All Things Were Working Together for My Deliverance



By the time the Union army reached Bayou Boeuf—the neighborhood where Solomon Northup, a free black man kidnapped from upstate New York, had been enslaved for twelve years—it had become a tourist destination. The federals accompanying General Nathaniel P. Banks on the march to Port Hudson, Louisiana, who had read Northup's *Twelve Years a Slave* (1853) made a point of seeking out the plantation of Edwin Epps, the last, longest, and most notoriously brutal owner of Solomon Northup before he regained his freedom (fig. 1). On May 19, 1863, 2nd Lt. William H. Root of the 75th New York Volunteers, wrote the following in his diary: "We are in the district that formed the theater of Solomon Northup's bondage":

Old Epp's plantation is a few miles down the Bayou and Epps himself is on the plantation, a*noted* man made famous of his owning Solomon Northup. Plenty of negroes are found about here who say that they knew Platt [Northup's name while enslaved] well and have danced to the music of his fiddle often. Some who remember when he was taken out of the lot by the "Northern gemman." Bayou Boeuf was then the witness of quite a scene which made a lasting impression on the minds of the poor darkies who saw the affair.

The story of Northup did linger, both on the bayou and in the memories of soldiers who traveled in those parts during the war. S. E. Chandler, a sergeant with the 24th New York Cavalry, wrote to the *National Tribune* in 1894 about

Northup and his story, noting that “the book is now out of print, cannot be procured of any regular dealer.” However, he had found a copy of *Twelve Years* in a secondhand bookshop in Albany. Chandler recalled meeting “a number of returned soldiers who were with Banks on his Red River expedition who told me of having read the book at the time it was published (1854[sic]) and who visited the plantation of Edwin Epps, where Northup … passed years of his life. They told of seeing and talking with his former slave comrades, whose names were Uncle Abram, Wiley, Aunt Phoebe, Patsy, Bob, Henry, and Edward.” Chandler hoped that others who had visited Bayou Boeuf during the war might also write to the *National Tribune* with “a brief account of what they learned” about the world and the people that Solomon Northup had left behind.

> The film serves to remind us what the war accomplished: the dismantling of the institution that cost Northup twelve years of his life.

As the soldiers who went looking for Edwin Epps well understood, to remember the Civil War was also to recall its antecedents and its outcomes—that is, the South and the nation as they existed before, during, and after the bloody conflict. The recent film version of Northup’s story, appearing in the midst of the Civil War’s sesquicentennial, exemplifies this broader understanding of war memory. Like the book before it, Steve McQueen’s *Twelve Years a Slave* points directly to the bitter roots of the conflict. The film also serves to remind us what the war accomplished: the dismantling of the institution that cost Northup twelve years of his life.

1. Title page of an original edition of Solomon Northup’s Twelve Years a Slave, published in 1853. Courtesy of the UNC University Libraries, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, North Carolina.

2. Advertisement that appeared in New Orleans Item, April 22, 1922, p. 4. Courtesy of GenealogyBank.com, a division of NewsBank, Inc.

Recently, I began researching the editorial backstory to the first modern republication of *Twelve Years a Slave,* in 1968, and that edition’s translation into a feature film. It soon became clear that much of the press coverage of the film—which has focused on the film’s level of historical accuracy, and on how true it is to Solomon Northup’s account—has ignored the subsequent history of the story Northup told. Northup came to believe, when looking back at his escape from the bayou, that “all things were working together for my deliverance.” Little could he imagine that his published narrative would also experience redemption more than once in subsequent years.

Northup's account reached the big screen after traveling the same hard ground of racial conflict that the nation as a whole crossed from the 1850s to the present. The book fell out of print after the Civil War and remained so through the nadir of race relations in the South and the rise of Jim Crow. It was not republished until 1968, in the midst of the Civil Rights movement, when historians had begun to reflect on the African American past in search of antecedents for the radical politics of the present. Now that the Civil War has once again become present in American popular culture due to the sesquicentennial, *Twelve Years a Slave* has resurfaced, this time in cinematic form.

That such a searing film would appear now seems fitting. While most contemporary textbooks discuss the role that slavery played in disunion, antebellum southern slavery is not often integrated into the popular memory of the war. Although important films about slavery and the Civil War have appeared since the 1960s—from *Roots* to *Glory* to *Lincoln*—none of these are so closely tied to the testimony of one person's daily experience of slavery. It is the particularity of Northup's story, as many historians have noted, that allowed him to so keenly reflect antebellum society at large and especially slavery's hold over daily life in the South before the war.

The film's attention to violence (a focus it shares with the original text) and to the plantation landscape in which such routine brutality occurred, de-sanitizes slick political justifications for the Civil War. Like Alexander Gardner's grisly photographs of Antietam in 1862, *Twelve Years* shocks its intended audience with horrors that have largely been kept from the public eye.

As a work of both memory and memorialization, the film version of *Twelve Years a Slave* is perhaps the most powerful answer yet to the movie that became the archetype of the Civil War epic from its debut in 1939, David O. Selznick's production of Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind*. The inverse of that unforgettable monument to a fictional yet fiercely remembered "Old South,"*Twelve Years a Slave* reminds us of what the Civil War *really* swept from American society.

The resulting film is clear-eyed and painful to watch, closely following the experience of its protagonist and taking relatively few liberties with the original text. Countless critics, writers, and historians have hailed it as cinema's first honest look at the South's "peculiar institution." Writing in the *New Yorker,* David Denby declared it "easily the greatest feature film ever made about American slavery." Were it not for the collaboration of two historians in Louisiana, however, McQueen's film could not have become such a testament to what enslaved people endured before the Civil War.

In the spring of 1966, Sue Eakin and Joseph Logsdon contracted with Louisiana State University Press to republish what seemed to be an improbable story. Solomon Northup was a free black man living in Saratoga Springs, New York, in 1841 when he was lured to Washington, D.C., by two men posing as performers in

need of Northup's skill as a violinist. Awakening to find himself chained in a slave pen, Northup was quickly sent south to the New Orleans slave market, sold under the name of "Platt" to a man named William Ford, and carried to the Bayou Boeuf region of central Louisiana. There he remained in bondage for twelve years, much of that time to a cruel master named Edwin Epps, before he was able to reclaim his freedom.

On his return to New York, Northup arranged to tell his story to a lawyer named David O. Wilson. Like most slave narratives of this period, *Twelve Years a Slave* was both a condemnation of slavery and a much-needed source of income for its ex-slave narrator. Wilson does not seem to have had serious abolitionist leanings, but he was an aspiring writer and recognized a good publishing prospect in Northup's story. Harriet Beecher Stowe had published her novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* the year previous, and it met with unprecedented success. The original 1853 edition of *Twelve Years a Slave* was dedicated to Stowe, who had been pleased to see Northup's experience come to light. She noted the similarities between Northup's ordeal and Uncle Tom's, particularly the fact that Northup had been enslaved to a sadistic master (Epps) in central Louisiana, very near to where Tom suffered the abuses of Simon Legree.

Although Eakin and Logsdon became interested in the narrative independent of one another, Eakin saw it first. She recalled that she was about twelve years old when she first read *Twelve Years a Slave.* She had accompanied her father to Oak Hall Plantation (near Alexandria, Louisiana), where he had some business with its owner, Dr. W. D. Haas. Haas was the grandson of Douglass Marshall, mentioned in Northup's account, who owned fifty slaves at Oak Hall in 1860. To keep the young girl occupied, Haas gave her the family's copy of Northup's story. She recalled being struck by the familiar names and places in the narrative.

Despite her avid interest in *Twelve Years a Slave*, Eakin had a difficult time obtaining a copy of her own. The book had long been out of print, as a clipping in the New Orleans *Item* from 1922 attests. Someone from Eakin's hometown of Bunkie with the initials "L.C.E." placed an advertisement in search of a copy of the book and was told none could be had, even in local libraries (fig. 2). Eakin eventually found a copy in a secondhand bookshop in Baton Rouge. As a college student at LSU in the 1940s, she began tracing the life of Northup and apparently never stopped.

Perhaps it is not surprising that Sue Eakin's is not the face most associated with the recent film adaptation of *Twelve Years a Slave* (fig. 3). In fact, most people would be hard pressed to consider the woman in her author's photo (white, grandmotherly, with her hair set and a chain on her eye glasses) on the cutting edge of anything, much less that of African American history. Although it was clearly Eakin who did most of the sleuthing, with Logsdon's help she brought the remarkable narrative of freeborn Solomon Northup's ordeal in slavery back into print.

Just as Lt. Root penned his letter from a South soon to be free of slavery, Sue Eakin and Joseph Logsdon revived Northup's narrative during another upheaval in American race relations. The political movements of the late 1960s brought with them a rising interest in African American history. At that critical point in a long racial struggle, in an age before digital archives put original nineteenth-century books at readers' fingertips, Eakin and Logsdon made *Twelve Years a Slave* accessible to two generations of scholars and their students.



3. Dr. Sue Eakin, professor of history, from the yearbook of Louisiana State University at Alexandria, Sauce Picante (1978). Courtesy of University Archives and Central Louisiana Collection, James C. Bolton Library, Louisiana State University at Alexandria.



4. Illustration from original edition of Solomon Northup's Twelve Years a Slave, published in 1853. Courtesy of the UNC University Libraries, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, North Carolina.

In doing so they became part of a long history of slave narrative publication and re-publication in American letters. With the rise of anti-slavery activism in the 1830s, the publication of slave narratives burgeoned. White abolitionists typically penned an introduction to the former slave's account; many ex-slaves also relied on amanuenses (who often had heavy-handed editorial intent) to transcribe their stories. Some literary critics have seen this as an unequal relationship, and others see this same inequality in modern editions: the words of a former slave, so this critique goes, are never allowed to stand on their own, without the support of an editor to authenticate them.

In the case of Northup's story, however, the process of authentication was always something of a communal one, and it began almost from the moment of Northup's liberation. Given the illegal nature of Solomon Northup's enslavement, the effort to retrieve evidence of his sale and to retrace his steps commenced once he was redeemed. After a failed attempt to send a letter to New York and a near lynching (fig. 4), Northup found an ally in Samuel Bass, an itinerant carpenter with antislavery sympathies who got word to those in New York who could vouch for Northup's status as a free man. A descendent of his father's owner, Henry B. Northup, traveled to Louisiana to retrieve him, with endorsements and aid from Louisiana Senator Pierre Soulé and the governor of New York.

Both Northups then traveled to New Orleans, where they visited the slave pen where he had been held and the room in which William Ford had purchased him. According to the *New York Daily Times*, they also visited the office of a notary to "trace the titles of the colored man from Tibaut [Tibeats] to Eppes [sic], from Ford to Tibaut, and from Freedman [the New Orleans trader] to Ford—all the

titles being recorded in the proper books kept for that purpose." The elaborate system of notarial record keeping in New Orleans, which today fills an archive like no other in the country, helped Northup corroborate his own memory of events.

In later years, the accounts of Lt. Root and Sgt. Chandler, too, served to authenticate Northup's story. And Chandler's list of people who remembered Northup and his sudden liberation suggests that those who were enslaved with him also were willing to affirm both his story and its strangeness. The inclusion of a woman named "Patsy" on that list is significant since in Northup's telling she had been the main object of abuse in the Epps household, caught between the sexual coercion of Edwin Epps and the violent jealousies of his wife. That Patsy may have been there still, with Epps, means the war could not have come soon enough.

White members of the Bayou Boeuf community—contemporaries and immediate descendants of those Northup had encountered—also chimed in regarding the accuracy of Northup's memories. There is evidence that white planter families from the Bayou Boeuf community kept copies of the 1853 edition of *Twelve Years a Slave* in their libraries. According to Eakin, a family named Townsend "undoubtedly was one of those who owned one of the original editions of which there were a number still preserved." Apparently the people of Bayou Boeuf were eager to see their community recognized in print, even if it appeared in the context of a truthful account of the brutality of slavery and the slave trade.

In the footnotes to the 1968 edition, Eakin reprinted parts of an annotation Dr. Haas had written on the flyleaf of the book in 1930, around the time Eakin first read the narrative. Dr. Haas's inscription reflected the grudging admission of residents of the area that Northup's narrative was accurate in its recounting of people and places in Bayou Boeuf: "This story is remarkable in many respects [—] that an uneducated negro after twelve years spent in slavery under a drunken overbearing Master could give so correct a narrative of his experiences is remarkable."

By 1966, Eakin had completed years of research on Northup's narrative, but convincing the editors at LSU Press that she was the right person for the editing job was not easy and, ultimately, not entirely successful. When she first approached the press about publishing *Twelve Years a Slave,* she was a married woman with children, a master's degree, and an instructor's position at a small regional state university. Eakin did not receive a PhD until 1978. "(Mrs.) Sue L. Eakin," as she signed her letters, was not the highly credentialed male historian university presses preferred.

5. Dr. Joseph Logsdon teaching at the University of New Orleans, ca. 1970. Courtesy Special Collections, Earl K. Long Library, University of New Orleans, New Orleans, Louisiana.

6. Northup Trail, stop 2: Bayou Boeuf and image of Mary McCoy and her house, top right. McCoy was the original owner of the 1853 edition of Northup's narrative that was brought to Joseph Logsdon by a student in 1966. From Backtracking Twelve Years a Slave, Solomon Northup Trail Guide, p. 4-5, vertical file. Courtesy of the Ethel and Herman Midlo Center for New Orleans Studies, New Orleans, Louisiana.

In one telling, Eakin approached the press and was rejected. When she tried again, the editors expressed mild interest. Unbeknownst to her, however, a young scholar at LSU-New Orleans (later, the University of New Orleans) with a BA and MA from the University of Chicago and a PhD from the University of Wisconsin, had discovered his own copy of *Twelve Years a Slave*, and had decided that it should be reprinted.

Joseph Logsdon first read Northup's narrative when one of his students brought the book to class (fig. 5). The woman was a friend of the McCoy family, some of whom were mentioned in Northup's account, and it was their copy she had brought for Logsdon to see. According to Northup, the young plantation mistress Mary McCoy was "the beauty and the glory of Bayou Boeuf" and a benevolent slave owner who held "about a hundred working hands, besides a great many house servants, yard boys, and young children" (fig. 6). In his first letter to her, Logsdon told Eakin: "The work came to my attention last fall when one of my students … brought me the family's treasured (and humorously edited) copy of the narrative. After reading the fascinating book, I realized that it should be edited and republished."

Both historians had gone to the press, within weeks of one another—Eakin with years of research in hand, and Logsdon with an interest in the subject matter and well-placed contacts in the field. After meeting Eakin and discussing a possible collaboration, Logsdon wrote to the director of LSU Press: "Her knowledge of the Bayou Boef [sic] region is truly impressive. There is no question in my mind that, working together, we shall write a much better book." For Eakin, however, the decision to collaborate with Logsdon was not much of a decision at all, since she had little choice if she wanted to be an editor on the project.

They divided the work between them: Logsdon worked on the New York parts of the account as well as the introduction, and Eakin continued to research and write footnotes to the Louisiana portion. Together, they verified nearly every name, date, and landmark Northup mentioned in his narrative. John Ridley, who wrote the script of the film, told the *New York Times* that he relied upon the extensive notes in the Eakin and Logsdon edition to write the screenplay.

Logsdon's most significant contribution, however, may have been his efforts to put Northup's narrative in a larger context. Logsdon was aware that African American history was of increasing interest to publishers and within the academy. In his "Northup" file, he saved a clipping from the*National Observer* dated March 21, 1966 (fig. 7), with the headline "A New Boom as Negroes Seek a

Place in History.” The writer noted “the depth and diversity of the current Negro information explosion, a phenomenon that is inundating libraries and schools, spawning new businesses, and creating a sense of pride in heritage among thousands of American Negroes.” The Civil Rights movement and its fight for school integration, as well as “the emergence of Africa” in the popular consciousness, had created an “insatiable public appetite for information on Negro Life.”


7. “A New Boom as Negroes Seek a Place in History,” National Observer, March 21, 1966. Joseph Logsdon Papers, Special Collections, Earl K. Long Library, University of New Orleans. Click image to enlarge in new window.

8. Cover, Backtracking Twelve Years a Slave, Solomon Northup Trail Guide, n.d., vertical file. Courtesy of the Ethel and Herman Midlo Center for New Orleans Studies, New Orleans, Louisiana.

In the same article, John Hope Franklin, then teaching at the University of Chicago, argued that “the Negroes’ contributions to the nation have been obscured by history, and deliberately so. The traditional view of the Negro that depicts him as irresponsible and shiftless was part of the apparatus used to uphold his degraded status, and justify the institution of slavery.” A “reexamination” of that view was underway, but not all of this new work was genuine. Pointing to the efforts of publishers and writers to turn a profit by quickly filling the void in black history, Franklin said: “There are people slapping anything at all to do with Negroes between two covers and making a profit on it.”

Logsdon must have seen the Northup project as one that would address Franklin’s concerns. The experience of enslavement narrated by one of the enslaved, a dramatic story filled with detail that could be verified and used by scholars and teachers, was the antithesis of the slapdash productions to which Franklin alluded. In light of Northup’s obvious intelligence, remarkable survival, and industrious frame of mind even under slavery (in addition to playing the violin at plantation parties, he saved his first master, William Ford, both time and money by devising a means for transporting timber down the bayou instead of over land), *Twelve Years a Slave* would contribute meaningfully to a rebirth of research and writing in African American history.

Logsdon also worked to promote the new edition among prominent historians. He enlisted the help of Kenneth Stampp, eminent historian of American slavery at the University of California-Berkeley, who agreed to write a blurb for the book (though it does not seem to have ever been used). Stampp called the narrative a “priceless document,” asserting that while Frederick Douglass’s narrative was the “superior” of the two, “in some respects Northup’s narrative is more

valuable to the historian." Because he had been born a free man, Northup (perhaps more so than Douglass) "tasted the bitterness of slavery."

When the 1968 edition appeared—doubling the accepted canon of nineteenth-century slave narratives to two—it was as if Northup had offered up his story again, in another tumultuous era for race relations in America. A review for the *Florida Historical Quarterly* (whose blurb, strangely, still appears on the cover of the 2010 LSU Press edition) insisted that the book "should be must reading for every young Southerner. Only in accounts such as this can they understand the true nature of the curse which, more than a hundred years later, still hangs like a millstone around the neck of the South, hampering final emancipation for white and black alike." Such a directive reflects the time and place in which Eakin and Logsdon reintroduced Northup's remarkable story, delivering his account to an eager new generation.

If Logsdon provided the larger framework for Northup's narrative, it was Eakin who reconstructed "the world of Solomon Northup," to quote Logsdon himself. But in truth, Eakin's relationship to her subject was not entirely academic—nor was it always objective. She seems to have been drawn to *Twelve Years a Slave* in large part because while it narrated Northup's trials, the text also recorded a detailed history of her beloved Bayou Boeuf. In the early 1970s, for instance, she secured funding for a brochure called *Backtracking: Twelve Years a Slave*, which numbers the various sites of Northup's enslavement and provides brief commentary on the people and places he encountered (fig. 8). This text serves as a (now mostly outdated) travel guide through the community where Northup was enslaved for so long.

Perhaps nothing so well illustrates Eakin's familiarity with the world in which Northup found himself, however, than the map of "The Bayou Boeuf Country" she created with the help of a local cartographer named Rufus Smith (fig. 9). The names and property lines of plantation owners cluster on either side of the bayou, and the cleared land is ringed by swamps and mostly impassable forests. Like Northup's narrative, the map is full of names and places, topographic notations, and marked routes between plantations. Eakin did her best to highlight Bayou Boeuf, its landmarks, and Northup's journeys through it. But she was unable to render that same landscape from Northup's perspective, that is, from the perspective of a free man who suddenly found himself enslaved in plantation country, far from a port or a coastline that might have afforded him swift passage home.

9. A map commissioned by Sue Eakin from local cartographer and surveyor Rufus Smith (1970). Signed by Eakin. Courtesy of Ethel and Herman Midlo Center for New Orleans Studies, New Orleans, Louisiana.

Sue Eakin's mapping of Solomon Northup's "world" and his journeys through it has been translated into three dimensions in Steve McQueen's film. With the

camera, he tracks Northup through what historian Walter Johnson describes as the “carceral landscape” of the mid-nineteenth century Lower Mississippi Valley, a vast territory of cotton and cane with few opportunities for escape. In Northup’s recollection, it was as though even the sun was beyond the reach of the bayou’s inmates: “In the edge of the swamp, not a half mile from Epps’ house was a large space, thousands of acres in extent, thickly covered with palmetto. Tall trees, whose long arms interlocked each other, formed a canopy above them, so dense as to exclude the beams of the sun. It was like twilight always, even in the middle of the brightest day.”



10. Photograph of the Edwin Epps house in its original location along the banks of the Bayou Boeuf. Sue Eakins located it there in 1976 and helped to orchestrate its first move, to the nearby town of Bunkie, Louisiana. Courtesy of University Archives and Central Louisiana Collection, James C. Bolton Library, Louisiana State University at Alexandria.

In McQueen’s film, elements of the landscape become characters in the story. He filmed oak trees, for instance, in long, watery shots of gnarled branches draped with Spanish moss and, at two points in the story, with the bodies of black men. In one scene, when Northup considers escape, the sweating indecision he suffers in the maze of scrub brush is frightening. When he then stumbles on a lynching—through which McQueen also evokes a more recent reign of terror in the South—the impassability of that space for a black man in the 1840s becomes plain.

Given how closely McQueen’s film hews to Northup’s account, Eakin would probably have been pleased with the film. But there is one important point on which Sue Eakin would have taken issue with McQueen’s version. It concerns the house where Epps lived—the very house where Lt. Root made a stop on his way to Port Hudson. Eakin exerted much effort to help preserve the Edwin Epps house, built with the help of Northup in 1852 (figs. 10 and 11). Since 1976, the structure has been moved twice and now sits, restored, on the campus of LSU-Alexandria. Eakin had found the house herself, after considerable searching: “I had a time documenting the house,” she wrote, “because I had mistaken it for another of the hundreds of thousands of old slave cabins which had once lined the Bayou Boeuf.” Eakin rightly pointed out that the house, a modest one, was “far more typical of plantation houses as known within the miles of plantations in the lower Red River Valley than the columned mansions ‘restored’ mostly with oil money after World War II.”

Much of the movie, in fact, was filmed on the grounds of the sorts of “columned mansions” to which Eakin alluded. The Felicity Plantation in Vacherie, Louisiana, plays the part of the Epps house in Steve McQueen’s movie and such a house, Eakin might have argued, would have been entirely too extravagant for a man who began his career as an overseer. In her *Backtracking* guide, she included a photograph of the P.L. Shaw House, a neighboring plantation to the

Epps place with a nearly identical structure. The Shaw house was still in good repair at the time the photo was taken and probably offers something close to what Lt. Root and his companions found on Epps's property in 1863 (fig. 12).



11. The Edwin Epps house as it now stands on the campus of Louisiana State University at Alexandria, where it serves as a museum dedicated to Northup's time in the region. Courtesy of University Archives and Central Louisiana Collection, James C. Bolton Library, Louisiana State University at Alexandria.



12. Photograph of the plantation house of Edwin Epps's neighbor, P.L. Shaw. As the text notes, this house most closely resembled the Epps house at the time of the Civil War. From Backtracking Twelve Years a Slave, Solomon Northup Trail Guide, n.d, p. 11, vertical file. Courtesy of the Ethel and Herman Midlo Center for New Orleans Studies, New Orleans, Louisiana.

Eakin would have also appreciated the film's high-profile release during the Civil War's sesquicentennial. But she would have continued to point to our garbled understanding of the slave South and our even more confused attempts to remember the society that the Civil War upended. "It was here," she seemed to say, "and here, and here." The peeling houses and the bloodlines that persisted in Bayou Boeuf were also remains of the war and the last physical evidence of the antebellum society it (rightly) destroyed.

Further Reading

Two editions of Northup's narrative have been published in advance of the film: Solomon Northup, *Twelve Years a Slave*, ed. Henry Louis Gates Jr. (New York, 2013); Solomon Northup, *Twelve Years a Slave, Enhanced Edition*, ed. Sue Eakin (Longboat Key, Fla., 2013). The 1968 edition is Solomon Northup, *Twelve Years a Slave,* Sue Eakin and Joseph Logsdon, eds. (Baton Rouge, La., 1968).

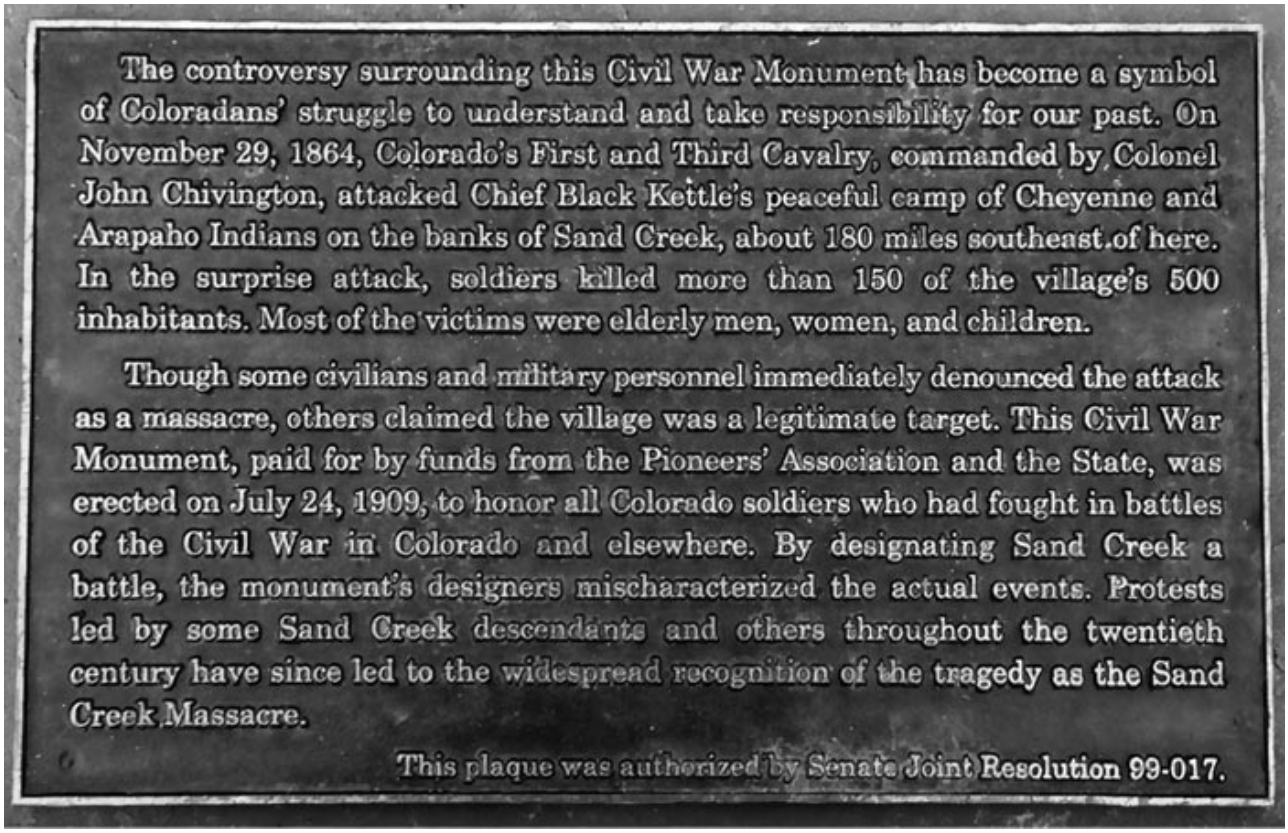
On the history of slave narratives, see Marion Wilson Starling's *The Slave Narrative: Its Place in American History* (New Haven, Conn., 1981).

For critiques of *Twelve Years a Slave* as a book and a film, see David Denby, "Fighting to Survive:*Twelve Years a Slave* and *All is Lost,*" *The New Yorker* (October 21, 2013); Noah Berlotsky, "How *Twelve Years a Slave* Gets History Right: By Getting It Wrong," *The Atlantic.com* (October 28, 2013); Jimmy So, "The '*12 Years a Slave*' Book Shows Slavery As Even More Appalling Than In the Film," *The Daily Beast.com* (October 18, 2013); and Forrest Wickman, "How Accurate is Twelve Years a Slave?" *Slate.com* Culture Blog (October 17, 2013).

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Mary Niall Mitchell is Joseph Tregle Professor in Early American History and Ethel & Herman Midlo Chair in New Orleans Studies at the University of New Orleans.

For Liberty and Empire



Remembering Sand Creek, Rethinking the Civil War

The runners were exhausted. Mostly young people from the Northern and Southern Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes, they dripped with sweat and nibbled on energy bars. They talked and sipped from bottles of water, striking odd poses to stretch their road-weary hamstrings. They had just finished a relay of roughly 200 miles, a “healing run” intended to protect them from the ravages of drugs and alcohol, violence and deprivation, boredom and sorrow—just some of the maladies that stalked them on the reservations where they lived.

Early that morning and throughout the previous day, Thanksgiving, they ran past stores gearing up for sales, past families crammed into cars speeding toward holiday gatherings, and past mile after mile of empty prairie landscapes. At impromptu rituals along their route, they reacquainted themselves with

venerated tribal traditions and with land that had once belonged to their ancestors. Having finally arrived at their destination, the state capitol building in Denver, they were ready to complete their journey. They stopped to catch their breath and to commemorate a painful tragedy from their collective past. The date was November 29, 2002, the 138th anniversary of the Sand Creek massacre.

They gathered around the plinth of a Civil War memorial atop the capitol steps, which seemed to some of the Cheyennes and Arapahos like an odd classroom in which to study tribal history. A teenager wearing Nike gear—from her hat all the way down to her fluorescent pink shoes—had traveled from Concho, Oklahoma, to participate in the healing run. She looked up at the statue and said, "I don't get it." A uniformed federal soldier, seemingly only a few years older than the athlete standing by his feet, gazed westward into the middle distance, across Denver's Civic Center Park and toward the Rocky Mountains (fig 1). He carried his rifle in two hands and thrust one leg in front of the other, ready to meet the enemy or Colorado's bright future, whichever crossed his path first. The runner asked, of nobody in particular, "Will someone tell me why we're here? What does this Civil War guy have to do with us? With Indians? With Sand Creek?"

> Americans … often recall their history as one of steady progress punctuated by the occasional righteous war. In this view, the nation fought the Civil War only because of slavery and to expand freedom.

She did not have to wait long for answers. Drum beats and the opening strains of Chief White Antelope's death song signaled the start of a ceremony to reinterpret a plaque affixed to the north-facing side of the Civil War memorial (fig. 2). That marker first related the state's early history and then boasted of its citizens' patriotism—it reported that nearly 5,000 Coloradans had volunteered to serve the Union during the Civil War, "the highest average of any state or territory and with no draft or bounty"—before listing in neat columns the names of all of the "battles and engagements" in which those soldiers had fought, including, at the bottom right, a bloodletting typically labeled "a massacre": Sand Creek.

Although that episode may have seemed out of place on what otherwise appeared to be an honor roll, the story of Sand Creek's inclusion on that list suggests that as the United States continues its Civil War sesquicentennial celebration, taking a moment to study the intersection of Native and national histories, as well as the collision of the past and the present, may help to reshape popular conceptions of the Civil War's causes and consequences in the American West. Confronting Sand Creek's place as part of the Civil War forces onlookers to reckon with the fact that a conflict most often recalled only as a war of liberation should more properly be remembered as a war of empire as well.

Such an understanding may be foreign or uncomfortable for Americans, who often

recall their history as one of steady progress punctuated by the occasional righteous war. In this view, the nation fought the Civil War only because of slavery and to expand freedom. Even the best scholarship can inadvertently contribute to such misconceptions. James McPherson's *Battle Cry of Freedom*, for instance, the most influential study of the war written in recent decades, begins in the far West. McPherson suggests that the conflict grew out of struggles between North and South over territory acquired from Mexico—struggles, in short, over the shape of an emerging American empire. By book's end, though, McPherson largely drops the issue, focusing instead on the fate of the newly freed people, on struggles over definitions of citizenship, and on the growth of the federal government in the postbellum years. In other words, *Battle Cry* locates the roots of the war in the West, but then, with the return of peace, largely forgets the region.



1. Colorado Civil War Memorial, Denver. Unveiled in 1909, the statue is sited on the west side of the state capitol building. It faces the city's Civic Center Park. Photograph courtesy of History Colorado (Subject file collection, Scan #10037235), Denver, Colorado.

Popular culture, much more even than scholarship, now typically frames the Civil War exclusively as a war of liberation. The recent film *Lincoln*, for example, might best be understood as answering a question Stephen Spielberg posed at the end of another of his war epics, *Saving Private Ryan*. Painting the earlier film's final scene against a perfect commemorative canvas, the Normandy American Cemetery and Memorial, Spielberg places an aging James Ryan amidst a forest of gleaming white crosses. After kneeling before the gravesite of the man who saved his life during the war, Ryan, a synecdoche for citizen soldiers, asks his wife if he has led a good life and if he is a good man. She replies that he has and that he is. With that, Spielberg, as close to a national narrator as the United States has, reassures moviegoers that World War II was a good war. The music rises, Ryan salutes his fallen comrade, the scene fades to a backlit American flag stiff in the breeze, and then to black.

Lincoln recapitulates the same queries and repurposes similar tropes. Forgetting that the war exploded not just out of the sectional conflict over slavery, but also out of the fight between the North and the South to control a growing Anglo-American empire in the West, Spielberg ignores that region and also the war itself, confining himself to a detailed recounting of the Thirteenth Amendment's passage. In doing so, he suggests that President Lincoln died so that the United States might live and that the nation, because it destroyed the institution of slavery during the war, redeemed itself in blood. *Lincoln* provides an object lesson in catharsis through suffering, as Spielberg transfigures tragedy, the death of more than 600,000 soldiers, into triumph, and violence into virtue. Was the Civil War a good war? Has the United States lived a good life in the years since? Yes and yes, the filmmaker reassures his

vast audience. And so, by viewing the war through a narrow lens and a crimped regional perspective, Spielberg shades collective memory into teleology. With *Lincoln*, he reads the past backward, obscuring as much as he reveals.

But no matter how it is portrayed in cinema, cast in monographs, or understood in the popular consciousness, the Civil War was rooted, from its beginning to its end, in the far West. Long after Robert E. Lee surrendered to Ulysses S. Grant at Appomattox, long after President Lincoln's assassination, long after the Thirteenth Amendment's ratification, the nation continued to focus on how best to settle the land beyond the 100th meridian, on how best to secure an empire that stretched from the Atlantic coast to the shores of the Pacific and beyond. And even after the war boasted a moment of redemption, a day of jubilee, for many Americans, it also featured episodes of terrible subjugation, days of dispossession, for others. Which is to say, even after the Civil War evolved into a war of liberation, it remained one of empire. For people who hope to understand this disjuncture, the experiences of Native Americans during the war, including at Sand Creek in 1864, may help.

Returning to November 29, 2002. As participants gathered around the memorial, state, municipal, and tribal officials spoke about Colorado's early Anglo and Native histories. Then Laird Cometsevah, a Southern Cheyenne chief and leader of a Sand Creek descendants' organization, recounted the details of the massacre. Cometsevah's version of the Sand Creek story served as an official narrative for many Northern and Southern Cheyenne people. He explained that after a gold strike in 1859 triggered a rush to the mountains near Denver, his ancestors endured years of escalating violence with settlers on the plains to the east. Cometsevah's forebears, weary of bloodshed and chaos by 1864, sought a truce with white authorities in Colorado. Late in September of that year, a group of peace chiefs, including Black Kettle, traveled to Denver, where they met with Governor John Evans and Colonel John Chivington. After Evans placed the negotiations in the hands of the region's military leaders, Chivington suggested to the Native emissaries that if they wanted to keep their bands safe, they should travel immediately to Fort Lyon, a federal installation in southeastern Colorado. The Cheyennes and Arapahos did as they were directed. The fort's commander told them to camp along the banks of Sand Creek. Then Colonel Chivington betrayed their trust.

Before daybreak on November 29, 1864, Cometsevah continued, 700 soldiers, men from the First and Third Colorado Regiments, "attacked that camp of peaceful Indians." By day's end, the Colorado volunteers had "slaughtered more than one hundred and fifty Indians," most of whom were women, children, and the elderly. Cometsevah pressed on: "The white soldiers had no mercy. They desecrated their victims' bodies, cutting open the belly of a pregnant woman, murdering children, and slicing the genitals from the corpses lying on the ground." He concluded: "Our people still haven't recovered from that treachery."

As the assembled dignitaries and runners contemplated Cometsevah's words, Bob Martinez, a Colorado state senator, stood next to a freshly cast plaque

shrouded in sweetgrass. After Arapaho and Cheyenne singers performed an honor song, Martinez unveiled a bronze plaque, narrating the politics of memory surrounding Sand Creek's placement on the nearby memorial (fig. 3). The text noted, "The controversy surrounding this Civil War monument has become a symbol of Coloradans' struggle to understand and take responsibility for our past." It then recounted the Sand Creek story before returning to the topic of the contingent and contested nature of public memory: "Though some civilians and military personnel immediately denounced the attack as a massacre, others claimed the [Cheyenne and Arapaho] village was a legitimate target." The sponsors of the Civil War memorial, for their part, had "mischaracterized the actual events" when they "designated Sand Creek a battle." In contrast, the plaque concluded by pointing to the "widespread recognition of the tragedy as the Sand Creek Massacre." The ceremony complete, Martinez posed for pictures with the Cheyenne and Arapaho runners.

For some onlookers, Senator Martinez's participation in the ceremony might have seemed incongruous. Four years earlier, rather than seeking to reinterpret elements of the monument, Martinez had tried to erase them. He had sponsored a bill in the state legislature to delete Sand Creek from the list of battles and engagements on the statue's base. Congress had just authorized the National Park Service to commemorate Sand Creek at a new historic site located near the killing field, thrusting the massacre back into the spotlight in Colorado. Martinez found himself shocked when he walked by the statue on his way to work in the capitol.

It seemed to Martinez that Sand Creek, "a horrible atrocity," in his view, had no place on this list of "battles." After all, he believed the massacre "had nothing to do with the Civil War," a conflict best remembered, he believed, for preserving the Union and ending slavery. Sand Creek's inclusion on the memorial, Martinez suggested, insulted the tragedy's Native American victims and diminished the sacrifices of the "Colorado Civil War veterans who fought and died in the actual Civil War battles that are listed." Martinez's colleagues in the state legislature agreed. On May 5, 1998, they passed a joint resolution reading, "Sand Creek was not, in fact," part of the Civil War. Nor, the document continued, was it "a battle." Instead, it was "a massacre," and therefore it would have to "be removed from the memorial."

A bit less than a century before that vote took place, Coloradans likely would have been shocked to learn that Sand Creek would someday be severed from its Civil War context. On July 24, 1909, the Pioneers Association, a heritage organization that celebrated Colorado's earliest settlers, participated in a national commemorative project by unveiling the state's Civil War memorial. With veterans of the war nearing the end of their lives around the country, archives throughout the United States acquired vast document collections, authors published stacks of regimental histories, and cities unveiled monuments designed to shape how future generations would remember the war.

As David Blight, Michael Kammen, Edward Linenthal, and other scholars have

argued in recent years, this upsurge of memorialization embodied a reconciliationist impulse. A heroic narrative of the war emerged around the turn of the century, a glorious martial story in which Union and Confederate soldiers fought bravely, well, and in service of virtuous goals. The war's root causes—struggles over the fate of slavery, over competing definitions of federal authority and citizenship, and over the right to shape an emerging American empire in the West—could be set aside in service of an amicable reunion between the North and the South.



2. A plaque affixed to the base of the Colorado Civil War Memorial. Sand Creek is included, at the bottom right, among the list of "Battles and Engagements" in which Coloradans fought during the war. Photograph courtesy of the author.

At the dedication of Colorado's Civil War memorial in 1909, event organizers stitched together national unity and regional pride, seamlessly integrating visions of empire and liberty. Robert Steele, chief justice of the state supreme court, oversaw the event. The statue's designer, John Howland, had served in the First Colorado Regiment, and he, along with a crowd of other veterans, participated in the ceremony. A huge audience gathered to celebrate the heroic Colorado volunteers who had helped save the Union, and, at Sand Creek, cleared the way for the nation to realize its Manifest Destiny—projects that would have been inseparable for most onlookers.

A phalanx of riflemen fired a twenty-one-gun salute as Chief Justice Steele pulled back an American flag, unveiling the bronze foot soldier. A military band then broke the "hush of patriotic awe," balancing the emancipationist spirit of "Marching Through Georgia" ("Hurrah! Hurrah! We bring the jubilee! Hurrah! Hurrah! The flag that makes you free!") with the Lost Cause nostalgia of "Dixie" ("I wish I was in the land of Cotton, Old times they are not forgotten"). As he rose to speak, Thomas Patterson, a former U.S. Senator and owner of Denver's *Rocky Mountain News*, invoked the spirit of reconciliation, declaring that, "we are all Americans today, and we all glory in one flag and one country." General Irving Hale, who a decade earlier had gained fame during the Spanish-American War as a proud imperialist and who later had helped to found the Veterans of Foreign Wars, followed Patterson to the dais, celebrating the Civil War "for making freedom universal for all Americans." Hale's remarks ignored the conflict's effect on Native peoples, including the Cheyennes and Arapahos, but captured the spirit of the day. Nether Hale nor anyone else at the event seem to have given a moment's notice to the fact that Sand Creek enjoyed pride of place on the monument.

That Sand Creek would be depicted on the statehouse steps both as a battle and as a chapter in Colorado's Civil War story culminated nearly half a century's wrangling over memories of the violence. John Chivington, for instance, worked from November 1864 until his death three decades later to shape public perceptions of Sand Creek. He always insisted that the engagement had been a

legitimate part of the fight to preserve the Union and to spread civilization into the West. Late in 1864, when he first bragged about Sand Creek, the bloodshed's status as part of the Civil War seemed like a foregone conclusion. Two years earlier, Chivington had secured his reputation for courage, fighting for the Union in New Mexico at the Battle of Glorieta Pass. Chivington recognized Sand Creek and the Civil War as having been catalyzed by the nation's struggle over the future of the West. An abolitionist and Methodist minister, he had ridden the circuit in Kansas in the 1850s, hoping to ensure that territory's future as free soil. He had experienced the 1860 election as a national referendum on competing visions of expansion: the Republican Party's free soil campaign, kin to Thomas Jefferson's promised "empire for liberty" in the West, versus the Democrats' insistence that slavery should be allowed to root itself in land acquired during the U.S.-Mexican War.

The Republicans carried the day in the 1860 election and then, after most Southern members of Congress absented themselves, passed legislation (the Morrill Act, the Pacific Railroad Act, and the Homestead Act) and created new pieces of the federal apparatus (including the Department of Agriculture) to ensure that the conquest and settlement of the West would proceed according to the party's plans. Chivington knew that many of his men in 1864 had volunteered to fight for the Union because they believed that the Lincoln administration had promised them the West as fair recompense for their service. In this vision, Native peoples would have to make way for onrushing white civilization—or, as in the case of the Arapahos and Cheyennes at Sand Creek, be crushed by the gears of war.

In spring of 1865, Chivington fine-tuned his Sand Creek story for the first of many times. In the months since the massacre, two things had happened to force changes in his recollections. First, despite his concerted public relations efforts, several of his former subordinates, haunted by memories of the carnage, had begun suggesting that Sand Creek had been a massacre, convincing federal authorities to launch inquiries into the violence. And second, the Civil War had ended, leaving the nation struggling to understand what had caused such a terrible paroxysm of violence. Chivington was determined that as this triage of national memories took place, Sand Creek would be bathed in the reflected glory of the war.

In April 1865, Chivington provided federal investigators with a lengthy account of Sand Creek, including lessons about the relationship between the Civil War, the nascent Indian Wars, and the future of the West. For several years prior to Sand Creek, Chivington claimed, he had "been in possession of the most conclusive evidence of an alliance, for the purposes of hostility against the whites, of the Sioux, Cheyennes, Arapahos, Comanche river, and Apache Indians." Ignoring diplomatic barriers and the bloody history separating those Native nations, Chivington insisted that the allied tribes had represented an existential threat both to white settlers in Colorado Territory and to the Republican vision for control of the Plains, the Rocky Mountains, and beyond. Without Colorado, without Sand Creek, he noted, the party of Lincoln and

liberty would have lost its surest toehold in the West.

Chivington placed the horror of Sand Creek against a backdrop of Confederate intrigue. “Rebel emissaries,” he revealed, “were long since sent among the Indians to incite them against the whites.” George Bent, son of a borderlands trade tycoon and former federal Indian agent named William Bent and his Cheyenne wife, Owl Woman, had supposedly served as the South’s agent. Bent, Chivington claimed, had promised the Plains tribes that with “the Great Father at Washington having all he could do to fight his children at the south, they could now regain this country.” In other words, Chivington suggested, with federal authorities distracted by fighting the Civil War back east, Native peoples could push white settlers out of the West, retaking land they had steadily lost since the beginning of the rush to Colorado. The specter of such carnage seemed terrifying in context. With memories of the Dakota uprising in Minnesota in 1862 and the Cherokees’ decision to side with the Confederacy still fresh, Chivington insisted that Sand Creek should properly be understood as part of the successful struggle to preserve the Union.

Federal investigators were unmoved by Chivington’s claims. Each of the investigations into Sand Creek damned Chivington and the violence he wrought, with none doing so more stridently than the Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War (JCCW). Founded in 1861, the JCCW inquired into a vast array of controversial topics, including the causes of Union losses, the treatment of wounded and imprisoned soldiers, and the use of so-called colored troops in the North’s armies. Its report in 1865, for example, covered the debacles the previous year at the Crater outside Petersburg, the infamous massacre of African American soldiers at Fort Pillow in Tennessee, and Sand Creek, among other contentious issues.

Pulling no punches, the JCCW recommended that Governor Evans be sacked and that Chivington—who, the committee concluded, had committed “murder”—be cashiered and court martialed. At once acknowledging Sand Creek’s place within the Civil War and also attempting to segregate the massacre from the struggle to crush the rebellion, the report’s authors raged, “It is difficult to believe that beings in the form of men and disgracing the uniform of the United States, soldiers and officers, could commit or countenance such acts of cruelty and barbarity.” Chivington, they noted, had “deliberately planned and executed a foul and dastardly massacre which would have disgraced the veriest savages among those who were the victims of his cruelty.” Sand Creek so threatened the honor of the Union cause that the JCCW hoped its perpetrators would be regarded not as federal soldiers but as frontier rogues, less civilized even than the Indians they had killed.

Westerners, and Coloradans especially, did not accept that verdict. After the JCCW issued its findings, the *Rocky Mountain News* lauded Chivington and defended Sand Creek as a necessary part of taming the savage West. And years later, William Byers, the *News*‘s editor at the time of Sand Creek, began a print war with Indian reformer Helen Hunt Jackson, who had recently used Sand

Creek as an example of the federal government's malice toward Native peoples. In his attacks on Jackson, Byers hewed to the line drawn by Chivington, insisting that the Colorado volunteers had been loyal Union men who had killed hostile Indians. Although federal troops were still grappling with Native nations during the Indian Wars when Byers attacked Jackson, he nevertheless claimed that Chivington and his men had pacified rather than inflamed the Plains tribes. He concluded that Sand Creek had "saved Colorado and taught the Indians the most salutary lesson they ever learned."

Jackson scoffed at the idea that Sand Creek had quieted the region's tribes, rebutting Byers's claims by waving the bloody shirt. The Indian Wars that the massacre had precipitated had cost federal authorities millions of dollars, she explained, requiring that some 8,000 troops be "withdrawn from the effective forces engaged with the Rebellion." Not only had the massacre been an atrocity, she argued, it had also detracted from the Union war effort. Two years later, when Jackson published *Century of Dishonor*, she expanded her argument, suggesting that Sand Creek had been a predictable outgrowth of longstanding federal Indian policy. The Republican Party's vision of empire, of a white man's republic in the West, had helped set the nation on the path to the Civil War and the Indian Wars.

Around the turn of the twentieth century, with men like William Byers still trying to shape public memory of Sand Creek, George Bent decided that he had to weigh in on the massacre's history. Anthropologists were arguing at the time that Native Americans were a vanishing race, historians were lamenting the closing of the frontier, and the public was consuming mountains of dime novels. The West, in popular culture and public policy, stood at the center of discussions about the nation's future. Bent worried that Indians had no voice in those conversations. He began collecting tribal history and lore for James Mooney, a renowned Smithsonian ethnographer, and George Bird Grinnell, a founder of the discipline of anthropology. After the two scholars disappointed him (Mooney because he would not listen, Grinnell because he withheld proper credit), Bent sought out another collaborator. He began working with George Hyde, a relatively obscure historian. In 1906, the two men placed six articles in a magazine called *The Frontier*.

Those essays, published under Bent's name, inverted Chivington's Sand Creek stories. Although Bent acknowledged that he had fought for the South—he had served in General Sterling Price's First Missouri Cavalry—he mocked the "men in Colorado [who] talked about Rebel plots" to ally with the region's Indian peoples. Pointing to the constraints of Native diplomacy, he noted that the Kiowas and Comanches were "inveterate foes of Texas," and suggested that the Cheyennes and Arapahos, though hardly staunch Unionists, likewise had no incentive to join with the Confederacy. Turning to the massacre itself, Bent, who survived a wound he received there, related details of Chivington's betrayal of the Cheyenne and Arapaho peace chiefs; of Black Kettle's decision to raise a white flag over his lodge, signaling that his people were friendly; and of the Colorado troops' butchery. (In 2002, Laird Cometsevah would draw on

Bent's Sand Creek stories when, speaking on the steps of Colorado's capitol building, he recounted the history of the massacre.)

For the lion's share of his articles, though, Bent moved beyond the massacre's particulars, instead considering the implications of the violence. He understood the Civil War as a war of imperialism rather than liberation, a conflict that, after it ended, left the Plains tribes and white Westerners awash in blood. Unlike Chivington and Byers, who maintained that Sand Creek had brought peace to the region, Bent believed that the fighting begat more fighting. The massacre touched off a period of violence that only ended with the subjugation of his people during the dawning Reservation Era. Sand Creek, in Bent's telling, was part of the rotten foundation upon which the federal government constructed an empire in the West.

Chivington's loyalists did not allow Bent's charges to stand unchallenged. With most veterans of the First and Third Colorado Regiments well into their golden years, Jacob Downing read Bent's essays in the *Frontier* as an attack on the memory of his own and his comrades' honorable Civil War service. A retired major who, prior to Sand Creek, had distinguished himself fighting Confederates—at Apache Canyon, Glorieta Pass, and several other engagements in the conflict's far western theater—Downing had in the years after the war become one of Denver's most prominent citizens, a businessman and philanthropist devoted to various municipal causes. In 1906, he remained active in several local heritage organizations, including the Colorado chapter of the Grand Army of the Republic.

As a steward of the state's early history and Civil War memory, Downing tried to uphold the status quo by attacking the Bent family. Outraged that an Indian had dared to label the actions of white men "savage," in the pages of the *Denver Times* he called William Bent a "squaw man" and George Bent "a halfbreed." Sand Creek, Downing continued, should be recalled as Chivington had always suggested: a righteous battle fought against hostile Indians determined to slow the march of progress in Colorado, and also as a critical part of the Union war effort in the West.

Before Downing died the next year, he helped to influence early planning for Colorado's Civil War memorial, the statue that would sit atop the state capitol steps. After 1909, that monument would carve Chivington's Sand Creek story into stone, lending an aura of permanence to what had been a contested narrative.

Less than a century later, in 1998, Senator Martinez decided to recast that story, a reminder of the contingent nature of public commemoration. After Martinez's resolution passed the state legislature, the Capitol Building Advisory Committee hired a local metal worker. The artisan would remove the plaque from the statue's base, grind the words "Sand Creek" away, burnish the remaining twenty-one "battles and engagements" to match their original color, and then reattach the nameplate to the memorial. The horror of the past could be erased for just $1,000.

Or not. When David Halaas, chief historian at the Colorado Historical Society, heard about Martinez's resolution, he thought "it was a well-intentioned but lousy plan." Halaas worked at the time with Cheyenne representatives on other efforts to memorialize the massacre, including the Park Service's national historic site. He contacted Laird Cometsevah and Steve Brady, head of the Northern Cheyenne Sand Creek descendants committee. Cometsevah thought "that Sand Creek should not be a battle," but he did not want to see it "erased" from the Civil War memorial. Brady agreed: "Sand Creek was part of the Civil War, though not as a battle." He elaborated: "There were more than a few Indian massacres that happened during the Civil War, though white people tend to forget those stories."

As word spread that the legislature had not consulted with the Sand Creek descendants, opposition to Martinez's well-intentioned revisionism surfaced in Denver. Tom Noel, a historian and public intellectual known as "Dr. Colorado," entered the fray, writing an opinion piece in the *Denver Post* just after Independence Day 1998. Noel argued that Coloradans should grapple with their history, warts and all, rather than forget it. He suggested that the state's Civil War memorial should remain untouched and that "the story of Sand Creek, with all of its various interpretations, needs to be left open for public discussion and reflection."

Some of Chivington's latter-day defenders, including Mike Koury, an author, editor, and member of a national heritage organization known as the Order of the Indian Wars, agreed with Noel that the plaque should be left alone. "Taking [Sand Creek] off a statue," Koury pointed out, "is not going to make it disappear. You gain nothing by hiding it under a blanket." Unlike Noel, though, Koury advocated a conservative course not out of respect for the complexity of ever-shifting collective memories, but because he thought "politically correct" meddling would "dishonor people who fought in the Civil War." Duane Smith, an American historian on the faculty at Fort Lewis College in Durango, Colorado, piled on. Annoyed by bureaucrats and activists doing violence to the past, Smith sneered that it would be "absolutely stupid" to alter the statue to suit the politics of the day. He concluded, "Sand Creek was a tremendously important Civil War battle," suggesting that the volunteer soldiers under Chivington should still be honored for their patriotism.

3. A revised plaque placed in 2002 near the Colorado Civil War Memorial. Photograph courtesy of the author.

Finally, on July 31, 1998, Cometsevah and Halaas testified before Colorado's legislature. They explained that Sand Creek had been part of the Civil War. Halaas noted that details about the slaughter could be found in *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (otherwise known as the*OR*), the go-to source for historians researching military aspects of the war; that the men of the First and Third Colorado

Regiments had mustered into the Union army; and that Evans and Chivington had believed that the Native people at Sand Creek had likely forged an alliance with the Confederacy. Cometsevah and Halaas then offered the legislators a compromise. Rather than “removing Sand Creek,” the state should provide the memorial’s visitors with context, “inform[ing] the public about the massacre through historical markers.” Within a few months, the legislature adopted the suggestion.

Close to four years passed before the new interpretative plaque could be unveiled, four years filled with committee meetings and public outreach events, four years spent trying to spin a single narrative thread that would explain Sand Creek’s relationship to the Civil War while also satisfying descendants of the massacre’s victims and contemporary Coloradans fiercely proud of their state’s heritage. In the end, 138 years after Colonel Chivington and his Colorado volunteers descended on the Native Americans camped along Sand Creek, the plaque was ready.

After the unveiling ceremony, the Cheyenne and Arapaho leaders and the young runners from their tribes prepared to leave Colorado’s capitol, to make their long drives back to Oklahoma, Montana, and Wyoming. Laird Cometsevah asked the teenage girl wearing Nike gear if she had an answer to her question, if she understood what she was doing there, what Sand Creek had to do with the Civil War, and what the Civil War had to do with Indians. She replied, “I think so.”

Cometsevah later regretted that he did not press her to elaborate. “I hope she realized that white people were fighting over who would control Colorado and the West at that time,” he said, “and I hope she and other people who see the statue understand that Sand Creek happened during the Civil War, but that it wasn’t in any way, shape, or form a battle. Chivington and his men were Civil War soldiers, but it was a massacre.” With a sigh, Cometsevah concluded, “I hope that young lady understood all of that. But it’s always hard to know what people do and don’t understand. All we can do at these sorts of things [the healing run and the reinterpretation of the Civil War memorial] is the very best we can.”

In the ten years since the state of Colorado rededicated its Civil War memorial, hundreds of thousands of people have visited the capitol steps in Denver. Since 2007, tens of thousands more have traveled to the southeastern part of the state, where they have climbed a small rise overlooking the Sand Creek killing field, located within the National Park Service’s historic site. And now, with the Civil War sesquicentennial celebrations ongoing and the sesquicentennial of Sand Creek upcoming, the University of Denver and Northwestern University are grappling with John Evans’s role in the founding of their institutions, the Park Service is set to release an interpretive film about the relationship between Sand Creek and the Civil War, and the Cheyenne and Arapaho peoples are planning more healing runs to mark the 150th anniversary of the massacre.

But even amid this uptick in memorial activity, it remains difficult, as Laird Cometsevah suggested, to know for certain what onlookers will make of their experiences, of the history and repercussions of Sand Creek, and of the massacre's relationship to the Civil War—or even if they will make anything at all of that relationship. Most Americans, after all, prompted by popular culture and scholarship, still remember the Civil War only as a war of emancipation, a good war.

But viewed from Indian Country—from the gibbets of Mankato, Minnesota, in 1862, where thirty-eight Dakota Sioux were hanged; from the Bosque Redondo in New Mexico in 1864, where Navajos staggered to the end of their Long Walk; and from the banks of Sand Creek, where peaceful Arapahos and Cheyennes fell before John Chivington's men—the Civil War looked different. It looked like a war of empire. Perhaps visitors to Colorado's state capitol, when confronted with a reinterpreted statue of a Union soldier, will learn that the Civil War could actually be both of those things at once. Perhaps they will learn that the nation's history is often shot through with such painful ironies and that the act of memorializing the past is fraught with unexpected lessons.

Further Reading

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Ari Kelman is a professor of history at the University of California-Davis. He is the author, most recently, of *A Misplaced Massacre: Struggling Over the Memory of Sand Creek* (2013) and is currently completing, with Jonathan Fetter Vorm, *Battle Lines: A Graphic History of the Civil War* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2014).

What's in a Name



How Durben in Glasgow Became Dearborn in Quebec

I discovered a Revolutionary-era journal written by a Captain Durben—from an unexpected source—in 2009 while researching Benedict Arnold's expedition to Quebec, a disastrous 1775 attempt to invade Canada and capture the city for the American cause. One of my primary purposes at that time was to compile a comprehensive bibliography of all printings of every journal written about the Arnold expedition, which seems to have generated more journals than any Revolutionary War battle.

One of many Google searches took me to a surprising entry, featured in an online Americana exhibit created by the Special Collections Section of the University of Glasgow Library, which was devoted to eighteenth-century books and manuscripts. On the fourth page, I found a description of a manuscript titled, "A Journal of the Rebel Expedition," written by a Captain Durben, along with an image of the journal's first page. The subtitle stated that this was "An exact copy of a Journal of the Route and Proceedings of 1100 Rebels, who marched from Cambridge, in Massachusetts Bay, under the Command of General Arnold, in the fall of the year 1775; to attack Quebec." I was immediately intrigued—this document purported to be a manuscript journal of the Arnold expedition that had previously been entirely unknown to me.

Upon reflection, I was astonished that an unknown journal of an important Revolutionary War event had been residing in a university library in Scotland for over 225 years and had never been mentioned in any scholarship on the Revolutionary War. At the same time, I was also skeptical. How did a manuscript journal written by an American officer end up in Scotland? Moreover, I had done enough research on the Quebec expedition to know that there was no American officer involved named Durben. The more I thought about the online exhibit, the more I was convinced that, when I researched it further, the manuscript would turn out to be a disappointment because it would prove *not* to be an original

journal of the expedition to Quebec.

> I was immediately intrigued—this document purported to be a manuscript journal of the Arnold expedition that had previously been entirely unknown to me.

The Durben manuscript was contained in a bound volume entitled “Manuscripts from the Library of William Hunter.” Dr. Hunter was a Scottish physician and private book and manuscript collector so active in his era that he was a competitor of the British Library. At his death in 1783, he bequeathed his collection, including the Durben journal, to the Library of the University of Glasgow.

I wrote to the Special Collection librarians there, requesting a photocopy of the manuscript journal. They readily copied the entire file and sent it to me. The package included the Durben journal plus two other, shorter journals of the expedition. No author is identified by name for either of these shorter journals.


Front page of Captain Durben’s journal. By permission of the University of Glasgow Library, Glasgow, Scotland (Special Collections-Sp. Coll. MS. Hunter 608).

“Portrait of Benedict Arnold,” from The European Magazine and London Review, March 1, 1783. Photograph courtesy of the author. Click to enlarge in a new window.

After closely examining the Durben manuscript, I concluded that it was a period copy of a previously unknown journal originally authored by Captain Henry Dearborn (1751-1829) of New Hampshire, probably one of the best-known officers on the expedition other than Arnold himself. Dearborn was captured in the assault on Quebec on December 31, 1775, and was imprisoned in Quebec until he was released on parole early in May 1776. The journal entries cover the period September 13, 1775, through May 18, 1776. These entries were written contemporaneously as events occurred, as the author went along on the expedition and then, during the winter of 1775-1776, when he was imprisoned in Quebec. The transcription was evidently penned sometime thereafter, by Dr. Robert Robertson (1742-1829), a Scottish surgeon serving with the Royal Navy in Quebec in 1776. In what follows I’ll discuss the evidence that led me to these conclusions.

The name “Durben” at first threw me because, as mentioned above, there was no

officer in the Arnold expedition with that name. Looking at names that might sound like Durben, I tentatively concluded that the author might be Captain Henry Dearborn. No other officer had a name that sounds anything like Durben, and no other officer's name begins with the letter "D."

Two entries in the journal provided additional evidence supporting Dearborn's authorship. The author mentions two of his officers by name, both of whom were in Captain Dearborn's company. The first is Joseph Thomas, who was appointed as Dearborn's Ensign, according to the daily entry for September 18. The author also refers in an entry on November 2 to a Lieutenant Hutchins being in his company. Both Joseph Thomas and Nathaniel Hutchins were officers in Dearborn's company, and both are listed in *New Hampshire Troops in the Quebec Expedition*, published by the state of New Hampshire in 1885.

The Durben journal concludes with entries for the days of May 17 and 18, 1776, which describe the author leaving on a boat with Major Return J. Meigs. The early exit from Quebec by the two officers, Meigs and Dearborn, is verified by other expedition journals, providing compelling supportive evidence that the author of the Durben journal was Henry Dearborn. In Private James Melvin's journal, the entry on May 18, 1776, reads: "Pleasant weather; hear that Major Meigs and Captain Dearborn are gone home." There are also two entries in Captain Simeon Thayer's journal: "May 17 … Major Meigs had the liberty to walk the town until 4 o'clock. Mr. Laveris came and informed Capt. Dearborn that he had obtained liberty for him to go home on his parole … May 18. About ten o'clock they [Meigs and Dearborn] set sail for Halifax." It is clear from these entries that it was well known by the men in prison in Quebec that Meigs and Dearborn went home together.

A note located at the end of the "Captia" portion of the Durben manuscript describes how the journal came into the hands of its transcriber. Here, the writer recounts that Meigs and Dearborn went on board the schooner that was to take them to Halifax on May 17, but it did not make it out of the harbor and had to return. It ended up sailing again the next day, but in the intervening period the journal was stolen from Dearborn. "By some accident or another, the Schooner that they sailed in was obliged to return to Quebec; and a person on board of her stole the originals from the author, & gave it to one of his own friends a shore, who was so obliging as to lend it to me to take a copy of it—at least this is the history which I got from that gentleman, of it." It is clear from this information that Dearborn wrote this journal prior to May 17, 1776.

At the bottom of page 1, Dr. Hunter writes that the journal was given to him by a Mr. Robertson, whom he describes as a surgeon on HMS *Juno*. Documents held at the University of Glasgow identify the *Juno* as a "32-gun ship launched in 1757" and "a fifth rate shipping frigate which was burnt on 7 August 1778." Entries in *Naval Documents of the American Revolution* confirm that Dr. Robertson was on board the *Juno*. The frigate arrived in Quebec on June 4, 1776, five months after the assault on Quebec and two weeks after Meigs and Dearborn left Quebec

aboard the HMS *Niger*. Thus, Dearborn was long gone from Quebec when the journal made its way to Robertson via an unknown third party who had stolen it from its original author.

A little over two years later, on August 7, 1778, the *Juno* was burned in Providence Harbor to prevent its capture by American forces. Since Robertson was not listed as a surgeon on any other ship after 1778, it is reasonable to conclude that he was not on the *Juno* when it was destroyed, or else he would have been transferred to another ship. I believe it is likely that Robertson transcribed Dearborn's original manuscript journal while he was on board the *Juno,* between the time it left Quebec in September 1776 and August 13, 1777, the last known date he was on board.


"Map of the Country which was the Scene of Operations of the Northern Army…" from the atlas included in The Life of Washington by John Marshall (1805). The image was republished in a subsequent edition of The Life of Washington by the Walton Book Company in 1930. The red dotted lines were added by David Picton in 2010 to show the route of the expedition. Map courtesy of the author.


"Portrait of Maj. Gen. Henry Dearborn," etching by Henry Bryan Hall, 1872. Courtesy of the New York Public Library, New York, N.Y.

Dr. William Hunter, the subsequent recipient of the manuscript, died on March 30, 1783, and from his signed notation in the journal we know that it was in his hands before he died. Thus, sometime between 1777 and 1783 Robertson apparently gave his transcribed copy of the journal to Hunter. It has been in the Hunter manuscript collection since that time, and at the time I discovered it had never before been published.

What we have, then, is a journal dating back to 1775, written originally by Henry Dearborn. This original journal was subsequently stolen from its author, transcribed and edited by Robertson, and then given to Hunter. The original manuscript in Dearborn's handwriting has long since disappeared, or at least its whereabouts are unknown.

After the Quebec experience, Dearborn went on to an impressive military career during the Revolution, participating in the battles of Saratoga, Monmouth, Sullivan's campaign, and Yorktown, ending as a lieutenant colonel. After the war, Dearborn was appointed a major general in the Maine state militia, a United States marshal in Maine, and was elected to Congress. In 1801, President Thomas Jefferson named Dearborn Secretary of War, and during the War of 1812 James Madison appointed him Senior Major General in the Army, in command of the northeast sector. From 1822 to 1824, he served as Minister Plenipotentiary to Portugal, and he died in Roxbury, Massachusetts, in 1829.

Henry Dearborn is known to have written five other journals of his

Revolutionary War experiences, all of which survive in manuscript form. Four of these are in Dearborn's handwriting. The last discovered journal, covering the march to Quebec, survives at the Boston Public Library (BPL) and was published in the *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society* in 1886. According to John Wingate Thornton, a nineteenth-century antiquarian and an expert on handwriting, this last journal held at the BPL is not in Dearborn's handwriting, although he did make some corrections to the manuscript in his hand. In order to better compare the two journals, I spent a day reviewing the manuscript in Boston.

Comparing the Glasgow journal with the one published by the Massachusetts Historical Society, it is easy to see that many of the entries and the events that are covered are similar. However, the Glasgow journal is shorter and more succinct in its entries, which lends credibility to the conclusion that it was written during the events discussed. It is much more likely that someone writing during a significant army field maneuver would not have time for the more extensive and flowery descriptions that are found in the later journal.

An example of the differences in the two journals can be found in the entries for September 22, 1775. The Durben journal entry reads:

22nd. We got up where the Bateaux were built; from thence we carried thirty three men of each Company in the Bateaux up to Fort Western; That is about forty miles up from the mouth of the River; and at night all our men had mostly got up to the Fort.

The MHS journal entry expands the account:

"Working Against Flood on Dead River," illustration by Sydney Adamson from The Century Magazine (1903). Courtesy of the Library of Congress, image USZ62-108233, Washington, D.C.

Septemr 22d. Proceeded up the River. We pass'd Fort Richmond at 11: O clock where there are but few Settlements at Present, this afternoon we pass'd Pownalborough, Where there is a Courthouse and Gaol—and some very good Settlements, This day at 4 O Clock we arrived at the place where our Batteaus were Built.

Graphic illustration of the march to Quebec, courtesy of the author. Click to enlarge in a new window.

We were order'd to Leave one Sergeant, one Corporal and Thirteen men here to take a Long the Batteau's, they embarked on Board the Batteaus, and we

proceeded up the River to Cabisaconty, or Gardners Town, Where Doctor Gardner of Boston owns a Large Tract of Land and some Mills, & a Number of very good dwelling Houses, where we Stayed Last night, on Shore.

Another even more significant variation is found in the comparable entries for October 4, although it is not clear if the same events for that day are being described in the two accounts.

The Durben journal entry records: "4th. We haled [hauled] up our Bateaux at the Portage, and dried them."

The MHS entry states: "4 Our Course in general from the mouth of the river to this place has been from North, to North East, from here we Steer N.:W. to Norrigwalk, which is Twelve miles to where we arrived to night, the River here is not very rapid. Except Two bad falls, the Land on the North side of the river is very good, where there are 2 or 3 families settled, at Norrigwalk, is to be seen the ruins of an Indian Town, also a fort, a Chapel, and a Large Tract of Clear Land but not very good, there is but one family here at present Half a Mile above this old fort, is a Great fall, where there is a Carrying place of one Mile and a Quarter."

The missing Quebec expedition journal in Dearborn's own handwriting is an obvious omission in the personal accounts of his Revolutionary War experiences. Until now, it was thought that the original manuscript journal written at the time by Dearborn was the one published by the Massachusetts Historical Society in 1886—although not in his handwriting. Now, however, we know better, because we have that original journal, or at least a sanitized version of it, from the late eighteenth century.

Finding Henry Dearborn's original journal has been exciting and rewarding in ways I could not have predicted. I am convinced that had I not followed through on tedious Google searches, this journal would have never been discovered and made public. As Revolutionary War manuscripts go, this one is not earth-shattering, nor does it contain any momentous revelations that will change the history of the invasion of Canada. But in its own right it is a significant finding that clarifies the history of one participant's own narratives of the war, and presents the original version of an account that has been known only through later revisions.

After Benedict Arnold himself, Henry Dearborn was the most famous military man on the expedition to Quebec, and he was one of only a handful of American officers to write a journal covering the entire period of the Revolutionary War. Moreover, Dearborn's subsequent career was unmatched by any other participant in the expedition. By virtue of his appointment as Senior Major General during the War of 1812, he rose to a higher military rank, and as congressman and Secretary of War, he attained a higher civilian position than any other expedition alumnus except for Vice President Aaron Burr. Discovery of the Dearborn journal also reveals a fascinating story about how an American

manuscript made its way to from Quebec to Scotland, where it has been unknowingly preserved for over 200 years.

To date, I have succeeded in identifying thirty-three extant journals of the Quebec expedition, including the three found in the University of Glasgow Library. When I started this journey, I did not expect to find any previously unknown and unpublished journals, particularly in Scotland. Much to my surprise, there are still unknown manuscripts to be found in the unlikeliest of places. I now know that research that starts out in one direction can lead to surprising and unexpected results that are more rewarding than the original objective.

Further Reading:

The complete transcribed Dearborn journal, as well as the two smaller journals, and notes by Robertson and Hunter, can be found in Stephen Darley, *Voices from a Wilderness Expedition: The Journals and Men of Benedict Arnold's Expedition to Quebec in 1775* (Bloomington, Ind., 2011).

To read other journals of the Quebec expedition, see the compilation of thirteen journals by Kenneth Roberts, *March to Quebec: Journals of the Members of Arnold's Expedition* (New York, 1946). The best histories of the Arnold expedition are Justin H. Smith*, Arnold's March from Cambridge to Quebec* (New York, 1903); John Codman, *Arnold's Expedition to Quebec* (New York, 1901), and Thomas A. Desjardin, *Through a Howling Wilderness: Benedict Arnold's March to Quebec in 1775* (New York, 2006).

There are numerous publications of individual Revolutionary War journals from a variety of battles and campaigns. Two compilations of journals from the war are John C. Dann, ed., *The Revolution Remembered: Eyewitness Accounts of the War for American Independence* (Chicago, 1980) and George C. Scheer and Hugh Rankin, *Rebels and Redcoats* (New York, 1957).

For background on Benedict Arnold, the most thoroughly researched biography is James Kirby Martin, *Benedict Arnold, Revolutionary Hero: An American Warrior Reconsidered* (New York, 1997).

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Stephen Darley is a retired attorney and independent scholar based in North Haven, Conn. He has been conducting research on the Revolutionary War in general, and Benedict Arnold in particular, for over forty years.

Republicans and Abolitionists on the Road to "Jubilee"



It's rare for a single work of scholarship to fundamentally change the way I teach a topic in U.S. history, but historian James Oakes' latest work has done just that. Oakes has thoroughly persuaded me that the Republicans came into the Civil War ready to carry out much of the abolitionist agenda, meaning that they were willing from the beginning to destroy what Francis Lieber called the "poisonous root" of slavery. In his Lincoln Prize-winning book, *Freedom National: The Destruction of Slavery in the United States, 1861-1865* (2012), Oakes argues that as early as 1861, congressional Republicans, along with the president and his cabinet, and generals in the field, "insisted that slavery was the cause of the rebellion and emancipation an appropriate and ultimately indispensable means of suppressing it." The Republicans were moving in lock-step with the abolitionists. As one widely circulated 1861 antislavery petition declared, Congress needed to utilize its "war-power" to destroy the "system of chattel slavery," which the author of the petition labeled as the "root and nourishment" of the Confederacy.

Until recently, I have followed the trajectory of most textbooks and covered the abolitionist movement from the publication of David Walker's *Appeal to the Colored Citizens of the World* in 1829 to John Brown's raid on the federal arsenal at Harpers Ferry thirty years later. Over the course of several weeks, we examine a selection of broadsides, pamphlets, images, and letters that have been scanned by the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, the Massachusetts Historical Society, the Library of Congress, the National Humanities Center and the Boston Public Library. We also discuss how these documents fit in with the

PBS documentaries (Africans in America and The Abolitionists) that students watched and responded to online the night before.

After covering the attack on Fort Sumter, I left the abolitionists behind and focused on the Republican Party. The narrative I presented painted the Republicans as reluctant emancipators, a party that had neither the support nor the encouragement of most abolitionists. The trajectory of the war shifted only over the course of several years from a struggle for the restoration of the Union to a no-holds-barred war against human bondage.

> I often ask my students whether they think the Confiscation Act would have been issued if hundreds of refugees had not shown up at Fortress Monroe weeks before. They often conclude that the slaves themselves were partly responsible for pushing the legislative agenda in Washington.

Oakes' scholarship, however, has forced me to ask an obvious but important question: How did the abolitionists succeed in achieving their ultimate goal? In this, Oakes challenges historian Manisha Sinha's argument that abolitionist precepts were not represented within the ranks of mainstream congressional Republicans and that President Abraham Lincoln "gave short shrift to the abolitionist agenda" in the early years of the war. Though Frederick Douglass was often frustrated with the Republican Party, Oakes argues that Lincoln and the Republicans were committed to achieving what Douglass called for in May 1861: put "an end to the savage and desolating war" being "waged by the slaveholders" by striking "down slavery itself."

My students have responded enthusiastically to a multi-day lesson utilizing the *Visualizing Emancipation* Website. This ground-breaking digital history project allows students to map emancipation over the course of the war. Students view the unfolding of emancipation by tracking the movement of slaves toward the Union Army's lines and the actions of soldiers and generals in the field. The Website can be used alongside the Freedmen and Southern Society Project and the Valley of the Shadow Project.

In the classroom, I use the students' blog posts as a way to start a discussion. During their exploration of *Visualizing Emancipation*, many students picked up on the number of slaves that flooded Union lines in coastal Virginia not long after the firing on Fort Sumter. During the discussion we focused heavily on the role of General Benjamin Butler. On May 27, 1861, Butler, a conservative Democrat who opposed Stephen Douglas at the party's 1860 convention, wrote to the Commander of the U.S. Armed Services General Winfield Scott asking him what he should do with the fugitives entering his lines at Fortress Monroe. "As a military question it would seem to be a measure of necessity to deprive their masters of their services … As a political question and a question of humanity can I receive the services of a Father and a Mother and not take the children?" asked Butler. "Of the humanitarian aspect I have no

doubt." What Butler needed was clarification on the political side of the equation. He decided to label the escaping bondmen "contrabands" under the rules of war and refused to turn them over. On May 30, Secretary of War Simon Cameron approved Butler's decision not to return the "contrabands." As Adam Goodheart has noted, slavery's "iron curtain began falling all across the South."

On August 8, 1861, two days after Lincoln signed the First Confiscation Act, which stated that Confederates who used slave labor to engage in rebellious acts would "forfeit" their claim to such "labor," Secretary of War Simon Cameron issued instructions for slaves to be "discharged." With his use of the word "discharged," Cameron restored language used by Illinois Senator Lyman Trumbull in an earlier version of Section 4 of the First Confiscation Act. Whereas Article 4, Section 2 of the 1787 Constitution prevented a "person held to labor or service" from being "discharged" if they escaped to a free state or territory, Trumbull's amendment called for the military to emancipate or "discharge" enslaved people who reached Union lines. By treating the "contrabands" not as property, but as persons "held to labor," the confiscation bill lined up with the long-standing view of antislavery Republicans. Cameron's instructions also answered a question posed by Butler in a letter dated July 30, 1861: "Are these men, women, and children, slaves? Are they free?"

Frederick Douglass, carte-de-visite taken from Bowman's New Gallery, Ottawa, Illinois (date unknown). Courtesy of the Carte-de-visite Collection (Box 1), American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts.

Lincoln never said a word in opposition to Cameron's far-reaching order, which settled the status of those caught up under the terms of the First Confiscation Act on the side of freedom. There would be no further legal proceedings to debate the question. "Strictly speaking," the act "freed only slaves used to support the rebellion," writes Oakes. But "under the War Department's instruction, *all* slaves voluntarily coming to Union lines from disloyal states were emancipated." Indeed, in his December 1861 message to Congress, Lincoln used the word "liberated" when referring to slaves caught up under the provisions of the bill. I often ask my students whether they think the Confiscation Act would have been issued if hundreds of refugees had not shown up at Fortress Monroe weeks before. They often conclude that the slaves themselves were partly responsible for pushing the legislative agenda in Washington. As Steven Hahn has argued, black flight "began to reshape Union policy."

Oakes tackles the long-standing assumption that the "purpose of the war shifted" from one designed to protect the Union to one that promoted emancipation. This is the conventional narrative found in numerous textbooks or classics like Allan Nevins' multi-volume *Ordeal for the Union* (1947-1970). Take, for example, the traditional rendering of Lincoln's battle with General

John Frémont in the summer of 1861 and General David Hunter in the spring of 1862. Historians have typically used the clash with Frémont and Hunter to demonstrate Lincoln's reluctance to embrace emancipation. As Oakes noted in his 2007 book on Lincoln and Frederick Douglass, Lincoln merely ordered Frémont and Hunter to conform to the wording of Section 4 of the First Confiscation Act, which empowered officers to confiscate slaves that were being used against the Army or Navy, along with the subsequent War Department orders. Frémont had gone a step too far in his proclamation, emancipating slaves of all rebels in Missouri; Hunter declared the abolition of slavery in three entire states (South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida) not yet under Union control. Allan Nevins actually called Frémont's order the first act for emancipation, ignoring the role of General Butler and Secretary of War Cameron.

Frémont and Hunter, in Lincoln's analysis, had turned themselves into dictators. Lincoln told his friend Orville Browning on September 22, 1861, that he could not allow "this reckless position" to stand. Lincoln did not disagree with the agenda of freeing slaves; he simply wanted it done in a manner that followed what Congress had prescribed. In his order revoking Hunter's emancipation edict, Lincoln reminded the public that he was still holding out hope that rebellious states would adopt a "gradual" emancipation plan. As Oakes noted in his book on Lincoln and Frederick Douglass, the president wanted to make clear that he was being pushed by the actions of slaveholders; they were the ones who "lit the fuse." The bomb exploded in 1862.

Virginia slaves continued to escape to freedom as the Army of the Potomac moved south in the spring of 1862. In mid-March, General Ambrose Burnside captured New Bern, North Carolina. Nearly 7,500 blacks from the eastern portions of the state quickly made their way to the city. As one slaveholder declared at the time, the idea of "the 'faithful slave' is about played out." Burnside carried on the same policies Butler had enacted. According to Oakes, a "tacit alliance between escaping slaves and the Union army" was "created with the approval of officials in Washington." In July 1862, Congress authorized the president to enlist black men. The Second Confiscation Act empowered the president to "employ … persons of African descent … for the suppression of the rebellion." In November 1862, the prominent abolitionist Thomas Wentworth Higginson took command of the First South Carolina Volunteers, a regiment composed of freed slaves. "No officer in this regiment now doubts that the key to the successful prosecution of this war lies in the unlimited employment of black troops," wrote Higginson. "Instead of leaving their homes and families to fight, they are fighting for their homes and families, and they show the resolution and sagacity which a personal purpose gives." One month later, Attorney General Edward Bates demolished Chief Justice Roger Taney's racist ruling in *Dred Scott v. Sanford* (1857) and declared in an official opinion that African Americans were full citizens of the United States.

In addition to the *Visualizing Emancipation* Website, another exercise that allows students to explore the ideas James Oakes raises in *Freedom National*is to search the text of the *Congressional Globe*. I found it useful this past term

to have my students access the *Globe*online, particularly the debate over the First Confiscation Act, via the Library of Congress' Website. Massachusetts Senator Henry Wilson declared: "Our purpose is to save this Government and to save this country … and if traitors use bondmen to destroy this country, the Government should at once *convert those bondmen into men*" so they could not "be used to destroy our country." For Wilson, along with many of his colleagues, especially Senator Trumbull, freedom and the war effort went hand in hand.


"The (Fort) Monroe Doctrine." Anonymous, political cartoon (1861). Courtesy of the Political Cartoon Collection, American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts.


"Come back here, you black rascal! … " illustration taken from a Civil War envelope preserved in a scrapbook of Civil War memorabilia, s.n. (1861-1865). Courtesy of the American Broadsides and Ephemera Collection, American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts.

By focusing on political history, Oakes reminds us of the astounding legislative record of the 37th Congress. Congressional leaders pushed through bills strengthening efforts to prohibit the international slave trade, granted diplomatic recognition to Haiti, and abolished slavery in Washington, D.C. On the military front, thousands of slaves sought refuge behind Union lines after the U.S. Army and Navy took control of the coastal regions of the Carolinas and portions of the Tennessee Valley.

As "emancipation events," to borrow a phrase from the editors of *Visualizing Emancipation*, became more prevalent, discussion of colonization also intensified. In the Second Confiscation Act, Congress attached an appropriation for voluntary emigration and authorized the president to implement it. Section 12 of the act reads: "The President of the United States is hereby authorized to make provision for the transportation, colonization, and settlement, in some tropical country beyond the limits of the United States." In his second annual message to Congress in December 1862, Lincoln went so far as to call for a constitutional amendment authorizing funding for voluntary emigration.

For a long time, Lincoln held fast to the idea of voluntarily removing blacks, though there was only one tiny, privately organized experiment in voluntary exile. The businessman Bernard Kock asked Lincoln to help subsidize a project to send blacks to Île à Vache, a Caribbean island off of the coast of Haiti. Lincoln granted funding, signing off on the ill-conceived scheme on December 31, 1862. At this very moment Lincoln was also putting the finishing touches on the Emancipation Proclamation—something that my students often find shocking. Lincoln personally shut down the disastrous Île à Vache project within a year.

Michael Vorenberg's research on colonization schemes during the Civil War has helped my students understand Lincoln's writings concerning the removal of

African Americans from the United States. I often use the September 1862 edition of *Douglass' Monthly* to demonstrate the profound opposition to colonization within the black community. Douglass was responding to Lincoln's August 14, 1862 disastrous meeting with a black delegation in Washington, D.C. The president urged the leaders to think about the possibility of mass emigration. "Taking advantage of his position and of the prevailing prejudice against them [African Americans] he affirms that their presence in the country is the real first cause of the war, and logically enough, if the premises were sound, assumes the necessity of their removal," declared Douglass in response. However, as historian Kate Masur reminds us in a recent article, we need also to keep in mind that since so many "white Americans rejected the idea of a multiracial nation … many black Americans, recognizing the implications of that rejection, took steps to build their lives elsewhere."


"Abraham Lincoln, The Martyr President," lithograph by Currier & Ives (1865). Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts.

Another question history classes should explore is how mainstream abolitionists fit into this new narrative about the destruction of slavery that focuses heavily on the Republicans, a party of which many abolitionists were leery of trusting. I have found it useful to present my students with copies of William Lloyd Garrison's *The Liberator* from July 12, 1861 (accessed via the Early American Newspaper Project) in order to demonstrate the parallel tracks of Republican Party policy and abolitionist doctrine.


"William Lloyd Garrison," engraving (image and text 11.5 x 10 cm.). Frontispiece in Liberty Bell, Boston (1846). Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts.

That edition recounts that on a warm and sunny July 4th afternoon in 1861 at Framingham, Massachusetts, a large town just west of Boston, more than 2,000 people gathered to listen to abolitionists lecture about the meaning of the war. In his inaugural address as the new president of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society, Edmund Quincy declared that there was never such an occasion as the one upon them to be "thankful." The war had created a situation in which slavery could be destroyed. Quincy was greeted with laughter and applause when he told the crowd in Framingham: "The American Anti-Slavery Society has for its

Office Agent—who? Abraham Lincoln … and it has for its General Agent in the field—General [Winfield] Scott." Secretary of Treasury Salmon P. Chase and Postmaster General Montgomery Blair had "not the heart nor the wish to put back into the hell of Virginia slavery one single contraband article in Fortress Monroe."

During his turn at the podium, Garrison reminded the crowd that Lincoln's cause was their cause. Both he and Lincoln would be given "a coat of tar and feathers" by the white South, proclaimed Garrison. The Boston editor went on to talk about how the war powers could be used to destroy slavery. The abolitionist editor had long given up on the notion that "moral suasion" could bring an end to the Slave Power. In 1837, he admitted to the British abolitionist Elizabeth Pease that American antislavery advocates were not making nor were they going to make an "impression" upon slaveholders. "I have relinquished the expectation that they [slaveholders] will ever, by mere moral suasion, consent to emancipate their victims. I believe that nothing but the exterminating judgment of heaven can shatter the chains of the slave." That judgment arrived in 1861 in the form of Lincoln and congressional Republicans.

However, not everyone in the all-star line-up of speakers at Framingham had confidence in the Lincoln administration. Stephen Foster, for example, did not want abolitionists to commit to supporting Lincoln until an emancipation edict had been issued. In Foster's analysis, the president was not up to the task. Foster declared that the administration was "undeniably the most thoroughly subservient to slavery of any which has disgraced the country." In the eyes of Sallie Holley, a close friend of Foster's wife, Abby, Lincoln was a "sinner at the head of a nation of sinners."

The Fosters, along with the New Hampshire radical abolitionist Parker Pillsbury, quickly found themselves in the minority. For the Garrisonians, the war was going to bring revolutionary changes in the political system that could not be accomplished through moral suasion. Beginning in the summer of 1861, David Lee Child wrote a series of wide-ranging articles in *The Liberator* on the war powers. The "slave, once freed by the war power, would be free for ever," declared Child, who drew heavily from an 1836 speech by the venerable John Quincy Adams.

A "defeat, bloody and cruel" was needed in order to "anger" the North into "emancipation," said Wendell Phillips during his remarks at the Framingham rally. The prominent antislavery attorney and orator got his wish a few weeks later. On July 29, Child wrote to Garrison offering his view on the Battle of Bull Run. According to Child, the massive Union defeat had "done more than a dozen victories" in terms of convincing politicians that using the war powers was absolutely necessary. Former Rhode Island Congressman Elisha Potter Jr. agreed: "We may commence the war without meaning to interfere with slavery; but let us have one or two battles, and get our blood excited, and we shall not only not restore any more slaves, but shall proclaim freedom wherever we go."

In early August 1861, Congress responded by passing the First Confiscation Act. A month later, Garrison, Phillips, and other Bay State abolitionists organized the Emancipation League, with the purpose being to educate the North on how central the issue of slavery was to the successful prosecution of the war. As historian Stacey Robertson has argued, the League "tried to stimulate abolitionist sentiment by insisting that emancipation would help the North to win the war."



From 1846 to 1865, the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society celebrated the Fourth of July with a picnic and rally at Harmony Grove. "View of Harmony Grove, Framingham, Massachusetts," illustration, p. 384 from Gleason's Pictorial Drawing-room Companion, June 12, 1852, Vol. 2 Issue 24, published by Gleason (1852). Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts.

In January 1862, Garrison gave a number of addresses to huge crowds in Philadelphia and New York. Speaking about the origins of the bitter and bloody conflict the nation found itself embroiled in, Garrison proclaimed:

There is war because there was a Republican Party. There was a Republican Party because there was an Abolition Party. There was an Abolition Party because there was Slavery. Now, to charge the war upon Republicanism is merely to blame the lamb that stood in the brook. To charge it upon Abolitionism is merely to blame the sheep for being the lamb's mother. But to charge it upon Slavery is to lay the crime flat at the door of the wolf, where it belongs. To end the trouble, kill the wolf. I belong to the party of wolf-killers.

Garrison, who was undoubtedly reveling in the applause from the crowds that came to hear him speak, crowds that would have likely pelted him with rotten apples (or worse) only a year before, also spoke about the war powers: "What the people have provided" to "save their Government, is not despotism." It "is as much a Constitutional act, therefore, for the President of the United States, Gen. McClellan, or Congress, to declare Slavery at an end in our country."

Lincoln made this a reality on January 1, 1863, when he issued the Emancipation Proclamation. Too often, teachers criticize the Proclamation because it is couched in legalistic, military language, lacking the moral force of a radical antislavery address. However, as Oakes rightly observes, "most Americans at the time associated military emancipation with antislavery radicalism." Lincoln was moving in lockstep with antislavery constitutionalism. Even Stephen Foster, who never hid his hatred for Lincoln, argued that "emancipation proclaimed by the national government and enforced by the Army" would "effectively destroy the slave power." Critics might speculate as to Lincoln's motives, but one important fact remains: no slave was ever returned to bondage. The Emancipation Proclamation also encouraged the enlistment of black freemen. As historian Douglas Egerton has recently argued, black abolitionists "were as anxious to

destroy slavery" as "they were to establish a bid for citizenship."

Shortly after Lincoln was re-nominated at the 1864 Republican Party convention in Baltimore, Garrison traveled to Washington. "There is no mistake about it in regard to Mr. Lincoln's desire" to "uproot slavery, and give fair play to the emancipated," wrote Garrison to his wife, Helen. What helped to draw the prominent abolitionist editor even closer to Lincoln in 1864 was the administration's abandonment of colonization. Abolitionists, according to Sallie Holley, had to work to "explode utterly all ideas of colonization as not only a cruel insult to the colored people, but a miserable national policy." In this they succeeded. Lincoln made no mention of colonization in the 1863 Emancipation Proclamation.

In 1864, Garrison risked losing many of his devoted followers when he entered into a battle with his long-time friend Wendell Phillips, who was incensed over Lincoln's announced reconstruction policy. As historian W. Caleb McDaniel argues in his engaging new book on democratic theory and slavery, Garrison—though unhappy about Lincoln's unwillingness to commit to political rights for black Americans—still believed that the president deserved another term. In a September 1864 letter to Samuel May, in which he discussed the dangers of voting for John Frémont, the candidate of the Radical Democracy Party, Garrison declared that the "best thing" that the abolitionists could do is "join the mass of loyal men in sustaining Mr. Lincoln and thus save the country from the shame and calamity of a copperhead [Democratic] triumph." Garrison was pleased with the Republican platform and its call for a constitutional amendment ending slavery. After the votes were tallied, Garrison, the man who had openly despised the American political system for decades, declared that Lincoln's "re-election" was the "death-warrant of the whole slave system" and indicated that the country was "very near the day of jubilee." In the final analysis, Republicans and abolitionists surely had their differences when it came to how slavery should be destroyed, but the historic significance lies not in what was *different.* What mattered most is what Republicans and abolitionists *agreed* on from the outset.

"Stephen S. Foster," photomechanical print (ca. 1870). Courtesy of the Portraits and Prints Collection, American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts.

The author dedicates this article to Lawrenceville History Master Kristina Schulte.

Further Reading

Everyone interested in the destruction of American slavery should begin with Ira Berlin, Barbara Fields, Steven Miller, Joseph Reidy, Leslie Rowland, eds., *Free at Last: A Documentary History of Slavery, Freedom, and the Civil War* (New York, 1993). The best overview of the abolitionist movement remains James Brewer Stewart's *Holy Warriors* (New York, rev. 1996). Students of the 19th century have been waiting anxiously for Manisha Sinha's forthcoming, *The Slave's Cause: Abolition and the Origins of America's Interracial Democracy.* In addition to *Freedom National: The Destruction of Slavery in the United States, 1861-1865* (New York, 2013), see also Oakes' *The Radical and the Republican: Frederick Douglass, Abraham Lincoln, and the Triumph of Antislavery Politics* (New York, 2007). Henry Mayer's *All on Fire* (New York, 1998) remains the best biography of William Lloyd Garrison. No student of Abraham Lincoln and the Civil War can be without a copy of Eric Foner's *The Fiery Trial: Abraham Lincoln and American Slavery* (New York, 2010). Silvana R. Siddali's *From Property to Person: Slavery and the Confiscation Acts, 1861-1862* (Baton Rouge, 2005) is a detailed treatment of these landmark pieces of legislation.Michael Vorenberg's *Final Freedom* (New York, 2001) is the definitive account of the Thirteenth Amendment. Kate Masur's *An Example for All the Land: Emancipation and the Struggle over Equality in Washington, D.C.* (Chapel Hill, 2010) details how the nation's capital became a laboratory for Republican racial policy during and after the Civil War. Janette Thomas Greenwood's *First Fruits of Freedom* (Chapel Hill, 2009) chronicles the creation of a network between Massachusetts and the eastern shore of North Carolina after Union troops from Worcester County took control of the area in 1862. For more on Garrison and Phillips in 1864 see W. Caleb McDaniel's *The Problem of Democracy in the Age of Slavery* (Baton Rouge, 2013). Douglas R. Egerton's *The Wars of Reconstruction: The Brief, Violent History of America's Most Progressive Era* (New York, 2014) brilliantly chronicles what Frederick Douglass meant when he argued in December 1863 that "the old Union, whose canonized bones we so quietly inurned under the shattered walls of [Fort] Sumter, can never come to life again … We are fighting for something incomparably *better than* the old Union."

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Erik J. Chaput is a History Master at the Lawrenceville School, a college preparatory boarding school in New Jersey. He is the author of *The People's Martyr: Thomas Wilson Dorr and His 1842 Rhode Island Rebellion* (2013) and the co-editor with Russell J. DeSimone of the *Letters of Thomas Wilson Dorr and the Letters of John Brown Francis* (forthcoming summer 2014), which can be found on the Dorr Rebellion Project Site hosted by Providence College.

Welcome Speech: Chef Kevin Mitchell imagining the words of Chef Nat Fuller



A twenty-first century chef invites guests to enter the spirit of Nat Fuller’s 1865 Reconciliation Banquet.

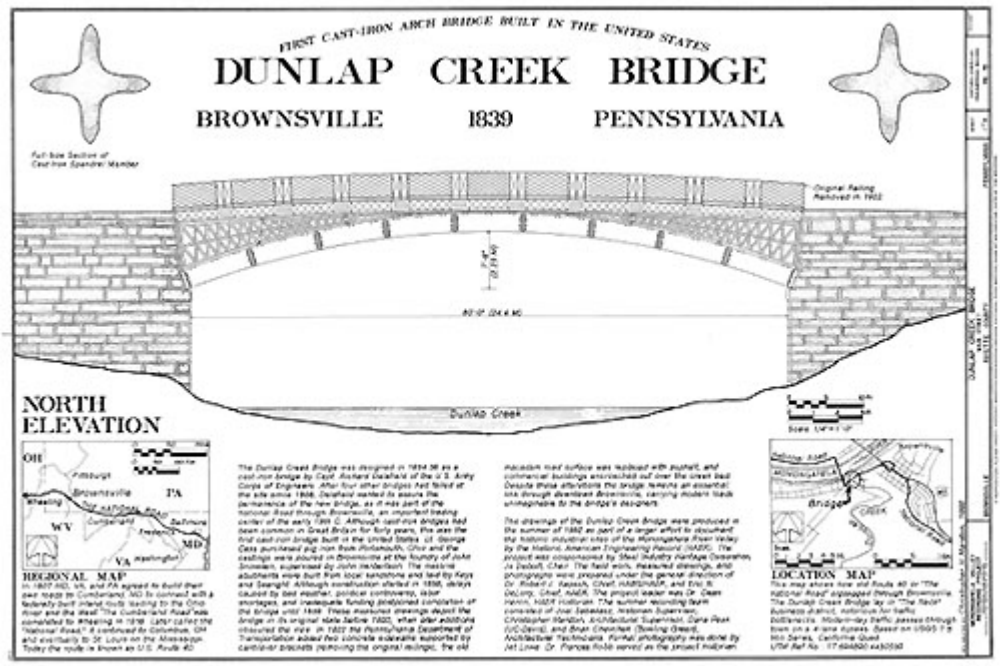
One Mississippi: Coloney & Fairchild’s Ribbon Map of the Father of Waters

[(1866)]



Two inches wide and eleven feet long, it mapped, among other things, a reunited nation.

Tom Paine’s Bridge



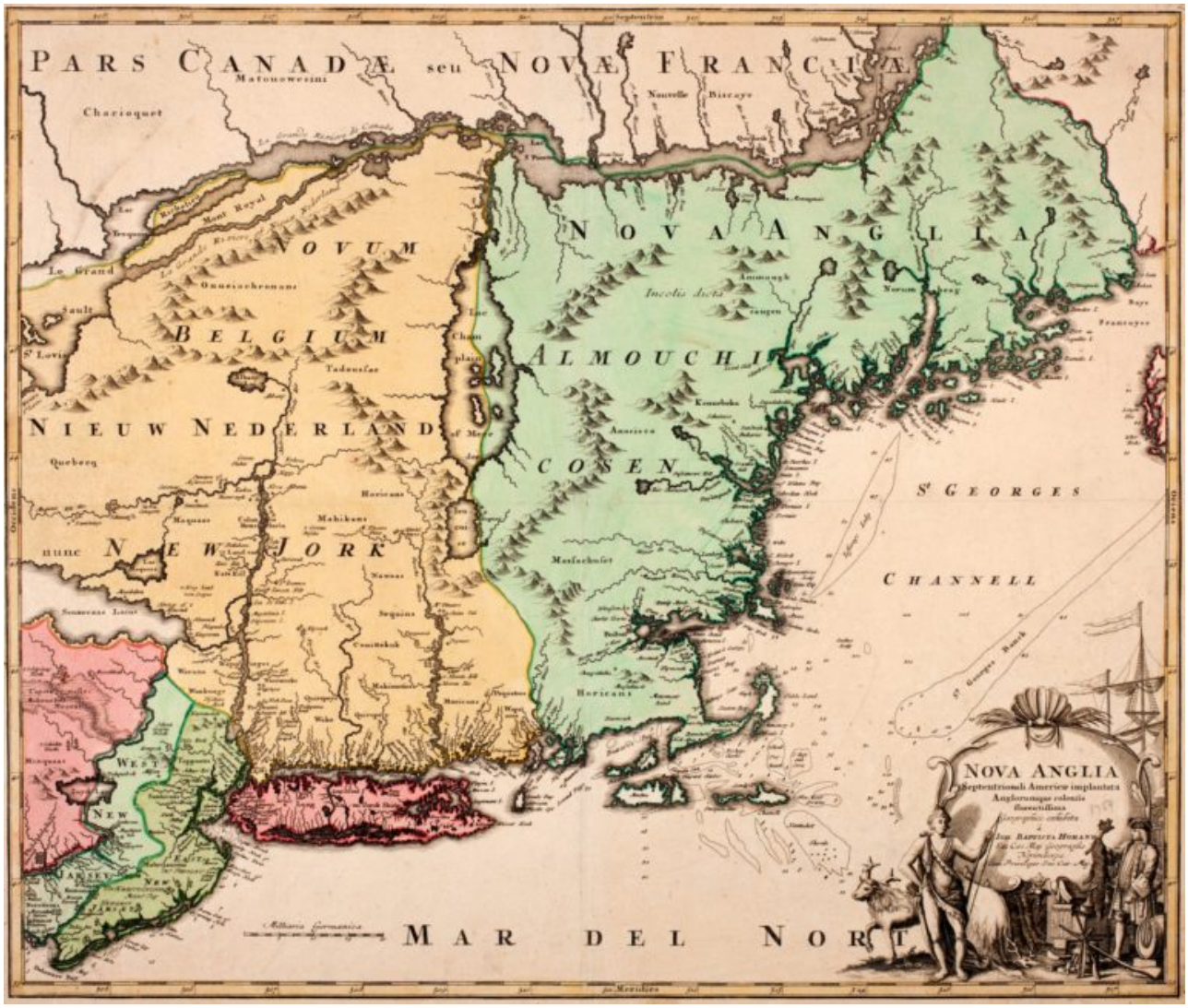
We do not often think of Paine as a revolutionary inventor. But in a very real sense, that is what he believed himself to be.

The Lion’s Den: Teaching about slavery



Initially, the students tend to dwell on the explicit message of the spirituals. They assert that the spirituals focus on another world and encourage slaves to passively accept their fate . . . Gradually, the classroom dialogue shifts to the implicit messages.

Poetic Order in Sarah Kemble Knight's *Journal*



By liberating her thoughts from the space of prose and her account from the limitations of physicality, Knight can transform the landscape through her narration, using poetry to “divert” and contain the threat of the unfamiliar.

[The Mind of the North in Pictures]



Currier and Ives never intended to produce prints of great value. They sold their products for as little as fifteen cents and no more than three dollars. Rather than aspiring to have their work exhibited in the nation’s fine-art museums and galleries, they sought to have it hung on the walls of America’s homes, stores, barbershops, firehouses, barrooms, and barns.