln, having given up hope of conciliation, forged ahead with his emancipation policy, they rejected him too.


"Mary Todd Lincoln," photograph between pages 182 and 183, Mary Todd Lincoln: An Appreciation of the Wife of Abraham Lincoln, Honoré Morrow (New York, 1928). Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts.

"After 200 Years, It's Time To Party," advertisement for the Kentucky Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial in 2008. Courtesy of the Kentucky Department of Tourism. Original design by Christina Hobbs and Mike Duck.

After Lincoln issued the preliminary emancipation proclamation in September 1862, Benjamin Buckner, a major in the 20th Kentucky Volunteers, described it as "an abominable infamous document, [which] falsifies all his pledges both public and private." "The Union Kentuckians are most shamefully treated," he exhorted, "and by reward of the presidents want of good faith, which is only equaled by his lack of sense, we find ourselves in arms to maintain doctrines, which if announced 12 months ago, would have driven us all, not withstanding our loyalty to the Constitution & the Union, into the ranks of the Southern Army." He resigned his commission in the Union Army and went home for the duration of the war. In January 1863, John Harrington of the 22nd Kentucky wrote to his sister in dejected tones: "I enlisted to fight for the Union and the Constitution, but Lincoln puts a different construction on things and now has us Union Men fighting for his Abolition Platform and thus making us a hord of Subjugators, houseburners, Negro thieves, and devastators of private property."

White hatred of Lincoln only increased when he began enlisting enslaved African American Kentuckians in the Union Army. One of the Commonwealth's most venerated Union warriors, cavalry commander Frank Wolford, exclaimed in 1864 that people of Kentucky would refuse to "keep step to 'the music of the Union' alongside of negro soldiers." Throughout the spring and summer of that year, Wolford made a series of long-winded speeches—one purportedly lasting for four

hours—in which he denounced Abraham Lincoln as a “fool” and a “tyrant,” and his policy of enlisting African Americans as illegal and “disgraceful to the people” of Kentucky. He encouraged white Kentuckians to resist any efforts to enroll them in the Army. Wolford’s series of extended protests led to his arrest and dishonorable discharge from the Union Army, and elevation to the status of folk hero among many in his home state. One Bluegrass resident noted, “Whilst the policy of his course is doubted, even censured by some, the gallant Wolford is now the most popular man in our part of the State & the President universally condemned for his tyrannical course in dishonorably dismissing [him].”

Such anti-Lincoln sentiments were common among white Kentuckians on the homefront as well. Western Kentucky resident Ellen Wallace’s husband owned around thirty slaves at the outset of the war, but initially she remained a staunch Unionist who in April 1861 projected that any decision by Kentucky to secede would lead to the state’s “ruin.” But over the next two years, Wallace came to believe that ruin came to Kentucky anyway in the form of Abraham Lincoln (a “vile wretch” of a president) and his “infamous proclamation.”

Over the course of the war, Wallace repeatedly confided in her diary in vividly racist terms her fears of the physical harm and sexual threat that emancipation would bring to the women of Kentucky. Wallace charged Lincoln with placing “innocent women and helpless infants at the mercy of black monsters who would walk in human shape.” “Servile insurrection will be the consequence [of emancipation] unless the strong arm of the nation prevents it,” she wrote on another occasion, “and the blood of helpless women and children will flow in torrents if [Lincoln’s] wicked and fanatical policy is not over ruled.” It could be, Wallace feared, “St. Domingo all over again.” As African Americans assumed authority within the Union Army, Wallace complained that Lincoln had “made the negro master of the white man as far as his power goes putting arms in their hands … the white man has to turn his horses head and obey Lincoln’s negro troops with clenched teeth.” In the diaries and letters of many Kentucky Unionists, Lincoln was a villain, responsible for corrupting their understanding of the war’s true purpose, which was to save the Union. They directed much of their anxiety, frustration, and anger surrounding the war and its outcome at him.

Not surprisingly, Lincoln did not fare much better in the estimation of most Kentucky whites after the war. While the many locales in other victorious Unionist states rushed to commemorate the martyred president, white Kentuckians did their best to honor the dead Confederacy of which they were never a part. In the decades following the war, they built Confederate monuments, published sectional periodicals, participated in veterans’ organizations and historical societies, and produced literature that portrayed Kentucky as Confederate, while largely ignoring the Union cause and the feats of its soldiers. In the seventy years following the Civil War, for instance, Kentuckians erected over seventy Confederate monuments within the state, and fewer than ten monuments to the Union. Many white Kentuckians embraced the conservative political, social,

and racial values embedded in the Lost Cause even when they had not supported the Confederacy during the war, rejecting the legacies of both the Union and its president.

Americans outside of the Commonwealth, however, began to turn their attention to the martyred president's Kentucky heritage. In the nascent age of American tourism, several people quickly realized that Americans would want to visit Lincoln's birthplace. In 1894, New York restaurant owner Alfred Dennett purchased the Sinking Spring Farm near Hodgenville, where Lincoln was born and lived until the age of two. He moved a dilapidated cabin found a couple of miles away from the farm, rumored to have been the Lincolns', to the site. As he struggled to finance his Lincoln endeavor, Dennett purchased another decaying cabin in southern Kentucky purported by locals to be the residence in which Jefferson Davis was born. Capitalizing on the national mood of sectional reconciliation, Dennett disassembled both cabins and began displaying them at public expositions in Tennessee, New York, and elsewhere.

Much to the chagrin of historians, but unintentionally underscoring the extent to which Americans longed for post-Civil War reconciliation, the logs of the two structures purportedly became confused and intermingled during the constant disassembly and re-assembly. As famed muckraker and Lincoln enthusiast Ida Tarbell later wrote, "It was the money-makers who first laid hands on the Lincoln cabin. It was torn down, dragged about the country, and shown in settings so vulgar and inappropriate that it was made to seem almost a ridiculous thing."


"Visit the Site of the Original Lincoln Logs," advertisement for the Kentucky Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial in 2008. Courtesy of the Kentucky Department of Tourism.


"His First Address Wasn't Gettysburg," advertisement for the Kentucky Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial in 2008. Courtesy of the Kentucky Department of Tourism.

Dennett could never raise the necessary funds for his grandiose scheme (which included a spa and hunting lodge), and in 1905 he sold the Sinking Springs site to Robert Collier, the editor and publisher of *Collier's Weekly,* for $3,600. Collier had founded the Lincoln Farm Association the year before with the purpose of making Lincoln's homestead a national shrine, to "perpetuate it as a birthplace of patriotism," and to attract visitors from all over the country. The New York-based association purchased the Lincoln (/Davis) cabin for $1,000, shipped it back to the Lincoln farm in Kentucky and commissioned architect John Russell Pope to design a marble building to house and protect it. The monument plans included fifty-six steps, one for each year of the president's life, which led up to the columned portico and heavy bronze doors of the marble structure.

Collier hoped to dedicate the project in time to mark the centenary of Lincoln's birth in 1909. Rather than a political beacon of Unionist victory, however, the association intended the homestead to represent national reconciliation. They hoped that since it laid upon "almost the centre of our population," it would become "the most accessible national shrine … the Nation's Commons, the meeting-place of North and South, of East and West, a great national school of peace and unity, where all sectional animosity will forever be buried."

Accordingly, the effort to mark Lincoln's birthplace began and ended largely as a national effort, rather than a local project. Of the $100,000 the Lincoln Farm Association had raised in 1908, only $4,000 came from the Kentucky legislature (in contrast, Kentucky lawmakers appropriated $15,000 for the state's Jefferson Davis monument, which was dedicated in 1924). Eventually, over 80,000 Americans joined the LFA. The association intended that the monument for the people should be a truly populist undertaking and asked that individuals contribute no more than twenty-five dollars, suggesting an ideal subscription rate of twenty-five cents. In the end, an estimated two-thirds of the funding needed for the project came in quarters.

In 1908, the state of Kentucky did form a Lincoln Centenary Committee, headed by prominent Louisville Union Army veteran Andrew Cowan. In the spirit of sectional reconciliation, the committee included some of Kentucky's most esteemed citizens, both former Unionists and Confederates. In a rare occasion of cooperative interracial memorialization, Kentucky African Americans also took part in the centennial remembrance. Governor Augustus Willson, only the second Republican governor in the state's history, appointed a "Negro People's Centenary Committee," after deeming that "the negro people should have honored representatives present to bear witness to their love for Abraham Lincoln and their faithfulness to his memory and to be a part of the great scene just as they are a part of the great life of our country."

By including African Americans in the memorial effort, Governor Willson recognized the important place Abraham Lincoln occupied in black historical memory, and sought to emphasize "the ideal of blessed humanity which freed a race, and which is such a noble part of [his] life." But inclusion did not mean equity. White organizers considered the black committee a separate entity and did not list its members on the state committee's letterhead, or even in the official Lincoln Centenary Program, thereby relegating African Americans to the status of silent partners within Kentucky's efforts to remember the Civil War.

The cornerstone laying ceremony featured a "Confederate Escort Committee," which stood alongside Union veterans in the ceremony. John Leathers, one of the Confederate veterans involved, considered the event a success and wrote Andrew Cowan afterwards that, "all passion and prejudice [had] gone with the flight of the years and we are now one reunited people with one flag and one country and common destiny and I think I can safely say that none among the great crowd present at the Lincoln Farm on the 12th were more sincere and honest in

rendering tribute to the name and fame of the immortal Lincoln than the Ex-Confederates who were gathered there."

Amidst the reconciliationist overtones of the endeavor, it was President Theodore Roosevelt who articulated the most radical form of Unionism. In the keynote address he delivered at the ceremony, he lauded Lincoln, the "homely backwoods idealist," for saving the nation when he freed the slaves. Roosevelt praised the native Kentuckian's "love for the Union," as well as his "abhorrence of slavery," calling him an "apostle of social revolution." Roosevelt brought up a Civil War legacy rarely acknowledged in Kentucky, where what little white public memory of Union victory that existed concentrated on its military victory rather than the social and racial revolution it brought. Roosevelt's mention of the "radical revolution," let alone his celebration of it, was an anomaly in white memory in the state.

In 1961, acclaimed Kentucky-born author Robert Penn Warren provided a much more representative description of the way many white Kentuckians remembered Lincoln. Reflecting on his early twentieth-century childhood growing up in Guthrie, Kentucky, during which he absorbed the "ever-present history" of the Civil War, he reminisced: "I had picked up a vaguely soaked-in popular notion of the Civil War, the wickedness of Yankees, the justice of the Southern cause (whatever it was; I didn't know), the slave question, with Lincoln somehow a great man but misguided … I got [my impression] from the air around me (with the ambiguous Lincoln bit probably from a schoolroom)."

Warren's recollection reflected the power that pro-Confederate groups, especially the United Daughters of the Confederacy, had over the interpretation of the Civil War in Kentucky. Not only did the UDC shape the state's cultural landscape with their memorial days and monument campaigns, but their production of state textbooks and the supplemental pro-Confederate texts ensured that no child in Kentucky public schools could have anything but an "impartial" view of the conflict between the states.

In 1901, the Lexington chapter installed pictures of Robert E. Lee in every public school in the city. Later that year, the UDC held a public ceremony in which the members presented the same schools with portraits of Jefferson Davis on the same day as the Grand Army of the Republic unveiled its portraits of Lincoln. Newspaper accounts reflected the disparity in the esteem in which the city's white masses held the two men. Even the Republican Lexington *Leader* covered the stories in two separate columns, devoting to the UDC twice as much space as the GAR. The paper called the UDC ceremony "unique," "an impressive program," and "an important patriotic event." The GAR donation, by contrast, was relegated to the "social and personal" section of the paper, where it was deemed "very acceptable and much appreciated."

Although the Lost Cause held sway in Kentucky's schools, monuments to Lincoln slowly began to appear in town squares and other civic spaces. The state constructed a large statue of Lincoln in the Hodgenville town square in 1909.

Two years later, Governor Willson persuaded Louisville businessman James Breckenridge Speed (whose uncles Joshua Fry Speed and James Speed were Lincoln's close friends and political allies) to donate $40,000 to pay for a Lincoln statue for the state Capitol rotunda. President William Howard Taft came to Frankfort to unveil it.

Local Kentuckians took note of the economic boon afforded by Lincoln's birthplace, which became the Lincoln National Historical Park in 1916. When Ida Tarbell traveled through the area in the 1920s to research her book, *In the Footsteps of the Lincolns* (1924), she found that "Like Homer in Greece, Lincoln in Kentucky was claimed by, if not seven, at least several different places." At the aptly named Poortown, where the log cabin of Abraham's uncle Mordecai Lincoln once stood, the locals, who knew "the value of a Lincoln connection," were happy to show Tarbell around. "They tell you there, with every proof of conviction, that here Abraham Lincoln was born; and that all Poortown feels naturally enough that it is wrong indeed that the noble marble monument that stands in Hardin County, near Hodgenville should not be theirs, that they should not have enjoyed the increase in land values that Hodgenville has had, and that they should not have the roads that the Lincoln Memorial has brought to Hardin County."

In an extension of Kentucky's wartime antipathy toward Lincoln, however, public memorialization of the president was largely limited to African American Kentuckians who celebrated him as part of Emancipation Day events, and by hanging his image inside their houses. Their most visible means of acknowledgment were the several segregated Common Colored Schools they named after him around the state. Even these tributes became obsolete after schools desegregated in the 1960s and many African American schools closed. According to historian David Rapaport, as of 2002, of the 1,353 public schools in Kentucky, Lincoln's name appeared on only eight, which makes him the namesake of a mere six-hundredths of one percent of the schools in the state of his birth.

While white resistance to the demise of Jim Crow in the 1960s and 1970s seldom appeared as violent or extensive as it did in states farther south, public acknowledgment of Kentucky's historical status as a slave state was slow. Famously, the Kentucky state legislature did not ratify the Thirteenth Amendment until 1976. But slowly, the idea that slavery was a cruel institution began to trickle down to mainstream public history in Kentucky as it did in other places in the United States. This was due to the fact that the Civil Rights Movement had connected the contemporary struggles of African Americans with the oppression they had faced during slavery, Reconstruction, and the Jim Crow era. Gradually, public sites and educational institutions around the state began to portray emancipation as a redemptive triumph and thus, the Great Emancipator became a more palatable figure in the South. It was in this interpretive environment that white Kentuckians finally began to lay claim to Abraham Lincoln and integrate him into a usable past for their state.


“Kentucky: Lincoln Heritage Trail,” front of map (2008). Original design by Christina Hobbs and Mike Duck. Courtesy of the Kentucky Department of Tourism.

By 1975, Hodgenville established the Lincoln Days Celebration, “for the purpose of celebrating the birth of Abraham Lincoln in an appropriate manner, to create an awareness of his values and influences upon this nation, and further the cultural, economic and civic interests of LaRue County.” In 1977, Kentucky preservationists completed the restoration of Mary Todd Lincoln’s girlhood home in Lexington.

But Kentuckians did not appear to truly embrace Lincoln as their own until the early twenty-first century as the state began plans for celebrating the 200th anniversary of his birth. Along with historical organizations around the nation, various entities around the Bluegrass State developed plans for a two-year-long tribute to the revered president to take place between 2008 and February 2010. In 2004, the state created the Kentucky Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission (KALBC) with the following goals: to “establish Kentucky as part of the Lincoln story on both a state and a national level by relating the critical role that Kentucky and Kentuckians played in his life and career.” And, of course, with financial interests in mind, the commission also wanted to use the bicentennial as an occasion to “enhance Kentucky’s heritage-tourism industry.”

Accordingly, schools, colleges, historical societies, public libraries, tourist sites, and other civic groups developed dozens of programs, events, and exhibits to mark Kentucky’s connection to Lincoln. The Kentucky General Assembly and the Transportation Cabinet created two new Lincoln road designations. US 31E became the “Lincoln Heritage Highway,” while the stretch of I-65 from Louisville to the Tennessee border was christened the “Lincoln Memorial Expressway.” They also commissioned signs declaring Kentucky the “Birthplace of Lincoln” at major border crossings into the state.

The state also developed the Kentucky Lincoln Heritage Trail, which included nearly twenty sites around Kentucky linked (some more closely than others) to Lincoln’s life and his Civil War legacy. Aside from obvious sites such as the Mary Todd Lincoln House and Lincoln’s Boyhood Home, these include locations such as the “Lincoln Marriage Temple,” which shelters the log cabin in which historians believe Nancy Hanks and Thomas Lincoln married, the home of Lincoln’s uncle Mordecai, and a replica of a cabin similar to the one once inhabited by his step-mother, Sarah Bush Johnston Lincoln.

It seemed that although—and perhaps because—Lincoln resided for such a brief period of his young life in Kentucky, no connection to the president was too minor to include. A number of other sites earned their way onto the trail by their connection to the Civil War: the Camp Nelson Civil War Heritage Park, which marks the third largest African American recruitment camp in the nation,

and the Perryville Battlefield Historical Site. Even Jefferson Davis's monument and birthplace won a spot on the map.

In both style and substance, these events and places stressed Lincoln's humble roots, his unlikely rise to the highest office in the land, and his lasting legacy in keeping the Union intact during the Civil War. Not surprisingly, the bicentennial effort highlighted his role in emancipating enslaved African Americans, the very act that made him so unpopular in his home state almost a century and a half before. In the post-Civil Rights era, white Kentuckians seemed ready to embrace Lincoln for the same reasons they had once maligned him.

The KALBC also outlined plans to "incorporate the relevance of the Lincoln story into educational programming across Kentucky." The Kentucky Department of Education, Georgetown College, and the Kentucky Historical Society (KHS) worked together to develop lesson plans centering on Lincoln for elementary, middle, and high school students. The lessons tied Lincoln's life and work to Kentucky's teaching standards and brought Lincoln into the classroom in a number of different subject areas. The KHS also mounted an exhibit inside of a tractor-trailer that traveled to schools and public events all over the state.

In stark contrast to Kentucky's effort to observe the 100th anniversary of Lincoln's birth a century earlier, the connections between Lincoln, slavery, and emancipation were front and center between 2008 and 2010. The KALBC funded numerous projects that focused on African American experiences of the Civil War era, including the Underground Railroad, USCT recruitment and enlistment in Kentucky, and the experiences of black families in the state's contraband camps. The commission also funded a workshop for museum docents and local historians entitled "Interpreting Slavery at Kentucky Historical Sites," designed to advise "employees how to talk about slavery with the public."

The Commission and Advisory Council members were a diverse group of Kentucky scholars and citizens, and included organizations such as the Kentucky African American Heritage Commission. Famed African American artist Ed Hamilton sculpted a new statue of Lincoln, which stands in Louisville's Lincoln Park along the city's waterfront. In the early twenty-first century, Kentucky African Americans played a large role in shaping the state's memory of Lincoln, both figuratively and literally.

Meanwhile, in an interesting turn, Kentuckians mounted a much more limited celebration for Jefferson Davis, who had also been born in Kentucky in 1809. Vestiges of Confederate partisanship remained, however. In 2007, the State Division of the Sons of Confederate Veterans protested that the Kentucky Lincoln Bicentennial Commission had circumvented proper procedures in order to have the Transportation Cabinet approve a Lincoln bicentennial license plate bearing the official Kentucky Lincoln Bicentennial emblem. While Kentucky SCV members, who were also seeking approval for their own specialty plate, denied that the tag's honoree had anything to do with their outrage, they used the

opportunity to call for the resignation of the co-chairs of the bicentennial celebration and the executive director of the Kentucky Historical Society.

As a result of the state's bicentennial commemoration, citizens of Kentucky—young, old, black, or white—could not miss the state's connection with the sixteenth president as well as the heroic light in which it cast his historical achievements. Certainly, it was not lost on Skyler Hornback, who, five years before he would go on to *Jeopardy* fame, was selected by officials at Abraham Lincoln Elementary to introduce First Lady Laura Bush when she visited Hodgenville as part of the bicentennial festivities in November 2008. "Here," Bush told the crowd, "we remember that the man who became our beloved president was once just a young boy."

The recent embrace of Lincoln is a part of the process by which Kentucky is slowly shedding its constructed Confederate identity in favor of one that acknowledges historical divisions among the state's whites, as well as between whites and African Americans. Within this pluralistic history, Abraham Lincoln has finally become useful and duly celebrated in his native state.

Acknowledgments

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Further Reading

Readers can find further information about Abraham Lincoln's portrayal in American history in Merrill Peterson's *Lincoln in American Memory* (New York, 1995).

For more information on the tradition of anti-Lincoln sentiment in the U.S., see Don E. Fehrenbacher, "Anti-Lincoln Tradition," *Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association* 4:1 (1982) and John Barr, *Loathing Lincoln: An American Tradition from the Civil War to the Present* (Louisiana State University Press, forthcoming, 2014).

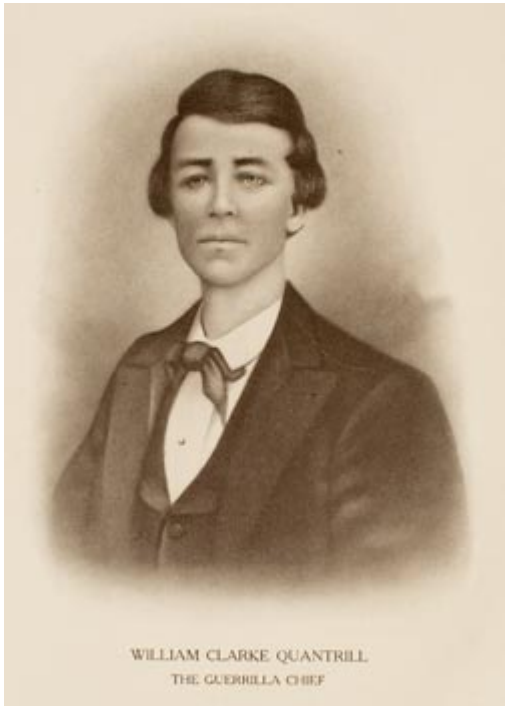
Despite being nearly 90 years old, Ida Tarbell's *In the Footsteps of the Lincolns* (New York, 1924) offers a fascinating look at early Lincoln tourism in Kentucky. For a more modern take, see Andrew Ferguson, *Land of Lincoln*: *Adventures in Abe's America* (New York, 2008).

For more on the Abraham Lincoln Birthplace National Historic Site, see the National Park Service Website. A detailed report on Kentucky's Bicentennial Commission is also available.

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The Regularly Irregular War



Domestic Violation, Women, and Remembrance in Missouri's Guerrilla Theater

The sound of gunfire cracked the morning silence. News that another Confederate partisan had been bushwhacked in a barnyard soon broke upon a funeral procession of women decked out in black. If not tended to quickly, the victim, dead or alive, would "be devoured by the hogs." So the women, as Mrs. William H. Gregg recalled, abandoned the burial of one southerner "ruthlessly murdered by Federal soldiers" and set off to forestall another funeral. They kept vigil over the wounded man all night but he died the next day (27-28).

Even as early as 1861 (the year of the incident described by Mrs. Gregg), this sort of encounter with guerrilla violence on the homefront was becoming common in western Missouri. The banks of the Missouri River here were a stronghold for slaveholders, though they were a minority of the state's population overall and were never quite able to maneuver Missouri out of the Union. In fact, a clear

majority of Missourians who enlisted in the regular armies remained loyal to the Union when hostilities broke out. Within this bitterly divided environment, the unnamed victim in the barnyard could stand for any number of bushwhacked men from all across a state teeming with irregular combatants. Historians generally categorize irregular combatants by their connection to the official war efforts of the Union or the Confederacy. Along this continuum, "cavalry raiders" such John Hunt Morgan or Joseph O. Shelby and "partisan rangers" such as John Singleton Mosby are distinguished from other, less-formal groups of men known as "guerrillas." Rather than enlisting in the Union or Confederate armies, these guerrillas operated largely outside the formal chain of command. They took to the bush and formed bands to fight the war on their own terms and turf. Guerrillas, irregulars, partisans, bushwhackers, and Jayhawkers (a moniker specifically designated for pro-Union guerrillas from Kansas who occasionally spilled over into Missouri) plied their trade most effectively in isolated settings and domestic locales; in choosing the targets of their violence they typically made few allowances for age, noncombatant status, or culpability. As a result, arson, theft, torture, rape, murder, and massacre became hallmarks of Missouri's wartime experience.

Violence in Missouri's guerrilla theater was local and personal. Neighbor turned upon neighbor to settle scores long simmering, and children and the elderly found themselves in the line of fire. Terror dismantled entire communities, uprooted families, and put hundreds of refugees on the road, hunting for safer ground in Arkansas and Texas. Such violence came with long-lasting social and emotional consequences, producing a unique texture of trauma in the region.

> Historians have debated endlessly whether the Civil War was the first modern war or the last Napoleonic-style conflict, but they have rarely situated it within a larger history of irregular warfare.

Sixty years after her wartime ordeal, Mrs. Gregg and fellow members of the Missouri Division of the United Daughters of the Confederacy researched, compiled, and published *Reminiscences of the Women of Missouri During the Sixties*. They did so because—despite the success of the UDC in fundraising, policing school curriculums, and constructing monuments—they felt that the wartime experiences of Missouri women were being overlooked. Following the war, as the editors of *Reminiscences* explained it, they had spent years helping to transform a cause lost, by way of much ink and marble, into *the* Lost Cause. But that movement, as typically conceived, was not (then as now) designed to accommodate and commemorate the experiences of women like Mrs. Gregg. Instead, the Lost Cause slanted strongly toward a male pantheon of Confederate heroes like Robert E. Lee, Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson, and Jefferson Davis. It honored the valor and sacrifice of enlisted men who went to war not for the institution of slavery but to defend states' rights against northern aggressors. And it proudly lamented that the Confederacy succumbed only to overwhelming manpower

and material resources on well-known eastern battlefields. These narratives left little room for burning homes, for women and children fighting and dying as irregular combatants while their men hid in the bush. The mainstream Lost Cause had little use for Missouri's guerrilla experience and, as a result, the record of the Missouri Daughters' own participation in it had been ignored.

Thus, post-war patterns of remembrance and commemoration in Missouri would not—indeed, could not—adhere to those prescribed by the rest of the South. Domestic violation was the cornerstone of guerrilla violence, and it constituted the "regular war" as many Missourians knew and understood it. Unlike the homes of southerners caught in the crossfire in the Eastern Theater, Missouri dwellings were the command centers, communication hubs, and supply depots in this conflict—and so they also became battlefields. Women were in charge at home while their husbands, fathers, and brothers were off fighting; their households were targeted and destroyed while still occupied, the ruins of irregular fortresses. Children, like their mothers, morphed into soldiers, messengers, and spies as their homes militarized around them. In publishing *Reminiscences*, the Daughters were attempting to catalog a new set of memorial tropes that could better convey the themes of domestic violation they had experienced in Missouri in the 1860s.

"William Clarke Quantrill: The Guerrilla Chief," photograph taken from a tin-type made at the beginning of the war, frontispiece, Quantrill and The Border Wars, William Elsey Connelley, Torch Press, Cedar Rapids, Iowa (1910).

Domestic Violation Hits Home

Historians have debated endlessly whether the Civil War was the first modern war or the last Napoleonic-style conflict, but they have rarely situated it within a larger history of irregular warfare. Such a focus reveals the degree to which homes themselves were the constitutive element of the conflict. In any war in which soldiers' mobility is their primary asset, adversaries will often attack immobile targets: civic and industrial buildings, and homes. For Missouri's women, the Civil War came to their doorsteps with full force, and it was this experience they hoped to highlight in Civil War memory and memorialization.

In the wake of a Jayhawker raid on Osceola, Missouri, Mrs. M. E. Lewis remembered how many individual homes were destroyed, though her family was considerably luckier than most. "We were very much afraid," she wrote, "that our house would be burned or catch fire from flying shingles which were on fire from other houses, but it was saved" (55). Others weren't so fortunate. One Missouri woman recalled how a group of "lawless men" committed thefts and murders in her neighborhood under the "guise" of the Home Guard. "Before

committing depredations," she wrote, "drinking was always resorted to." Men would be called to their doors at night and shot down without warning: "on Sunday afternoon, these fiends started out and by Monday morning had murdered three innocent men in their homes surrounded by their families" (19). Similarly, Julia Kern recounted multiple deaths occurring around her household. Her uncle, who was blind in one eye, was snatched by Union soldiers. According to Kern, they gouged out his good eye and shot him dead; later, a different man was "found secreted in his mother's house," dragged out into her yard, and hanged in front of her (248-249). Still another woman remembered how throughout Missouri, "hostile bands" had set out "burning homes" of all who dared to "side with the South." These men, she added, were not of the "regular" Union army, but "their deeds were winked at by those in authority" (124).

Guerrillas not only targeted individuals; they also destroyed or confiscated property and the materials of war. For instance, Martha Horne recalled when, in February 1862, "the Jayhawkers came, and hitching up our wagons with the few remaining horses that had not been taken by the Redlegs or the Federal militia, loaded in supplies that we had hauled out from Kansas City for our winter's use, and took negroes, provision stores and all out to Lawrence." Horne even alleged that the Kansas guerrillas "dug up young orchards close to the line and reset them in Kansas" and that they "mounted houses on wheels and hauled them over into Kansas" (42). Another Daughter remembered that "families suspected of having money on the premises or valuables concealed were in peculiar danger of being raided upon" during the war (126). But the memories of a different contributor revealed that a well-stocked household could very easily find itself under siege by guerrillas from *both* sides—regardless of reputation or allegiance. She recounted how her family's "hospitality, sympathy, and larder as well, were taxed beyond their limit by first one side and then the other." One night, a group of guerrillas under the command of William Quantrill arrived and ordered dinner. The men "laid their side arms upon the piano and proceeded to get busy." Less than an hour after the Confederates left, another group of guerrillas, this time Unionists, showed up. "So they, too, laid their arms on the piano," and ate everything left in the already depleted pantry (236-37).

The physical destruction of houses, provisions, and farms also broke families apart by separating members from the homes, spaces, and objects that bound them to one another. According to Mrs. J. A. Adcock, after guerrillas targeted her family's home, her family was forced to sleep outside in the brush; once it became too cold, however, they had to abandon their homestead until the end of the war. When they returned, she reported, the entire area was "a desolate waste," with only "now and then a lone chimney to tell the story of a fire." She considered her family lucky that the walls of their two-room brick house still stood and provided some semblance of shelter. "The saddest feature of all this war," Adcock concluded in her essay, "was the breaking up of families" because "not all members of families ever returned" (91-92). Another Missouri woman and her family "were forced by threats, almost daily house searchings, robbed of stock, food, clothing, jewelry, silver—in fact, anything in sight, to give up our dear old home, three miles out from Kansas City." Even after they

moved, the harassment from guerrillas continued. Eventually, the death of the woman's brother shattered the family: "Our home was broken up, and we, as refugees, were scattered here and there over the state" (236). Domestic violation left permanent scars on the homes and families of women in Missouri's guerrilla theater; these scars served as an equally permanent reminder of the wartime experience the Daughters sought to commemorate in *Reminiscences*.


"Bill Anderson," wood engraving, p. 316 in Quantrill and The Border Wars, William Elsey Connelley, Torch Press, Cedar Rapids, Iowa (1910).

Women Gone Guerrilla

The ruination of individual homes and family units was simultaneously a cause and effect of the guerrilla activities of women themselves. In many cases, by refusing to stand by as victims or non-combatants, they brought further destruction down upon their families. Like women in Virginia or Georgia or Tennessee, those in Missouri watched over homes and farms both large and small while their men were away. They fed and clothed themselves and their children and occasionally managed slaves. But the wartime service of Missouri women was also different. Guerrilla warfare prompted these women to stand in for men in ways they hardly could have imagined before the war, and in ways they refused to forget when it was over.

In the guerrilla theater women were not just mothers, wives, or heads of households—they became commanders of family units, real-time diplomats, and even hostage negotiators. Rich Hill resident Mrs. N. M. Harris remembered a pro-Confederate Kansas City banker (whose name is redacted throughout her story) who abandoned his home in 1861 under pressure from local Unionists. The following autumn, the rest of the banker's family was asleep when a "squad of noisy soldiers" burst through the door of their home. Now in charge of the household and its occupants, the banker's wife was responsible for communicating with the soldiers and negotiating a resolution that would preserve her life, the lives of her children, and enough of the material goods they required to survive (214-16). Mrs. J. A. Adcock, just a child during the war, similarly recalled how her father's association with Confederate guerrillas forced him to live in the woods. The move left her mother alone to deal with the angry Federal authorities and prowling Unionist guerrillas that had driven him away (91-92). The consequences of encounters gone awry or failed negotiations with guerrillas were deadly serious; Harris also wrote of a woman "whom Jennison shot for attempting to shield her husband, helpless from illness." The unfortunate woman was reportedly "crippled for life" and never able to walk again without crutches (216).

When a male relative left home to join the irregular ranks, the guerrilla

conflict inevitably found its way back to mothers, wives, and daughters, who functioned as his commissary while he was out fighting in the bush. Mrs. Tyler Floyd, for example, recollected a special mission she undertook to procure cloth, quinine, and morphine for Confederate irregulars. After driving into town—which was itself a dangerous affair—she hid the medicine and strips of fabric in her dress. When stopped by Federal troops, she successfully lied her way through their checkpoint and returned with her payload (105-107). According to the reminiscence of Mrs. S. E. Ulstick, Union authorities often commanded women "not to give food to southern soldiers or Bushwhackers under penalty of death." Though a widow (her husband had actually died before the war), Ulstick recalled that her house was searched on seven occasions by "drunken Jayhawkers." The invaders, she alleged, "frequently ran their bayonets through all the clothing in the wardrobe" and with "pistols cocked they asked questions, blowing their drunken breath in my face, cursing the most bitter oaths until I was so frightened I could not tell my name" (35-36). Ulstick and other women took on "the responsibility of getting supplies for their families," a function that undoubtedly allowed their men and boys to survive in the bush (142). Thus the Jayhawkers were, in some sense, applying military pressure where they knew it would be most effective. They were Sherman's troops before Sherman's troops ever lit a match or marched to the sea, waging a war against political will by making households howl.

In addition to serving a crucial military function by acquiring supplies, women also acted as emergency medical crews, pallbearers, and undertakers. After guerrilla engagements women picked up the debris of the battlefield: supplies, weapons, and bodies. Mrs. S. E. Lewis remembered the September 1861 sack of Osceola, Missouri, in which Senator James H. Lane and a brigade of Jayhawkers swept through and burned much of the town in an attempt to flush out Confederate sympathizers. "They [Lane's men] passed our house on horseback," she wrote, "their guns glistening in the moonlight." Rather suddenly, a skirmish broke out; the town's guerrilla defenders let loose a "tremendous volley of musketry." Both sides suffered casualties. But when the fighting had ceased and the guerrillas melted back into the brush, they left the wounded and the dead not in the care of a medical corps but in the hands of local women (54-55).

"Jesse James," wood engraving, p. 318 in Quantrill and The Border Wars, William Elsey Connelley, Torch Press, Cedar Rapids, Iowa (1910).

Where virtually no boundary existed between domestic and military realms, the absence of men from the household created uniquely difficult and traumatic scenarios for women. They, along with their families, watched as men were hunted, shot down, and hanged in front doorways and yards. But whenever possible, they fought back. This resistance was not limited to supplying, caring for the wounded and dead, lying, smuggling, or even spying. From broom

to ax to gun to shovel, from charm to venom, women wielded whatever weapons were available to them to defend their families and their homes. Mary Harrison Clagett, for example, described the ordeal of a woman in Callaway County, Missouri, who “stood with ax in hand ready to fell the first one that entered” when a detachment of Union soldiers “swooped down” on her home. The invaders treaded lightly because the woman “was ready for battle inside, armed not with a broom but a dangerous ax” (125-127). Furthermore, Martha F. Horne recalled the trouble that arose after her husband, home from the service, stored a large load of fresh corn in their crib. She saw Union militiamen “helping themselves to our corn without so much as saying ‘by your leave.'” Enraged, she “grabbed a hand ax and a few nails and rushed down, arriving after the men had made off, each with an armful of corn.” By the time a second gang arrived to plunder the corn, Horne had nailed the crib door shut. An officer informed her that he must break down the locked door. According to Horne, she “took a step toward him, drew back the ax over my shoulder and told him if he struck that lock I would brain him.” At that, the startled foragers took their leave and Horne went home sobbing (43-44). Far from helpless, women like these met irregular violence with irregular violence, and they recounted these acts quite proudly in their *Reminiscences*.

A Hard-Knock Life in Missouri

With their parents and homes so directly entrenched in Missouri’s guerrilla war, the conflict left very little room for children to do the things that children normally do. Homes were not safe places to play; they were not even a refuge to shield children from the traumas of the war. But these children did more than just witness hardships and tragedies. They were roused from warm beds on snowy evenings and threatened with all forms of violence, from intimidation and theft to rape and decapitation. Thus, like their mothers and other grown relatives, youths in guerrilla-torn sectors of Missouri participated directly in the war in this region.

Age was clearly no guarantee of insulation from guerrilla warfare in Missouri. Children witnessed a breakdown of social and political order in which their mothers, fathers, grandparents, and neighbors were often assaulted and killed. Maggie Stonestreet English wrote that her “bitter memories will be cherished so long as one remains whose tender sensibilities were so grossly violated when all should have been gay and joyous to the free and careless heart of a child.” She then recounted that her “most painful childish memories were of officers searching the house for my father, who was secreted there.” Once her father had been driven into exile, the raids did not stop. Her family was robbed—even of a locket containing a dead child’s hair—and “the house was burned and the plantation devastated” (125). Another woman remembered a young girl awakened by guerrillas in the middle of the night. When she began to cry, one of the guerrillas went to the girl and “holding a saber against her face, told her if she uttered another sound he would cut her head off.” Other girls sleeping in the same home ran downstairs to investigate. “The outlaws,” the woman

continued, “turned their attention to the girls” and “using insulting terms” searched them for valuables, “all the while singing ribald songs or telling obscene jokes.” Before leaving, the raiders forced “three of the girls into the yard and marched back and forth in the moonlight, making most vicious threats and insinuations” (214-15). Mrs. J. M. Thatcher was equally terrified one evening when raiders stormed into her house and even threw “their loaded guns across [her] baby’s cradle.” “A young lady,” she recalled, “dared not refuse to take a ride with officers, and one [such] young girl died three days afterwards with a dread secret untold” (250).

But children weren’t always just the victims of guerrilla war—they, too, frequently answered the call of irregular service. In these cases, children were trusted with vital intelligence about family members, put to work in home-fortresses, and when necessary, expected to bear arms when their houses came under siege. Ann C. Everett summoned memories of an afternoon on which she and her two small children had gone to spend time with a nearby neighbor. After visiting only a short while, they “heard the firing of guns and the whooping and yelling of men.” Looking toward her home, Everett “soon saw that it was surrounded by a company of Federal soldiers.” She ran to the house with her children and discovered that a trio of Confederates had been shot there and the Union officer in charge planned to leave them unburied as good “food for the hogs.” Everett and children, ages five and seven, endured a nightlong vigil over the corpses before burying them in the morning (132-35). Another contributor to *Reminiscences*, Kate S. Doneghy, told the tale of the night she was home alone with her six little boys, the oldest of whom was just eleven. “All at once,” she wrote, “there was a dash and crash” from the outside of the small house. Soon she found her home surrounded by Federal soldiers with “guns and bayonets at every window.” Doneghy answered the door with a baby on her hip and the men rushed inside with revolvers drawn. According to Doneghy, in front of six children, the Federal soldiers told her to get whatever she could out of the house before they torched it. Only the scene of a six-year-old boy trying to save the family Bible shamed them into stopping (186-87). Mary Harrison Clagett recalled guerrillas trying to burn down her house in the middle of the night. When their attempts failed, she prayed inside as they dragged her son, Irvin, out in only his nightclothes and abused him in the yard. Even less lucky was another boy memorialized in the collection who, already in poor health, was “driven from home by threats upon his life” and soon after died apart from his family (126-27). Perhaps more than other memories published in *Reminiscences*, the recollection of the violated innocence of children underscored how the guerrilla front produced a unique strain of remembrance.

Remembering the Unimaginable

Throughout the pages of *Reminiscences*, the Missouri Daughters painted the portrait of a war largely unrecognizable to their eastern counterparts. They described a conflict in which homefront violence involving women and children as primary combatants and casualties was commonplace. Missourians’ households

were epicenters of traumas that most families had never before experienced or imagined. Residents of Missouri's guerrilla theater lived and fought through a different kind of war—one that set them apart from other Southerners. By publishing their accounts, the Missouri Daughters were not simply trying to insert their own personal remembrances of the Civil War into the Lost Cause; rather, they produced new kinds of memorial narratives that sorted, categorized, and laid bare their unique wartime experiences. And when critics questioned their intentions, contributor Mrs. N. M. Harris responded with a simple question of her own: "Why? Isn't this part of the history of the Civil War?" (214)



"Map of Lawrence at the Time of the Massacre," pp. 335-336, Quantrill and The Border Wars, William Elsey Connelley, Torch Press, Cedar Rapids, Iowa (1910). Click image to enlarge in new window.

Despite their compelling case, the sort of memorial shift that the Daughters envisioned in*Reminiscences*—one that might balance their own experiences with the Lost Cause in a way that could provide some sort of commemorative closure—never really materialized in the South. Indeed, it never materialized even in Missouri. The idea of a war fought without heroic generals and major pitched battles, involving women and children and the unpleasant realities of bushwhacking, never gained institutional traction. To be sure, in the 1920s (and beyond), members of the Missouri Division of the UDC remained prominent as local historians and brokers of Confederate tradition. They helped manage the Confederate Veterans' Home at Higginsville, Missouri; spearheaded educational programs for children; maintained Confederate graves; and even sent birthday cards to elderly former Rebels. But they were never able to successfully integrate their own experiences into the Lost Cause narratives they helped administrate and disseminate because, in those accounts, women are not damsels in distress or stoic army wives. Instead, they are full-fledged partisans of the guerrilla theater. These women, along with the trauma they endured and the "other" war they represented, were commemorative competitors with Confederate veterans. Thus, *Reminiscences* threatened the mainstream versions of the war that best suited rank-and-file Confederates everywhere.

Today the most familiar of Missouri's guerrilla-based memory narratives revolve around large-scale massacres at Osceola (September 1861), Lawrence (August 1863), and Centralia (September 1864). These wartime atrocities involved larger-than-life guerrilla chiefs, massive casualty counts, and a bevy of witnesses who spread fantastic (and often erroneous) descriptions of the violence. Popular narratives also focused attention on Union general Thomas Ewing's General Order No. 11, which forcibly evicted civilian residents of Jackson, Cass, Bates, and Vernon counties in an effort to stamp out support for Confederate guerrillas in August 1863. The massacres and Order No. 11 are the best-remembered scenes from Missouri's guerrilla theater because they offer a

quick, easily processed glimpse of irregular warfare. Through them, we see the major figures and functions of bushwhacking, but in a form that conveys many of the traits that make the public comfortable with the Civil War: political orders, larger battles, and famous (or infamous) commanders.

Not unlike other collective remembrances of the Civil War framed around Robert E. Lee, Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson, and Ulysses S. Grant, conventional accounts of Missouri's Civil War history are male-dominated. The usual suspects include William C. Quantrill, "Bloody Bill" Anderson, Senator James Lane, Charles "Doc" Jennison, the Younger brothers, and the James boys, among others. These men are the state's most prominent Civil War exports, and most Missourians have latched onto them and the narrative they represent. Even in the few cases where women of the Civil War generation have received memorial attention in the form of specified, permanent monuments, such recognition has typically come up well short of commemorating the roles played by women in guerrilla warfare. Consider a monument erected in 2009 in Cass County, Missouri, remembering the "Burnt District" created by Ewing's General Order No. 11. The structure—a lone, stone chimney—and corresponding placards hint at the domestic nature of irregular warfare in Missouri. But the memorial commemorates the order itself and does not highlight women as actual combatants.

This commemorative "comfort zone" was recently exemplified by a digital reenactment, staged via Twitter, of the Lawrence (Kansas) Massacre on its sesquicentennial anniversary. Under the hashtag QR1863, enthusiasts spent hours on August 21, 2013, producing a minute-by-minute stream of messages designed to recreate William Quantrill's raid on the city in real time. But while the "tweet-enactment" did include women in its reportage of the massacre (and scenarios in which they faced mortal danger from guerrillas), it failed to provide the context or back story through which women of the guerrilla theater were directly involved in both the staging *and* waging of irregular warfare. Nor did the reenactment underscore how fervently many women desired to be remembered as something *other* than the victims of a caricatured, intoxicated "Bloody Bill" Anderson prowling the streets of Lawrence for scalps, loot, and vengeance. Instead, they wanted to be remembered as primary actors—not extras—in the broader conflict to which the Lawrence Massacre belonged.

As we now know, such emphasis on massacres, orders, and leaders actually misrepresents much of the guerrilla war in Missouri. Quantrill, Anderson, and company were all very active players on the guerrilla front, no doubt, but isolating the flashiest exploits of a handful of notorious men tells us very little about guerrilla warfare, or about the daily traumas Missouri's women and children experienced. Many contemporary Missourians with an interest in the Civil War legacy of their state do have a basic understanding of guerrilla warfare as a "different" type of wartime experience. The same can generally be said of Civil War buffs outside of Missouri. More often than not, however, even a cursory conception of just how hard the guerrilla experience hit the individual homes remains buried in the state's postwar commemorative strata.

As a result, most Missourians—and Americans, it seems fair to say—are curiously content to recognize the irregular features of the guerrilla war and then to continue to approach its memory and commemoration from a conventional (Eastern, male) perspective. This is a serious problem. Because whether we agree with their original cause or not, the stories of these women and their memories of a war waged from, on, and upon their homes must be integrated into the wider narrative of Civil War memory and commemoration. Otherwise, we will fail to comprehend how regular such irregularities really were in Missouri, and why these women refused so doggedly to forget them.

Further Reading

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The American Revolution, the West Indies, and the Future of Plantation British America



The American Revolution was disruptive and challenging for plantation societies. Its most significant long-term effect was an artificial separation of the British Empire. The aftermath of the American Revolution saw the northern and southern sections of the pre-revolutionary British Empire separated, with the new United States of America intruding itself between Canada and the West Indian islands. The more significant shift was in plantation America. The natural links between slave societies in British America were broken, reducing the long-term ability of slave societies to unite against outside forces. Certainly, if the artificial split of the plantation colonies that occurred in 1776 had not happened, Union victory over the Confederate South in 1865 would conceivably have been much harder.

One lesson that British imperialists refused to learn from the American Revolution was that the prejudices of settler elites needed to be respected. That was not a policy that Britain adopted. The British Empire from the 1780s onward became more, not less, authoritarian and became ever more dependent upon

metropolitan direction exercised tightly among a close group of initiates experienced in plantation affairs. Governors were unwilling to put up with any opposition from settlers who upheld the principles of local autonomy that led the residents of the Thirteen Colonies into revolt. Such imperial obstinacy proved especially problematic for West Indian planters. Britain acted less consultatively and less in the interests of West Indians after the American Revolution than before. In 1784, for example, against strong West Indian protests, they severed the West Indies economically from North America by insisting on recognizing the United States of America as a foreign nation whose ships should be banned from British ports. For the first time in the eighteenth century, and increasingly thereafter, West Indian lobbyists in London found themselves unable to get their way in West Indian policy matters. This diminished political influence, moreover, was combined with a British tendency to see West Indian planters less as gauche *nouveau riches* who brought material benefits to the Empire than as crude, cruel, sexually lascivious deviants. Metropolitan opinion saw West Indian planters as given to “mongrelisation” in their relations with black women. As a consequence, they were thought to be intellectually and morally bankrupt.

> The representational image of the planter may have been based on that of the oriental pasha, but depictions of actual planters tended toward the pathetic rather than the tyrannical.

It was not economics but politics that was the real problem facing the West Indies after the American Revolution. In the aftermath of the American Revolution, Jamaican planters came under scrutiny (mostly unfavorable) as never before. Britons accepted the new principles of an imperialism that was beginning to bestride the globe but felt distinctly queasy about particular aspects of its commerce and governance. White West Indians were the first in a long line of Loyalists abandoned by Britain (the Northern Irish may have been the last). Beginning from 1783, British imperial officials showed repeated readiness to sacrifice colonial aspirations if such aspirations did not suit imperial aims. In short, Britain showed little respect for Loyalists after the American Revolution had finished and when Loyalists had become more of a problem than a resource.

The West Indian planter cut a sad figure from the late 1780s onward. The representational image of the planter may have been based on that of the oriental pasha, but depictions of actual planters tended toward the pathetic rather than the tyrannical. Planters were not seen as they saw themselves: British gentlemen, of upright character, firm morals, capable of moderation, self-restraint, and refined gentility. Rather, planters were seen through an Orientalist lens, a discourse predicated on a humoralist understanding of the malign effects that exchanging a temperate climate and lifestyle for a tropical way of life meant for Europeans. Planters were wealthy, but depictions of their wealth were undercut by representations of decadence and corruption coded as

luxury, effeminacy, gluttony, racial degeneracy, or sexual hybridity.

Seeing the American Revolution in an Atlantic rather than an American perspective allows us to take the perspective that Samuel Johnson did on planter pretensions in 1775 when he expostulated on the irony of hearing yelps of liberty from the drivers of slaves. The American Revolution was a war fought by planters in part to protect, defend, and expand slavery. One of the fundamental rights that British American planters insisted upon was their right not only to own slaves; they also wanted to be able to determine within their own legislatures the laws under which their investment in slave property would be protected. The planters of the American South after 1787 largely succeeded in ring-fencing slavery from interference from outside forces, whether these forces were British imperial rulers or northern abolitionists. Some of the most important people in America were deeply invested in slavery and its continuation.

Not all of those people were slaveholders, but those who were insisted on protections for slavery, especially the right of slaveholders to police their slaves and the right to have runaway slaves returned to them from any part of the United States. As events turned out, slaveholders in the American South made the correct decision to rebel against Britain in order to protect their investment in slave property. William Lloyd Garrison was correct to see the new United States government as being founded on a pro-slavery constitution. The small gains that abolitionists made in the American North were surpassed by the gains slaveholders achieved in limiting the ability of a powerful centralized government to insist on the amelioration of slavery. France and Britain both insisted on the amelioration of slavery in the late 1780s. They then ended slavery by imperial decree—France in 1794 and Britain in 1833. Southern slaveholders were able to control the discourse over slavery, and were able to stop a powerful centralized state from interfering in their affairs. That strategy worked until southern planters decided to destroy themselves by seceding from the United States of America in 1861.

The greatest threat to slavery thus proved to be an assertive, self-confident imperial state with centralizing tendencies. Britain became such a state after 1788. It tried aggressively to reshape its empire in its own image, confident that Britain was the ideal model for any imperial society. West Indian planters found out to their cost how willing Britain was to interfere in matters that colonial people thought were their own business. The most important matter colonials believed they should control was how their slaves should be treated. Britons increasingly disagreed. Thus, West Indians were caught in a bind not of their own making. The republican tendencies of America appalled them. Their loyalty to the king remained a paramount political value. They could not join in the American republican experiment. But they became increasingly aware of how the American Revolution had encouraged Britons to traduce planters' character in ways that diminished planters' importance, whether the planters in question lived in America or in the West Indies. And they realized that many Britons wanted to end the institution of slavery, the institution that

sustained West Indian prosperity.

West Indian planters also lamented how little influence they had in a radically reformed British Empire in which everyone was a subject and in which most subjects were not white. William Wilberforce and other abolitionists seemed to them madmen. West Indians thought abolition a mindless policy designed to destroy British prosperity, especially in the islands. But West Indians were in a dramatically weaker position after 1783 in an empire with relatively few slaveholders. Moreover, the increasing number of Britons who thought slavery wrong left West Indian planters unable to stop British "madness." That madness, as they saw it, was to wreck a great economic system in which the sufferings of Africans no one needed to care about brought about an advance in the standard of living of white people everywhere. Thus, the American Revolution had important political consequences for the part of British America that did not join the rebellion in 1776. West Indians lost control of slavery, which was critically important to them. Meanwhile, their northern cousins—previously less powerful than the West Indians had been in imperial circles—increased their power over slavery, at least in the areas of the Americas where slavery was most important.

Further Reading

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Returning to the Puritans



As a professor in a law school, I should begin by stating that I am on record testifying that Professor Sacvan Bercovitch changed the course of my career. Here's how. I met him in 1987, at the School for Criticism and Theory, then housed at Dartmouth College. I was in his class, centered on *the American Jeremiad*, and I found the experience a revelation, absolutely eye-opening. I'd been a trial lawyer for five years at that point, and a law professor for another seven. I was lonely and miserable in my chosen profession. I was at loose ends, a woman unbound, lost in the world-before-binders for my kind.

At the time there were very, very few women and virtually no women of color in legal academia. When I began teaching, I was one of six women of color teaching in law schools in the entire United States: four African Americans, one Latina, and one Asian American. Things were to change rapidly after that, but they hadn't at that point.

Given all this, I had decided to go back to school and get a PhD in English in order to wipe the slate clean, start all over again, try something that wasn't

so seemingly completely and insurmountably an exclusive gentlemen's network within an exclusively male preserve.

> When this roundtable was originally organized, we were asked to consider whether there is still a place for synthetic, totalizing interpretations of what Bercovitch called "the meaning of America." I don't know.

Anyway, I loved Professor Bercovitch's class, and not only because he was such a fabulous teacher. There was also the context of that moment in my own life, for I grew up in Boston, literally atop the bones of the Puritans and their dour inheritance. Boston, where in high school we had to read John Winthrop and John Cotton and Samuel Danforth. Now, if there's anything that can make adolescence even more miserable than it is as a constitutional matter, it's growing up in a world where, just beyond one's window, the rest of the world was popping with joyous color, with Peter Max posters and rainbow coalitions, and music thrumming openheartedly to the strains of Miles Davis and the Rolling Stones and Nina Simone, and cultural fireworks like Haight Ashbury and the Freedom rides and women's liberation, while you are stuck indoors with the Puritan divines.

So there I was, an earnest nerdy grind whose only popular recognition in tenth grade was being elected "most ladylike"— for that *is* the kind of reward one gets for being perpetually locked away in one's room slogging through "Errand into the Wilderness."

That's how I came to be in Professor Bercovitch's class, bitter and cheerless and, like Miranda in *The Tempest*, bracing myself both for, as well as against, this brave new world that had such literary people in't. Yet, despite that dreary weight of expectation, I was electrified. To visit these Puritan texts anew, through adult eyes and under Professor Bercovitch's tutelage, was a revelation. As a lawyer, I had never remarked on the jeremiads' indelible shaping of legal argumentation. As an activist, I had never remarked on the jeremiads' indelible shaping of the form of those most powerful speeches during the civil rights movement—and I mean, even the straightforward knock-you-over-the head stuff like Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech. It must seem obvious in retrospect, perhaps, but at the time it was all new.

When this roundtable was originally organized, we were asked to consider whether there is still a place for synthetic, totalizing interpretations of what Bercovitch called "the meaning of America." I don't know. But it's not just his exposition of Americans' Puritan rhetoric but also his critique of it that has given me the equipment to play with and against that singular American vocality, which extends most especially to legal discourse.

Without Professor Bercovitch's transformative lens, I wonder if I'd have appreciated the peculiar covenantal appeal of Barack Obama's clever play with

the conventions of the immigrant narrative, back during the 2008 election. If you recall, Obama spoke of his immigrant father—not of a white European immigrant father who came to these shores in search of the American dream, but a Kenyan father, a black immigrant, who came to these shores in search of heaven on earth. And his "single mother" wasn't the instant present-day consensus of must-be-a-black-woman, but an unexpected white single mother, more in the older tradition of Horatio Alger's now-miscegenous legacy.

This calculated unsettling reorganization of racial tropes played havoc with political and media expectations, and—for at least a little while—there was a grace period of suspended stereotypification as Obama inscribed himself within a very mainstream narrative trajectory of political candidacy. People just didn't know what to make of him—the finest example of such hand-wringing being then-Senator Joe Biden's amazement that Obama was just so "clean and articulate." It's hard to remember that tremulous moment of suspended judgment for what it was, because it so quickly evaporated; and, ultimately, Obama was not just exoticized but rendered so familiarly alien that even his birth certificate hasn't yet completely resolved the issue.

By the same token, cases like Citizens United have so vexed the notion of personhood that we find ourselves quivering in a world where expenditure of money is speech, and speech is the incarnation of puritan economy, and the very recognition of monetized speech becomes the equivalent of personhood incarnate. Without having had the benefit of Professor Bercovitch's insights, I wonder if we'd fully appreciate the deep-rooted appeal of the Tea Party's pandering, panicked eschatology of despair.

But there's a more idiosyncratic dimension to my debt to Professor Bercovitch as well. Halfway through that summer of 1987, he gave us a homework assignment, to write an essay. For the life of me I can't remember the topic of that assignment, but whatever it was, I was so inspired by it that I sat down and wrote an essay that changed the course of my career. My essay had nothing to do with Puritanism or jeremiads *per se*, so I think the assignment must have been more open-ended, something about persuasion or rhetorical form, or constructing a polemic in some broader sense. That piece of mine was entitled "On Being The Object of Property," and it was a lamentation about chattel slavery and personhood. I wrote it quickly, in a single evening—it just came pouring out sparked by that homework assignment, a detailed answer to that question from Professor Bercovitch that now I cannot remember. It was an immensely satisfying project, and to this day I'm really proud of it; I still believe it's far and away the best thing I've ever written.

To make a long story short, Professor Bercovitch liked that piece too, and sent it over to Harvard University Press, which asked me to render it into a book, which then became *The Alchemy of Race and Rights*, a publication that opened all kinds of other doors for me. So, weirdly enough, the book that I wrote as an escape hatch from the legal profession ended up drawing me back into it, as I became both hailed and assailed for being genre-busting, and quirky.

I've been wandering about academia ever since, always in search of that original inspiration—Sacvan Bercovitch's inspiration. I have the answer, I keep telling myself. I just cannot quite remember the question ….

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Reconsidering The American Jeremiad



For an Americanist, one of the strangest developments of the past few years has been to hear the phrase “American exceptionalism” used on cable talk shows and political blogs even more than in academic talks. Does President Obama believe in American exceptionalism, the talking heads ask? Why won’t Obama swear fealty to American exceptionalism, his accusers demand? If you have been following these public discussions, you probably know that sentences from presidential speeches that deal with whether America may or may not in fact be a “city on a hill” have been parsed even more closely than Sacvan Bercovitch reads John Winthrop’s Arabella speech.

This phenomenon—the migration of the phrase “American exceptionalism” from a term of art in American Studies to a term of contention in mass culture politics—seems to me potentially illuminating for the task of reconsidering *The American Jeremiad*. Even after three decades, no other book in American Studies has offered such a searching analysis of this concept—of its historical roots, its cultural adaptations, and its enduring work in the world. What, then, does this most recent turn in the career of the exceptionalism idea mean for the claims in Bercovitch’s classic study? What does it mean that American Studies and American media punditry have agreed on the usefulness of this particular phrase?

> American Studies scholars, of course, understand American exceptionalism as ideology as well, with the important difference that it is an ideology they starkly disavow, almost as a kind of ritual of professionalization.

To hazard an answer, I want to make two speculative suggestions. The first is that this phenomenon—call it pundit exceptionalism—is a striking confirmation of what Bercovitch calls the “cultural continuities” of the rhetoric of the American jeremiad. Familiar idioms like “the American dream” haven’t disappeared from public parlance, of course; but the fact that an overtly ideological term—an *ism* word—is now part of everyday speech and is used as such even by true believers, confirms Bercovitch’s core argument. I refer to his claim that what might seem to be diffuse strains of feeling about futurity are in fact a very specific nationalist rhetoric, and that the enduring power of this rhetoric is evidence of its function as an ongoing mode of socialization. In other words, ideology.

American Studies scholars, of course, understand American exceptionalism as ideology as well, with the important difference that it is an ideology they starkly disavow, almost as a kind of ritual of professionalization. In his new preface, Bercovitch makes the case that the uniform rejection of exceptionalism in contemporary American Studies is really the flip-side of Fox News exceptionalism. What for one side is a name for a sanctified way of life is for the other a hiss and a byword—or, to be less Biblical, a methodological taboo. By this way of thinking, the recent convergence of these opposing camps in the

phrase American exceptionalism is more evidence that the energies of dissent and affirmation represent not a dichotomy but a symbiosis.

The recent coincidence of opposites in what is now a shared term of art is surely proof of Bercovitch's claim that this rhetoric is symbiotic and enduring. At the same time, however, there is a kind of dour severity to this phrase; exceptionalism is an unlikely catchword for popular discourse. And it makes me wonder if we're seeing a historical shift. This brings me to my second suggestion. What could it mean that even passionate defenders use a term, exceptionalism, that acknowledges on its face that it *is* an ideology—that it is not a transcendent symbol but a system, not America but American*ism*? In his new preface, Bercovitch brings his historical narrative up to date by contending that in our present-day dissent battles, "the old rituals show their usual resilience." But when all sides refer to exceptional*ism*, it betrays the sense that what is most at play is not a conviction or a truth but a polemical claim to truth. This seems to me not a sign of resilience but of possible calcification, a hardening of what used to be more flexible and alive to change. (After all, believers avow their faith in Jesus or Mohammed; they don't insist on their support for Christian*ism* or Mohammed*ism*, for those are terms that betray a defensive preoccupation with one's *ideological* opponents.)

I'm pointing, then, to what I perceive as a different affective key in recent debates. In these battles, exceptionalism often seems neither a rhetoric of hope nor of affirmation through dissent, but of disenchantment and a resulting resentment. Once you recognize your own beliefs as ideology, their power as conviction begins to diminish. What matters most is not whether it is true, but the fact that your *opponent* does not believe it is true. Mitt Romney's 2012 campaign slogan "Believe in America" sounded less like a sales pitch than a stern command, a last-chance warning for the 47 percent. And President Obama's re-election brought something unprecedented in the career of the jeremiad: it brought public declarations from several pundits that his decisive win represented not just a danger to the American errand but its actual end.

One of the many brilliant demonstrations in this study is its analysis of the economic dimension of the myth of America. The rhetoric of the jeremiad, Bercovitch shows us, was not an idiom of historical despair, but a generative narrative for a "well functioning capitalist culture." But what happens when capitalism *doesn't* function well—which may be to say, functions too well? What happens when the myth of declension meets real economic decline? My suggestion here is that if capital has underwritten the cultural capital that is the symbol of America, it may be that the symbol—like the nation-state—is facing a significant debt problem.

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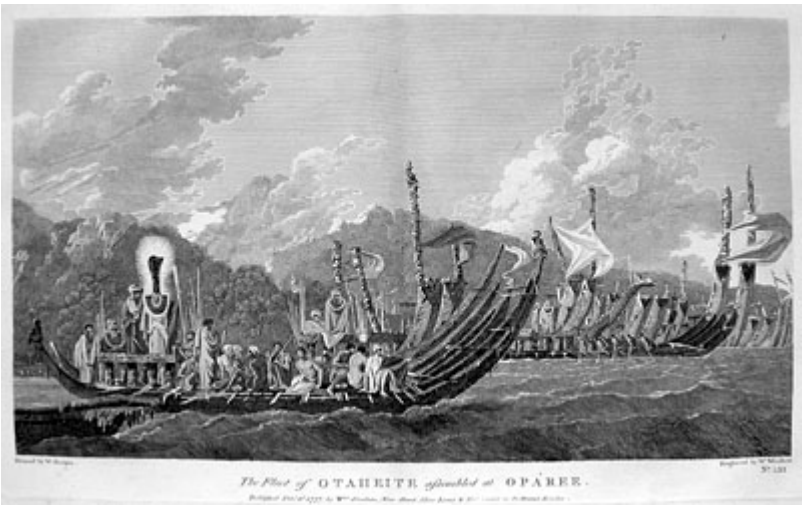
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