

THE COST OF NATIONAL UNITY:  
THE IMPACT OF MEMORY ON AMERICAN HISTORY

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## **Abstract**

The power of historical memory is readily apparent in the United States of America. Ask any descendent of veterans that served in war, and a plethora of reasons behind their willingness to fight will follow. As with any conflict, the enduring legacies of the war's aftermath are not always clear until years after the fact. Memory of the American Civil War took several different routes before finally settling on the "spirit of reconciliation" that came to dominate American society in the post-war era. In the South, the "Lost Cause" began to take hold with former Confederates attempting to justify their defeat and change the historical record to excuse their actions. As the winner in the war, the North did not need to come up with justification as to why they fought—they had secured the Union and destroyed the divisive institution, slavery. Gradually over time, Northerners and Southerners celebrated their veterans while simultaneously promoting reconciliation between the two sections. As a result, any emancipationist legacy from the end of the Civil War was relegated to irrelevancy in American society as Jim Crow settled in within the South for the next hundred years.

Memory of the American Civil War continues to have lasting impact upon modern American society, especially with the sesquicentennial celebrations of the war's major battles. Lesser known, and yet equally as important, is the memory of the American Revolution. As with the "Lost Cause", the American Revolution experienced its own reconstruction with equal parts forgetting and remembering. Emerging from this "reconstruction" was what became known as the American identity. Thirteen disparate colonies became a solid monolith of Americanism in the reconstructed views of the Revolution, instead of the divided thirteen colonies they truly were. This thesis argues that the "Lost Cause" and spirit of reconciliation that permeated the

post-war United States after the Civil War followed a tradition of desiring unity above all else at the expense of minority groups such as African Americans and Native Americans, that began with the American Revolution.

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## **Introduction**

Few events in American History stir as much passion and debate as the American Civil War. Year after year, thousands of reenactors spend countless hours and resources perfecting their impersonations of their chosen regiments during weekend events all across the United States. Generally, these events are designed to raise awareness of America's history among curious bystanders who have noticed the large groups of men dressed as though it were the 1860s. For many, these reenactments represent a chance to simply fire period-correct weaponry and drink beer with friends. For others, these reenactments serve a more personal purpose, especially if their ancestors fought during the war. Reenactors such as these are a microcosm of a broader remembrance and commemoration of the American Revolution and American Civil War. If polled, many descendants of those who served in war might give a version of events that understandably reflects the best aspects of their ancestor's beliefs and moral code of honor, even at the expense of reality. This is often reflected at the national level when the commemoration of major events, such as the American Civil War, takes center stage in American politics.

In April 2010, Virginia Governor Robert McDonnell issued a proclamation with the intention to honor those who served in the Confederate armies during the American Civil War. In what might have been a simple gesture, McDonnell's seven paragraph resolution did not mention the state's long history of slavery or its subsequent history of Jim Crow. In fact, the resolution went so far as to state that "it is important for all Virginians to reflect upon our Commonwealth's shared history, to understand the sacrifices of the Confederate leaders, soldiers and citizens during the period of the Civil War . . . this defining chapter in Virginia's history should not be forgotten, but instead should be studied, understood and remembered by all Virginians, both in the context of the time in which it took place, but also in the context of the

time in which we live . . .”<sup>1</sup> Asking all citizens, regardless of race and personal experience, to honor only those Confederates who served ignored several realities from the war, the first being that most of what then constituted Northwest Virginia did not support the Confederacy and later became the state of West Virginia. Secondly, Virginia had several Union regiments, as well as several escaped slaves, who ended up serving under the Union flag. If the people of Virginia were divided in loyalty during the war, why should all citizens today “reflect upon our Commonwealth’s shared history” and, in so doing, celebrate the memories of ancestors who might not be fully representative of the entire 1860 Virginian population?

McDonnell’s resolution immediately provoked outcry among many African-American groups, and even received a response from President Obama. The President rebuked the proclamation, stating, “I don’t think you can understand the Confederacy and the Civil War unless you understand slavery. And so, I think that was an unacceptable omission . . . I think it’s just a reminder that when we talk about issues like slavery that are so fraught with pain and emotion, that we’d better do so thinking through how this is going to affect a lot of people, and their sense of whether they’re part of a commonwealth or part of our broader society.”<sup>2</sup> As shown by both the proclamation and the President’s response, the way Americans remember certain events is often predicated upon their race and upbringing. As a white male, McDonnell desired to stress the importance of self-sacrifice, courage and honor displayed by the Confederate veterans, rather than the dark horrors of slavery that permeated Virginian society during the war. African Americans understandably view any remembrance of the Confederacy as tantamount to

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<sup>1</sup> Robert F. McDonnell, “Confederate History Month Proclamation,” *The Washington Post*, April 7<sup>th</sup>, 2010.

<sup>2</sup> CNN Wire Staff, “Obama: Governor’s failure to mention slavery unacceptable,” Last modified, April 9<sup>th</sup>, 2010.



honoring the institution of slavery, which defined the social structure, economy and way of life for the entire South.

Ultimately, McDonnell revised his proclamation by adding a paragraph solely dedicated to the harsh realities of slavery. His addendum read, “It is important for all Virginians to understand that the institution of slavery led to this Civil war and was an evil and inhumane practice that deprived people of their God-given inalienable rights, and all Virginians are thankful for its permanent eradication from our borders.”<sup>3</sup> Of course, McDonnell’s attempt to backtrack angered many partisan Confederate groups, such as the Sons of Confederate Veterans. The entire situation serves as a reminder of the power of memory in American society, in that an event that occurred over one hundred and fifty years ago can still elicit such strong reactions from all sides.

While the American Civil War continues to be a major source of debate and disagreement, the American Revolution occupies its own unique place in modern American society. Every year, thousands of dollars are spent legally and (in some states) illegally on fireworks to commemorate the formation of the United States and its separation from the Mother Country, Great Britain. Rather than a source of division, the Fourth of July serves as constant reminder of the uniqueness of the American experiment in that a heterogeneous population of thirteen distinct and separate colonies came together and formed a singular nation. Gone is any sense of controversy that so readily accompanies remembrance of the American Civil War. Modern historical memory of the American Revolution focuses on the final results of the conflict, rather than the amount of effort that was required to create the nation. Collectively, the nation has removed any sense of controversy from the separation from Great Britain. The

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<sup>3</sup> CNN Wire Staff, “*Gov. McDonnell apologizes for omitting slavery in Confederacy proclamation,*” Last modified April 9<sup>th</sup>, 2010.

American Revolution caused immense upheaval, not only with the colonies' relationship with Great Britain, but also among citizens of dueling loyalties. A nation of immigrants living within colonies that were as different from one another as any selection of European countries does not spontaneously arise as one people and form an identity without the assistance of historical memory. During modern Fourth of July festivities, most citizens take the formation and amalgamation of many peoples into one American identity for granted. The formation of the American identity and its longevity demonstrated throughout the Revolution and the American Civil War are the subjects of this thesis.

This thesis will seek to answer two questions surrounding the Revolution and the American Civil War. The first question concerns the expansion of slavery immediately following the end of the Revolutionary period, as well as how the rhetoric of freedom and the promise of rights were systematically denied to African Americans. The Founders and Framers faced a choice to either pursue the creation of an American identity based upon White Anglo-Saxon hegemony, or bolstering new rights for all individuals, regardless of race. As will be demonstrated, the leaders of the young American nation achieved national unity at a terrible cost to those enslaved until the end of the American Civil War.

The second major question this thesis will answer concerns the aftermath of the American Civil War. Never before in United States history had a war concluded with the express objective of ending slavery. Regardless of motivation, the end of slavery with the 13<sup>th</sup> amendment, along with the passage of the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> amendments, should have forecasted a period of substantial growth for the newly freed African Americans. While many gains were achieved in the early years of Reconstruction, they were completely wiped out once Federal troops were removed from the South as a consequence of the Compromise of 1877. Why, in the

aftermath of the nations' bloodiest war fought with the intent to destroy slavery, did African Americans get deprived of their rights without any major opposition? Somewhere along the line, the country faced a dilemma similar to that of the Founders and Framers and made a similar choice. National reconciliation proved to be the most powerful force within American society in the post-Civil War years. The need for a cheap source of labor assisted the reconciliation between the two sections at the direct expense of the Emancipationist legacy for the war. The nation chose to forgive and forget and, as such, freedmen were left to their own devices without the support of the Federal government.

The American identity forged in the aftermath of the American Revolution served as a balm to soothe sectional wounds throughout the first hundred years in American history. In regards to the Revolution, the American identity allowed the newly-formed nation to solidify from thirteen unique colonies. For the American Civil War, the American identity quickly healed some of the divisions between the North and South and assisted in the sections reconciling at a rapid pace. In both cases, the American identity was an elastic concept that could adapt to the times. With its inception, this identity allowed landowners, politicians and white males to control the destiny of the country without the "interference" of women, African Americans and Native Americans. The American identity succeeded in forming a new nation with the assistance of economics. With the South providing labor and raw materials under the institution of slavery and the North providing the industrial mechanism to participate in the world market, the experiment in Americanism proved to be quite profitable.

The American identity withstood the test of time for nearly seventy years, until the breakout of the American Civil War. Multiple crises nearly brought the country to ruin in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, but the efforts of a few compromise-minded leaders led the country through

unsafe waters. One such crisis is discussed in Frederick Jackson Turner's essay "The Significance of the Section in American History." In the essay, he discusses the interplay between sectional and national loyalty in American political history. His argument centers on the belief that sectional differences have defined American history since their origin at the founding of the country, and that except for the Civil War, sectional leaders have compromised their region's interests to ensure national unity.<sup>4</sup> Of particular interest to this paper is Turner's mention of the Hartford Convention, which was comprised of Federalist leaders during the War of 1812. Members of the convention not only discussed the possibility of leaving the Union entirely, but also advocated for the removal of the Three-Fifths Compromise, a measure that drastically affected representation in the Federal government. Many in attendance held anti-slavery views and have since been praised in posterity for their seemingly modern stance. However, historian Sean Wilentz in *The Rise of American Democracy: Jefferson to Lincoln* argues that "Rarely has any group of Americans done so little to deserve such praise."<sup>5</sup> Instead of arguing from a position of altruistic moral outrage, these politicians argued out of a position of political expediency, as "The Federalists' chief aim was the removal of the three-fifths clause, without any true representation for blacks . . . although public attacks on the planters for their immorality and hypocrisy added to the Yankee Federalists' treasury of moral virtue, those attacks often expressed little concern about the slaves, or about slavery as an institution."<sup>6</sup> Although the grievances that led to the Hartford Convention were legitimate, many of their stances reflected their concern for New England's interests rather than an altruistic concern for

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<sup>4</sup> Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Section in American History," *The Wisconsin Magazine of History*, Vol. 8, No. 3 (March, 1925), 276.

<sup>5</sup> Sean Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy: Jefferson to Lincoln* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2005), 163.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

the slave's well-being. The decision at the Hartford Convention to avoid secession demonstrates the power of American unity over the interests of the section.

With the end of the American Civil War, both sections experienced intense deprivation and loss. Apart, the two sections could not achieve the prosperity previously achieved during the antebellum period. Only together could the sections achieve economic profitability and national unity. Displaying the elasticity of the American identity, both sections unified through the passage of time. While serious political divisions still existed between the two sections, Reconstruction saw the Federal government dictating policy in ways not previously experienced in American history. The legacy of states' rights was severely weakened in the face of Federal intervention designed to protect the newly-freed slaves in the South. Due to the weakness of states' rights in the post-Civil War era, the differences between the two interpretations of the nation's founding were set aside. In the immediate aftermath of the war, it no longer mattered whether or not the country had been founded on the principles of limited national government or federalist intervention. The Democratic Party, whose states' rights sympathies defined Southern politics for so long, would not elect another President until Grover Cleveland in 1884. As a result, the political divisions that epitomized the nation's founding were lost in the buildup to sectional reconciliation. At the heart of the American identity was the ability for the nation to adapt to new situations, as shown by the country's reconciliation so soon after the nation's most destructive war.

The first chapter of this thesis will deal with the memory of the American Revolution, laying the groundwork for demonstrating the longevity of desiring national unity above all else. This process was aided and abetted by early historians, American politicians from the Presidency to the Congress, and a desire to reap the economic benefits that slavery provided for the young

country. Lost in the desire for unity were African-American contributions to the Revolutionary Era. Rather than serving as a bastion of freedom, the young United States was seen by slaves as supporting perpetual bondage. The British, though not necessarily through altruistic compassion, viewed the slaves as a resource to be exploited. Damaging the institution of slavery and allowing escaped slaves to serve within the British Army served two purposes. The first was that any escaped slave was one less laborer supporting the colonial uprising. Secondly, adding escaped slaves to the army increased the numbers of the British armed forces and pointed to the hypocrisy of the American charges of tyranny.

Boston King's memoir charts his life story from slavery in South Carolina to escape to New York City, where the British transported him to Nova Scotia once the war ended. His words paint the British lines as a safe haven and the colonies as dangerous to escaped slaves. Additionally, Lord Dunmore's proclamation in Virginia encouraging slaves to rise against their masters demonstrates that the African Americans had a substantial role during the Revolution. In the midst of the British defeat, several thousand escaped slaves followed the British into Canada and other British holdings.

Rather than realizing the significance of mass slave migration, the Founders and Framers balked on the question of slavery. Instead of utilizing an unprecedented era of Southern receptiveness to ending slavery, both sections chose to unify under a Constitution that did nothing to curb the growth of domestic slavery, except to end the international slave trade in 1808. With the invention of the cotton gin, Southern slavery exploded as Northern textile mills supplied an inexhaustible demand for cotton. Together, both sections chose national unity and economic profitability over the principle of universal rights for mankind.

Aiding in the process of creating a national American identity were the historians of the era. David Ramsay's narrative over the history of the American Revolution attempted to show that an American identity had always existed throughout colonial history. As a Federalist, Ramsay hoped that the country could coalesce under the United States' Constitution by creating a national identity steeped in historical legitimacy. In order to unify the sections, Ramsay deliberately minimized the contributions of minorities such as African Americans. For the young United States to grow economically, slavery needed to continue, and, as such, African Americans could not be given the same rights as others. New England historian Mercy Otis Warren followed Ramsay's trend of diminishing the slaves' role in the Revolution by focusing on the impact of slave uprisings upon whites, rather than the slaves. The first chapter discusses the contributions and experiences of African Americans during the Revolutionary Era and how they were systematically denied association with the American identity due to the nation's desire for unity and economic profitability.

The second chapter will discuss the role of memory and the American Civil War. At first glance, the conflicts seem to have little in common. However, both sides constantly sought to use the mantle of the Founder's original intent to bolster their side of the argument. Abraham Lincoln often consulted various works about former President Andrew Jackson's handling of the Nullification Crisis in the 1830s, while the state seal of the Confederacy proudly displayed the image of George Washington. After the war as nearly 700,000 lay dead across the South, Confederate leaders quickly began a concentrated effort to justify their actions over the past decade. Former Vice President of the Confederacy, Alexander H. Stephens, sought to directly tie the conflict to the foundations of the country, unsurprisingly away from slavery. According to Stephens:

It is a postulate, with many writers of this day, that the late War was the result of two opposing ideas, or principles, upon the subject of African slavery . . . That the War had its origin in *opposing principles*, which, in their action upon the *conduct of men*, produced the ultimate collision of arms, may be assumed as an unquestionable fact. But the opposing principles which produced these results in physical action were of a very different character from those assumed in the postulate. They lay in the organic Structure of the Government of the States. The conflict in principle arose from different and opposing ideas as to the nature of what is known as the General Government. The contest was between those who held it to be strictly Federal in its character, and those who maintained that it was thoroughly National. It was a strife between the principles of Federation, on the one side, and the Centralism, or Consolidation, on the other.<sup>7</sup>

Almost immediately following the war, Stephens took time to “clarify” what he saw as misleading interpretations of the war. In his argument Stephens readily employs the rhetoric used by many Anti-Federalists against the Constitution by railing against possible consolidation or centralization. Stephens’ arguments took a remarkable turn from his earlier sentiments in 1861, where he proudly stated that “the new constitution has put at rest, forever, all the agitating questions relating to our peculiar institution African slavery as it exists amongst us the proper status of the negro in our form of civilization. This was the immediate cause of the late rupture and present revolution.”<sup>8</sup> Stephens’ change of heart reflects the realities of being on the losing side in any war. In essence, the losing side does not want to be looked down upon in the history books. After only three years, Stephens understood that his former position from 1861, in which he believed that his government’s “foundations are laid, its corner-stone rests, upon the great truth that the negro is not equal to the white man; that slavery subordination to the superior race is his natural and normal condition. This, our new government, is the first in the history of the

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<sup>7</sup> Alexander H. Stephens, “A Constitutional View of the Late War Between the States; Its Causes, Character, Conduct and Results,” (Chicago: That National Publishing Co, 1868).

<sup>8</sup> Alexander H. Stephens, “Corner Stone Speech,” (speech, Savannah, Georgia, March 21<sup>st</sup>, 1861), Teaching American History, <http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/cornerstone-speech/>.



world, based upon this great physical, philosophical, and moral truth”<sup>9</sup> was no longer tenable. As such, efforts needed to be made to amend the historical record as he saw it. His efforts coincided with many other former Confederate leaders and generals who sought to rewrite the history of their conflict in order to absolve themselves of any blame in its failings and glorify their contributions. The collection of writings designed to argue the Southern point of view from the war became known as the Lost Cause.

The Union veterans did not need a comprehensive effort to change the narrative of the war. The Union was victorious, the slaves freed, the institution of slavery forever destroyed, and the Union preserved. Even in victory, the entire country now needed to come to grips with the reality of the last four years. Thousands of sons and daughters would now grow up without a father, grandfather and/or brother. Prior to the war’s ending, many of the new freedmen took it upon themselves to begin sharing their story. For many of them, slavery was all that they had ever known, and the war brought with it a chance for a new life away from the shackles of their masters. Historian David W. Blight writes in *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* that even before the war had ended, several African-American groups worked to forge their own interpretation of the events of the past four years.<sup>10</sup> This would later become known as the Emancipationist legacy of the war. This interpretation rightly pinpointed the major legacy of the war as being the destruction of the institution of slavery and the subsequent freedom for the four million slaves within the South.

The Emancipationist legacy endured for a short time, but was by no means the only legacy from the Civil War. In what Blight describes as the “spirit of reconciliation,” both the

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001), 28.

North and the South needed to heal and adhere in order for the country to experience a rebirth.<sup>11</sup> This process took time, but was aided by the North's willingness to drop the Emancipationist legacy from the narrative of Civil War memory. The second chapter of this thesis will chart this development and resulting side effects. Additionally, this thesis will argue that the spirit of reconciliation at the expense of other groups in society, specifically freedmen and Native Americans, followed a trend set forth by early United States history. Yet again, the choice of unity over reality reconciled both sections of the country, allowing policies such as Jim Crow to evolve and permeate Southern society.

The final chapter of this thesis will conduct a comparison between the historical memory of the American Revolution and the American Civil War. Rather than enjoying its own unique place in American History, the dueling legacies of Emancipation, the Lost Cause, and Reconciliation during the aftermath of the Civil War followed the pattern in United States history of choosing sectional unity over the rights of minorities who did not fit the particular mold of the American identity. Benjamin Rush's "An Address to the Inhabitants of the British Settlements in America, upon Slave-Keeping" argued poignantly during the buildup into the 1770s that:

Ye advocates for American Liberty, rouse up and espouse the cause of Humanity and general liberty. Bear a testimony against a vice which degrades human nature, and dissolves that universal tie of benevolence which should connect all the children of men together in one great family. —The plant of liberty is of so tender a Nature, that it cannot thrive long in the neighborhood of slavery. Remember the eyes of all Europe are fixed upon you, to preserve an asylum for freedom in this country, after the last pillars of it are fallen in every other quarter of the Globe.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>12</sup> Charles S. Hyneman, *American Political Writing During the Founding Era: 1760-1805*, ed. Charles S. Hyneman and Donald Lutz (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1983). 2 vols. Volume 1. 7/17/2014. <http://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/2066>

Regardless of its professed love of liberty and independence, the Declaration of Independence was not applied to all inhabitants of America following the Revolutionary war. A political movement based upon the principle of liberty for all does not readily relegate minority groups to irrelevancy without a concentrated effort. Benjamin Rush's comments are only the tip of the proverbial iceberg when it comes to the Revolutionary generation's guilty conscience over the institution of slavery. Even though many Northern and Southern leaders harbored grave doubts over the institution of slavery, attempting to upset the status quo might threaten the very unity they achieved during the American Revolution. Sectional interests, while still immensely important, must remain subservient to national unity. Additionally, the economic interests of the country required that a cheap source of labor continue to exist. As such, slavery grew exponentially and African-American contributions to the Revolution were omitted or greatly diminished in the history books.

One question remains to be answered before we delve into the historical memory of the two wars. Why does recounting the memory of the American Revolution and American Civil War matter? What relevancy does this have to modern society? So what? Put simply, in the words of historian William C. Davis when discussing the memory of Southern soldiers in the Civil War, "the best way to honor their memory lies neither in glorification nor recrimination but in a simple search for truth."<sup>13</sup> Davis' comment may only pertain to the Confederate experience in the Civil War, but should be applied broadly to all members of society in history, especially those who were forgotten or omitted. Historians owe posterity the truth, and the truth is often rich in detail. Also, by demonstrating how certain trends have reoccurred throughout American history and the negative side effects associated with them, it can help modern society avoid the

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<sup>13</sup> William C. Davis, *The Cause Lost: Myths and Realities of the Confederacy* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1996), 190.

mistakes made by past generations. Ultimately, how societies honor and remember particular events can have far-reaching consequences, both seen and unseen, with their effects manifesting themselves years later.

## Chapter 1 - American Revolution Memory

In a collection of essays discussing the legacies of the American Revolution, historian Willie Lee Rose took on the difficult task of writing on the war's meaning to African Americans. Rose recounted a speech by Frederick Douglas in 1852, in which the former slave was asked to speak on the importance of the American Revolution. According to Rose, Douglas mused, "Fellow citizens, pardon me . . . are the great principles of political freedom and justice embodied in that Declaration of Independence, extended to us?"<sup>14</sup> Douglas spoke for many of the slaves still toiling under the system of slavery in their disappointment that the lofty principles espoused by the founding documents were never expressly granted to all citizens. The Revolution was a missed opportunity for an expansion of human rights within the young United States, and no group of society represented this more than the black community. For minority groups such as the African Americans, the rhetoric of the Revolutionary Era did not apply to their own particular situations as the memory of the era centered on the creation of an American identity that brought about white hegemony, rather than the universal rights of mankind.

Historical memory played a major role in what was remembered and what was forgotten from the Revolutionary period. While various leaders such as Benjamin Franklin entertained past notions of a union between the British colonies, the shape and structure of the Union remained undecided.<sup>15</sup> The nature of the union of former colonies would later serve as a major

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<sup>14</sup> Willie Lee Rose, "The Impact of the American Revolution on the Black Population," in *Legacies of the American Revolution* (Logan, Utah: Utah State University Press, 1978), 183.

<sup>15</sup> The Albany Plan of Union was drafted by Benjamin Franklin in 1754 in response to the many stresses put upon the colonies in times of war. The plan was originally suggested by English officials so that the colonies could increase their autonomy should they encounter difficulties with the French, and Native Americans. Ultimately, the plan was abandoned as it might have given the colonies too much power, and any support of a union of colonies proved premature. For more information see, Robert C. Newbold's *The Albany Congress and the Plan of Union of 1754* and Leonard Larrabee's edition of *Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, vol. 5 (1959), 387-92.

source of constitutional disagreement. As such, the original government of the United States, the Articles of Confederation, clearly stated that the union of the states was “perpetual”, and that all delegates “solemnly plight and engage the faith of our respective constituents, that they shall abide by the determinations of the United States, in Congress assembled, on all questions which by the said confederation are submitted to them; and that the article thereof shall be inviolably observed by the States we respectively represent, and that the Union shall be perpetual.”<sup>16</sup> Such language did not appear in the United States Constitution, especially with the addition of the tenth amendment that served as the basis for political debate within the American polity for the next fifty years.<sup>17</sup> With the ratification of the Constitution, the young United States changed from a country with a founding document that explicitly stated that the union was perpetual, to one with a document whose ambiguity strengthened sectional bonds, but also planted its own seeds of discord. That is not to say the principles of states’ rights were omitted in the Articles of Confederation. The constant need for complete unanimity and the inability of Congress to levy taxes sabotaged any attempt of meaningful governance. However, in choosing to replace the archaic form of government under the Articles, the Framers sacrificed the expressions and promises of perpetuity that were left out of the Constitution. Less than five years after the signing of the Treaty of Paris, a major founding principle was compromised to fit the political reality of the young, struggling nation.

With the memory of the American Revolution fresh within the minds of the Framers, many Northern states adopted gradual emancipation measures that were designed to bring an end

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<sup>16</sup> *Articles of Confederation*, (Philadelphia: July 9<sup>th</sup>, 1778) The Library of Congress: American Memory, accessed 7/21/2014, <http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=llsl&fileName=001/llsl001.db&recNum=132>.

<sup>17</sup> Forrest McDonald, *States’ Rights and the Union: Imperium in Imperio 1776-1876* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2000), 25.

to the institution in their region. However, historian Gary Nash argues in *Race and Revolution* that the Northern states often get a free pass from historians, in that they portray the Northern politicians as altruistic human rights advocates with slavery existing as a purely Southern problem.<sup>18</sup> The reality, as you might expect, is quite different. Nash argues that for many of the slaves in the North, the only means of obtaining freedom was either death or escape.<sup>19</sup> Many of the slaves born after gradual emancipation was enacted continued to live in bondage until much later than initially promised. The point being, that even in the North, slavery elicited strong reactions and hesitation.

For many in the South, the idea of a strong, national government proved worrisome. While slavery was secure within the bounds of the Southern states and those Northern states who continued to own slaves, the open possibility of federal intervention within state affairs caused much angst and trepidation. The long winding road of any political argument—be it over the national bank, taxes, or internal improvements—often stalled over the fear that a strong federal government might impose its will upon the institutions of another state, in essence, slavery. According to historian Forrest McDonald, complete ratification of the Constitution was not assumed by the Framers due to the vast differences between the states, moreover, “on the few occasions when the language of the Constitution grammatically calls for referring to ‘the United States’ in the singular or in the plural, the plural is used.”<sup>20</sup> By referring to the United States in the plural, the Framers understood the power of statehood identities. These state identities that

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<sup>18</sup> Gary B. Nash, *Race and Revolution* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers Inc., 1990), 30.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> McDonald, *States Rights and the Union*, 22.

were so treasured throughout the young country led to North Carolina and Rhode Island's initial refusal to ratify.

Before the cohesion of the American identity could occur, the divisive issues of regional uniqueness and slavery needed to be dealt with. The Constitution helped bind the country together through its adoption and implementation with many of the arguments surrounding ratification later being solved with the addition of the first ten amendments, commonly known as the Bill of Rights. American politics evolved from a Federalist versus Anti-Federalist model, to a Federalist versus Democrat-Republican two-party system that dominated the early national period within the United States. These parties contained hints of regionalism, as the Federalists were based out of key states such as New York, Pennsylvania and Massachusetts, and the Democratic-Republicans were based within the South.<sup>21</sup> The two parties disagreed on the topic of Constitutional power. The Federalists, led by Alexander Hamilton, John Adams and Chief Justice John Marshall, advocated for a strong national government with an eye towards internal improvements and national banks. Federalists, while still retaining some semblance of states' rights, sought to forge a national identity for the United States. The Democratic-Republicans, also known as the Jeffersonians, advocated a strong states' rights philosophy concerning federal power. Members of the Democratic - Republican Party tended to hail from rural parts of the country, and had strong individualist tendencies that came to define Thomas Jefferson's ideal of the yeoman farmer.

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<sup>21</sup> Regionalism defined American politics until the destruction of the Federalist Party in 1817, and although the Era of Good Feelings did not bring an end to all political strife, partisan politics subsided for a short time. The contested election of John Quincy Adams and the Nullification debates in the 1830s caused major sectional rifts that spelled the beginning of the end for truly national parties.



While it might seem counter-intuitive, these political divisions helped solidify a national identity, for most citizens could directly identify with one of these two philosophies.<sup>22</sup> The national identity did not include women, slaves, Native Americans or those who did not qualify to vote due to lack of property. Rather than a democracy, the United States formed a large-scale republic, designed to bring only the brightest leaders to the front. As John Adams argued in his “Thoughts on Government” address in 1776, “the foundation of every government is some principle or passion in the minds of the people. The noblest principles and most generous affections in our nature then, have the fairest chance to support the noblest and most generous models of government.”<sup>23</sup> Adams foretold that virtue was needed in order to form a decent government. The spirit of republicanism allowed all members and sections of the country to partake of the American identity that was based upon a holy and virtuous people. The contemporary writer of the history of the American Revolution, Mercy Otis Warren described America’s promise as “producing everything necessary for convenience and pleasure, every man might be lord of his own acquisition. It was a country where the standard of freedom had recently been erected, to allure the liberal minded to her shores, and to receive and to protect the persecuted subjects of arbitrary power, who might there seek an asylum from the chains of servitude to which they had been subjected in any part of the globe.”<sup>24</sup> According to Warren, these ideals made America a place where “it might rationally be expected, that besides the natural increase, the emigrations to a land of such fair promise of the blessings of plenty, liberty

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<sup>22</sup> Frederick Jackson Turner, “The Significance of the Section in American History,” *The Wisconsin Magazine of History*, Vol. 8, No. 3 (March, 1925), 276.

<sup>23</sup> *Papers of John Adams*. Edited by Robert J. Taylor et al. (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1977), accessed July 31<sup>st</sup>, 2014, <http://press-pubs.uchicago.edu/founders/documents/v1ch4s5.html>.

<sup>24</sup> Mercy Warren, *History of the Rise, Progress and Termination of the American Revolution. Interspersed with Biographical, Political and Moral Observations in Three Volumes* (New York: AMS Press, 1970), 302.

and peace, to which multitudes would probably resort, there would be exhibited in a few years, a population almost beyond the calculation of figures.”<sup>25</sup> In short, the promise of America and what the diverse set of states could achieve in the future is what helped bind the sections of the country together in the aftermath of a divisive ratifying period.



**Figure 1:1 Mercy Otis Warren**

Source: [http://www.graphicenterprises.net/html/mercy\\_otis\\_warren.html](http://www.graphicenterprises.net/html/mercy_otis_warren.html)

One large omission exists within Warren’s assertion that the United States was a country where every man might be entitled to the fruit of his own labor. In fact, to the modern reader Warren’s usage of rhetoric that relates to slavery and bondage strikes a rather hypocritical tone.<sup>26</sup> How could a generation of leaders employ the rhetoric of slavery when describing their relationship with Great Britain, and manage to forget the millions of slaves who inhabited the thirteen colonies during the Revolutionary Era?<sup>27</sup> For many, slavery existed as a necessary evil and yet they allowed its continued existence due to its economic profitability. Writing in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, Warren lived through a time where certain peoples were completely removed from the history of the American Revolution, slaves, women and Native Americans among them. As a result, when Warren asserted that America stood as a place where those “who might seek

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 303.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> The History Channel, “Slavery in America,” accessed March 16, 2015, <http://www.history.com/topics/black-history/slavery>. It is impossible to determine an accurate amount of slaves imported in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, but estimates place the number anywhere from six to seven million.

asylum from the chains of servitude,” she faced no outcry or condemnation for forgetting those who toiled under the oppressive system of slavery. The removal or diminishing of these minority groups within American historical memory, including the Loyalists to the British Crown and their contributions to the Revolutionary era is the subject of this particular chapter.

The Revolution represented a time of immense social upheaval, as wars normally force members of society to cope with drastic amounts of change in a short period of time. The American Revolution was no different from many other wars, in that it allowed members of society who were previously ostracized a chance to improve their standing within their own lives and communities. This manifested itself in a variety of ways within each of the different minority groups. Women were entrusted with the home front, as most of the men went off to serve in some capacity during the war. Often, these women were left on their own with several young children and a farm to run while the head of household was away. This experience gave birth to the rise of republican motherhood. Republican motherhood was the idea that women, as the provider of all things domestic, and in most cases, the children’s schoolteacher, could raise the upcoming generation to be virtuous so the country’s leadership could continue to stay at a high-standard.<sup>28</sup>

For African Americans, the Revolutionary Era provided more opportunities for escape, a chance to participate in a war that espoused such principles as liberty and freedom, and the ability to assert themselves as an actor in society besides that of a slave. Unfortunately, many of these slaves’ stories are lost to history as many of them did not write their experiences down. Still, many trends can be deciphered from what scholars know of the African-American

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<sup>28</sup> Linda Kerber, “The Republican Mother: Women and the Enlightenment-An American Perspective,” *American Quarterly*, Vol. 28, No. 2, Special Issue: An American Enlightenment, (Summer, 1976), 202.

population during the Revolutionary War. Above all, the Revolution provided an opportunity for slaves to rise up and embolden themselves in a society who had previously ignored them.

Native Americans began their spiral downwards due to the fallout from the Revolution. The war provided yet another opportunity for each tribe to pick either the British or the United States, and in some cases, to continue their attempts to play each side off of one another. However, with the removal of the British from the thirteen colonies, the Indians lost their negotiation leverage when the war ended. The United States did not need to honor any previous agreements tribes had held with the British. With the end of the war, a large movement west into Kentucky past the original boundary established via the British Proclamation of 1763 commenced, beginning the long and bloody process of Indian removal from their ancestral lands. Native Americans, no matter what the tribe, were excluded from the American identity, as they did not fall under the protection of the Declaration's assertion that rights came from their creator.

The American Revolution provided an opportunity for women and African Americans to assert themselves for the very first time. Groups previously omitted from society experienced increased autonomy and freedom in an era where the language of liberty permeated American politics. All of these gains had a lasting impact upon American society; however, for many, the creation of a unified country based upon the rule of the affluent, natural aristocracy proved to be more important than the position of minorities in society. The desire for unity came at the expense of the many slaves still held in bondage at the war's end. As such, with the cessation of hostilities, instead of respecting and bolstering these newfound rights, the Framers consciously chose a spirit of reconciliation and a return to the status quo that changed American history forever. In choosing reconciliation between two vastly different sections of the country, the leaders of the young American republic began a trend that continues to impact us today.

## **African-American Experience during the American Revolution**

Unfortunately for historians, only a handful of slave narratives exist from the Revolutionary Era. All Northern states continued to practice slavery prior to the war, and while pockets of freedmen existed in various parts of the country, a full-fledged black community did not exist until well after the hostilities had concluded. With the vast majority of slaves being either illiterate or unwilling to write for fear of discovery, the precious few memoirs that exist are treasures that allow following generations to understand the conditions slaves encountered during the tumultuous times during the Revolution. One such memoir is that of former South Carolinian slave Boston King. King's memoirs, written in *The Methodist Magazine* from March through June 1798, demonstrate that for all of their rhetoric and supposed concern for the rights of mankind, the Americans were viewed by slaves as the side that represented slavery, while the British lines represented a chance for freedom.

King's memoirs detail his escape from an abusive master in South Carolina to the British lines in Charles-Town. While he received generally good treatment from the British officers and soldiers, he was nearly sold back into slavery by a Loyalist captain serving in the militia.<sup>29</sup> After his escape into Charles-Town, King struggled with finding work and even had to work for nearly nothing in an attempt to keep clothed.<sup>30</sup> He served the British army in various tasks and ended up sailing to British-controlled New York. Here, King once again entered into slavery, but escaped across the river into Staten Island. Once across, he received a passport and continued into New York.<sup>31</sup> King stayed there until peace was restored after the war ended in 1783.

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<sup>29</sup> Boston King, "Memoirs of the Life of Boston King, A Black Preacher: Written by himself during his Residence at Kingswood School," From *The Methodist Magazine*, March-June 1798, accessed April 6<sup>th</sup>, 2015, [http://antislavery.eserver.org/narratives/boston\\_king/bostonkingproof.pdf/](http://antislavery.eserver.org/narratives/boston_king/bostonkingproof.pdf/), 108.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

While King's story of escape to the British lines is fascinating in itself, the sentiment he expresses towards Americans demonstrate how slaves viewed the American Revolution. According to King, there was universal celebration once peace was achieved, except for, "us, who had escaped from slavery, and taken refuge in the English army; for a report prevailed at New York, that all slaves, in number 2,000, were to be delivered up to their masters, although some of them had been three or four years among the English. This dreadful rumor filled us all with inexpressible anguish and terror . . ." <sup>32</sup> With victory achieved, the American's now sought to retrieve their "property" from the hands of the British, prior to their evacuation. Luckily for King, "The English had compassion upon us in the day of distress, and issued out a Proclamation, importing, that all slaves should be free, who had taken refuge in the British lines, and claimed the function and privileges of the Proclamations respecting the security and protection of Negroes. In consequence of this, each of us received a certificate from the commanding officer at New York, which dispelled all our fears, and filled us with joy and gratitude." <sup>33</sup> As the British evacuated New York, several thousand escaped slaves followed, with Boston King and his family counted among them. For a short time, King and others lived in Nova Scotia, only to relocate to Africa where the British had promised them land and a chance for blacks to strike out on their own, away from the society that did not treat them particularly well. <sup>34</sup>

King's experience during the American Revolution exhibits that slaves understood the opportunities provided by the consequences of war. With many slave owners away fighting,

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 157.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 261

slaves had an unprecedented level of freedom of movement, which they utilized exceedingly well. According to historian Peter Kolchin, the proportion of the population that consisted of slaves within the Lower South declined rapidly between 1770 and 1790, from a total of 60.5 percent down to 43.8 percent in South Carolina.<sup>35</sup> Additionally, historian Philip D. Morgan estimates that South Carolina lost roughly 25,000 slaves from flight, migration, or death.<sup>36</sup> This considerable movement away from the South towards either the North or British lines defined the opportunity that slaves encountered during the American Revolution. The loss of slaves would be felt economically, as the Southern workforce was severely depleted.

The African-American experience during the American Revolution can be broken down into three major legacies, or events. As already alluded to, the American Revolution was an opportunity for many slaves to risk escape to potentially obtain freedom among the British. Boston King's experience demonstrates that the slaves were not simply bystanders during this era, as history books have argued, but in actuality were a very potent economic force. Once the war finished, their absence was keenly felt throughout the South and impacted how the remaining slaves were treated. In Kolchin's *American Slavery*, he writes that those who remained in slavery experienced a growth in autonomy, especially in the Upper South, that allowed slaves to have more free time, and the ability to hire themselves out to others for payment.<sup>37</sup> This autonomy also spanned slaves' religious lives as many began to participate in Christianity within the South. The Great Awakening, with its insistence on spiritual equality encouraged slaves to fully participate as equals in church. Over time, blacks took many of the

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<sup>35</sup> Peter Kolchin, *American Slavery 1619-1877* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993), 73.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 74.

biblical stories for their own, and incorporated them into their own spirituality.<sup>38</sup> Understanding the message of early Evangelical Christianity assisted the slaves in realizing the appeal of self-assertion, and led to the formation of the black church that defined the African-American experience throughout the next two centuries. As historian Ira Berlin writes, “the changes in African-American society in the Chesapeake during the middle years of the eighteenth century allowed black people to listen in on the debate between white Americans and their British overlords. The language of tyranny was one blacks well understood. When that debate broke out into open conflict, they would be quick to take advantage.”<sup>39</sup> In addition to increased autonomy, many Southern states acted legislatively to make private manumissions easier to complete.<sup>40</sup> The central legacy for the black experience during the American Revolution was the opportunity for escape, the general relaxing of manumission laws, and the increased autonomy gained by the slaves that remained, both through the church and self-assertion with the masters.

A second major legacy of the American Revolution for the black community was, “the emergence of a policy of containment of slavery in the Confederation period, a policy that had its ups and downs . . . but eventually became the rallying point for the emergent free soil movement and the Republican party, and the sticking point for Lincoln’s government in the secession crisis. Containment in time became the precipitating cause of the Civil War and emancipation.”<sup>41</sup> With the agreement to end the international slave trade in 1808, albeit for more than purely altruistic means, coupled with the enactment of the Northwest Ordinance that prohibited slavery in the

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<sup>38</sup> Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998), 138-139.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 140.

<sup>40</sup> Kolchin, *American Slavery*, 77.

<sup>41</sup> Rose, “American Revolution,” 195.



modern day states of Ohio, Michigan, Indiana, Wisconsin and Illinois, the Founders clearly showed a preference for curbing the influence of slavery rather than expanding it. For many Southern slave holders, the institution of slavery was a necessary evil to be used for economic purposes wherever practiced. By curbing and containing the institution of slavery, the Founders set a precedent that enabled Virginia to sincerely consider ending slavery within the state in 1832, and of course the Wilmot-Proviso which might have sparked the sectional conflict between the North and South.

At first glance, the ending of the international slave trade seems to be an altruistic principle added with the ratification of the U.S. Constitution. However, ending the international slave trade only served to increase the value of the domestic slave trade as home grown slaves became worth more than before. As Rose suggests, this did lead to an improvement in conditions as the paternalistic ideology settled in throughout the South. In most cases, slave owners fancied themselves as modern day biblical patriarchs, with their slaves being part of their larger family. Although conditions improved for slaves, slavery continued to be the oppressive system that entrapped millions within bondage, unable to choose for themselves the lives they desired. The creation of the cotton gin, coupled with the end of the international slave trade, led the number of slaves in the United States to triple between 1808 and 1860, ultimately totaling 4 million at the conclusion of the Civil War.<sup>42</sup> The economics behind slavery assisted the growth of the institution, as cotton required an immense labor force to supply the textile factories of the North. The American identity was aided and abetted by the profitability of slavery for both sections. With the South providing labor and the North providing factories designed to process

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<sup>42</sup> The History Channel, "Slavery in America,".

the raw materials, each section had a particular role to play. When united, they represented an incredibly strong market force.

The third legacy of the American Revolution was the creation of a free black community within the North. With many of the Northern states opting to gradually emancipate its slave population, the free black communities began to grow throughout the region. The North now became a place of opportunity and refuge for former and escaped slaves. The amount of political influence was negligible, as blacks could not vote, but the pressure caused by increased awareness of the slave's predicament became a deciding factor in changing Northern attitudes to an anti-slavery stance rather than ambivalent one.<sup>43</sup> With the rise of a free black community, freedmen could now share their experiences and push for the abolition of slavery entirely. No longer would the slaves be solely dependent upon empathetic whites to call attention to the horrors of slavery. With Northern cities as a place of refuge, former slaves, such as Frederick Douglas and Solomon Northup, produced their memoirs in order to share their stories from a life of bondage. Both Douglas and Northup escaped slavery during a time where the institution was still going strong and showed no signs of slowing down. Through the use of books, memoirs and letters, African Americans began cultivating relationships with people who helped them publish pamphlets and send them directly to the South. This provoked outrage throughout the region, leading Southerners to ban the importation of Northern pamphlets altogether. Having an educated African-American leadership within the abolitionist community helped exert pressure on both Northern and Southern politicians perhaps leading directly to the Civil War itself.

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<sup>43</sup> It should be noted that "Anti-Slavery" sentiment should not be confused with an "abolitionist" one. Anti-Slavery sentiment centered upon the unfairness of profiting from the sweat of another man's brow, instead of your own. Outside of the abolitionist movement, most in the North harbored many views that reflected the racial attitudes throughout the North and South. Anti-Slavery sentiment caused Abraham Lincoln's father to move his family away from Kentucky to Illinois due to being unable to compete with slave owning farmers.

The three major legacies of the American Revolution for the black community show that the slaves played a large role both during and after the war. The sheer volume of escaped slaves moving north and away from the American lines caught the attention of many former slave owners and Northern states, which opted to gradually emancipate after the war concluded. Even for those who remained enslaved, the war allowed for increased autonomy on the plantation and within society. The ability to work for others for a small payment was a previously denied venture. Limiting slavery in places where it could potentially expand, while only for economic means, set the precedent for containing slavery rather than expanding it. This legacy was largely forgotten by the time of the American Civil War, especially within in the South. Finally, the creation of the free black communities increased pressure on society, and gave the slaves a legitimate voice that previously did not exist. African Americans were at the heart of the Revolution and had a large role in causing the Northern states to move towards gradual emancipation.

Why did the principles of the Declaration and U.S. Constitution not include African Americans? For one, the relationship between slaves and the young United States was a bit troublesome during the war, especially in places such as Virginia and New York. The British royal governor of Virginia, John Earl of Dunmore, issued a proclamation in 1775 in response to reports of Virginia colonists rising against the crown. In his proclamation, Dunmore declared martial law throughout the colony in order to achieve peace and order. Dunmore then turned to one of the worst possible actions for Virginian slave owners by declaring that “all indentured Servants, Negroes, or others, free that are able and willing to bear Arms, they joining His Majesty’s Troops as soon as may be, for the more speedily reducing this Colony to a proper

Sense their Duty.”<sup>44</sup> In the very beginning of the widespread conflict between Great Britain and its colonies, the royal governor of one of the most populated colonies sought to enlist the aid of slaves to fight against their masters. Rather than being a complete afterthought, as the legacies of the Revolution might suggest, the role of slaves in the conflict within Virginia were of paramount importance. In his *Forced Founders: Indians, Debtors, Slaves and the Making of the Revolution in Virginia* historian Woody Holton suggests that nearly one thousand slaves joined Dunmore’s Ethiopian Regiment who was designed to point to the hypocrisy of rebel Virginian slave owners supposedly wanting to throw off the shackles of British tyranny.<sup>45</sup>

Although Lord Dunmore’s Proclamation seems very appealing to the modern reader, only one percent of Virginia slaves opted to join his forces.<sup>46</sup> In addition, the proclamation only carried the promise of freedom to those who could actively serve in the army, rather than being a general emancipation. However, even though the policy in Virginia ended with the defeat of Dunmore’s forces, the mere fact that some slaves found it agreeable to risk capture, and even death, for an opportunity to earn freedom should demonstrate the importance that slaves played in the early years of the American Revolution.

As seen with Boston King’s narrative, the case study of New York City during the American Revolution is instructive. With the near flawless victory by the combined might of the British navy and army, New York City served as a bastion of Loyalist support and a British base of operations. Judith L. Van Buskirk’s *Generous Enemies: Patriots and Loyalists in Revolutionary New York* discussed the city’s experience at length over the period of war. Van

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<sup>44</sup> Richard Johnson, “Lord Dunmore’s Proclamation on Slave Emancipation (1775), accessed on December 1<sup>st</sup>, 2014, [http://www.upa.pdx.edu/IMS/currentprojects/TAHV3/Content/PDFs/Dunmore\\_Proclamation\\_1775.pdf](http://www.upa.pdx.edu/IMS/currentprojects/TAHV3/Content/PDFs/Dunmore_Proclamation_1775.pdf).

<sup>45</sup> Woody Holton, *Forced Founders: Indians, Debtors, Slaves and the Making of the Revolution in Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 156.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 156-157.

Buskirk demonstrates how the war provided an opportunity for Loyalists, Patriots, women and slaves to increase their normally allotted autonomy diminished by societal norms. In regards to the African-American experience in New York City, Van Buskirk argues that, “no matter what the callous motivation or inconsistency of the British, an enslaved African American could cross the lines to a better life between 1776 to 1783. Like others during the war, New York’s blacks put their own priorities before adherence to either cause . . . The black community learned that liberation need not come only in isolated instances of flight; that those who held power could be moved to hasten the day of deliverance.”<sup>47</sup> The immense pressure applied by blacks escaping enemy lines and assisting the British pushed many Northern states to reconsider slavery altogether after the war. While the British policy towards the enslaved population in North America was often inconsistent, the slaves realized an opportunity when it presented itself. With all of the revolutionary rhetoric passed around the American populace, infused with the use of slavery as a metaphor to describe the British and American colonies relationship, the slaves understood what time it was, allowing many to leave with the British at the wars end.

Similarly to the Native-American experience after the conflict, African Americans were left largely to their own devices in the post-war aftermath.<sup>48</sup> Without the British as a buffer, slaves were left with a society who fully accepted slavery as an economic and social institution. For the British, hurting the Patriot war effort always was the end goal, but returning thousands of slaves to their former masters played no major part in their overall strategy. The window of opportunity to escape and improve the lives of family members quickly came to a close. As a result, the African Americans quickly realized their overwhelming support of the British needed

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<sup>47</sup> Judith L. Van Buskirk, *Generous Enemies: Patriots and Loyalists in Revolutionary New York* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 154.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

to be downplayed and hopefully forgotten. According to Van Buskirk, “the black community strove to downplay its wartime alliance with the British, stressing instead its contribution to the American cause. But the significant movement across military lines during the war was so dramatic that the memory died hard in the white community . . . Unlike its neighbors who passed gradual abolition legislation earlier, New York did not put a gradual emancipation law on its books until 1799.”<sup>49</sup> In both Virginia and New York slaves played a larger role in the war than was later discussed in the history books. The Founders largely ignored the lessons from the war that demonstrated that if given an opportunity, blacks would risk everything to improve the lives of their family. The slaves were also willing to serve in a military capacity, largely under His Majesty’s Army, in order to escape the bonds of servitude within the colonies.

The experience of the American Revolution for the black community allowed immense social change for those who ventured to gain their freedom. However, for most of those enslaved in the Southern colonies, the war ended as it began, in servitude. The American Revolution was not a war predicated on the principles of emancipation, but the British use of the potential of freedom encouraged many slaves to risk escaping across enemy lines. For slave owners, the autonomy of the black population served as a source of anxiety and constant fear, as the threat of a slave rebellion remained omnipresent. Instead of making necessary adjustments to ensure the loyalty and support of the black community, the Founding Fathers consciously joined in an effort to promote the legacy of unity in an effort to reconcile the young nation after a war that might be categorized as a civil war.

In discussing the formation of the United States Constitution, the Founders decided upon a course of limiting the international slave trade and banning slavery in the Northwest

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

Territories. At first glance, this appears to be in direct response to the experiences of the war, however, upon further review, their efforts fell far short of what was needed to ensure the cooperation of a burgeoning freedmen population. For many years, the well-known excesses of the international slave trade tarnished its reputation due to its perceived inhumane and cruel practices. Ending the international slave trade allowed the Founders from across the country to assuage their collective conscience, secure in the fact that the practice was on its way to extinction. Unfortunately for the enslaved, the ending of the international trade only encouraged the rapid growth of the domestic slave trade. Also, in the years leading up to the ending of the international slave trade, steps were taken in South Carolina to ensure the rapid importation of African slaves prior to the deadline. Ira Berlin writes in his comprehensive study on the history of slavery, *Many Thousands Gone*, that, “between 1803 and 1808, when the constitutional prohibition went into effect, over 35,000 slaves entered South Carolina, more than twice as many as in any similar period in its history as a colony or state . . . In all, between 1782 and 1810, South Carolina alone imported nearly 90,000 slaves.”<sup>50</sup> Instead of slavery being on its way out, the Southern states rapidly imported slaves prior to the end of the international trade in order to profit later. Slavery became even more lucrative as the supply was more limited than it was previously once the international trade ceased. Additionally, the growth of slavery was aided by the invention of the cotton gin, which required many slaves to operate it during the cotton boom.

The second step taken by the Founding Fathers, the Northwest Ordinance represented a policy change to limiting the spread of slavery. This was not done under the pretense of ending the harsh institution, but rather due to the institution being economically unfeasible in the Northwest Territories. Growing cotton, the crop that required the largest amount of intense slave

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<sup>50</sup> Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone*, 308.

labor, would not work in Illinois, Wisconsin, Indiana, Ohio and Michigan. Certainly, containing slavery appeared to demonstrate the Founder's anxiety over the system, but ending it in a place where it would not be profitable also served an economic purpose. As a result, not long after the Revolution ended and the Constitution was adopted, the institution of slavery experienced exponential growth as it had never seen before. Society had other priorities.

### **National Remembrance and Forgetting**

Classifying any particular person as the chief architect of the emerging American consensus view of the Revolution is a difficult task. However, no two historians were more important in creating the foundational myth of an American populace than Mercy Otis Warren and David Ramsay. Warren is an anomaly in an otherwise predominantly male era of written works. The mere fact that a woman of considerable prominence could take to the written word and express herself openly without fear of reprisal demonstrates the societal upheaval caused by the Revolutionary Era. The times lent themselves for women, such as Warren, to push against societal barriers that would otherwise never have budged. Her history of the American Revolution helped cement the legacy of unity between the colonies by chronicling the rise of revolutionary types during the war and piecing through what it meant for the entire country.

As a Massachusetts woman of incredible renown—John Adams once remarked in a letter to her husband, “that God Almighty has entrusted her with the Powers for the good of the World, which . . . he bestows on few of the human race. That instead of being a fault to use them, it would be criminal to neglect them.”<sup>51</sup>—Warren could reach many throughout the young nation with her words. Her last work, the *History of the Rise, Progress and Termination of the*

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<sup>51</sup> Pamela Kline and Paul Pavao, “Mercy Otis Warren,” accessed January 5<sup>th</sup>, 2015, <http://www.revolutionary-war.net/mercy-otis-warren.html>.



*American Revolution*, was published in 1805 to much acclaim. President Thomas Jefferson even reserved his own copy at the time of its publication.<sup>52</sup> With such an audience came much responsibility. Historians such as Warren had an opportunity to mold the national conscience into whatever they deemed important to include in their research and writings. As a result, Warren's limited mention of slavery in her celebrated work followed a trend set by another historian, David Ramsay, and consequently created a foundational myth in American society based upon the unity of all colonies, minus those elements in society who were not included.

Another historian, one that emerged prior to Mercy Otis Warren, was David Ramsay, a Pennsylvanian-born intellectual who eventually spent most of his adult life in South Carolina. Ramsay's life constitutes a microcosm of the larger trend in American Revolutionary memory from the end of the war into the early national period. The late historian Arthur H. Shaffer dealt with Ramsay's evolution from a Northern anti-slavery advocate to an almost ambivalent slave owner in South Carolina.<sup>53</sup> By examining Ramsay's correspondence with other notable anti-slavery Founding Fathers such as Dr. Benjamin Rush, Shaffer demonstrates that Ramsay occupied a precarious position within South Carolinian politics as a man with considerable misgivings concerning slavery and yet having ambition for higher political office. Upon moving to South Carolina, Shaffer exhibits Ramsay lamenting to Rush, "Oh that it had been my lot to have spent my days where slavery was unknown . . . To speak as a Christian, I really fear some heavy judgment awaits us on that very score . . . I think with you in respect of our enslaving the Africans, and have a firm belief that there will not be a slave in these state fifty years hence."<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Arthur H. Shaffer, "Between Two Worlds: David Ramsay and the Politics of Slavery," *The Journal of Southern History* Vol. 50, No. 2 (May, 1984), 192.

<sup>54</sup> Letter to Benjamin Rush, February 3, June 20, 1779, "Ramsay: His Writings," 59, 60.

Even with these sentiments, Ramsay was held in considerable esteem so long as he did not challenge the system of slavery in definitively moral terms.<sup>55</sup> He did however lead a losing effort within the South Carolina legislature to arm three thousand black slaves within South Carolina and Georgia in response to an anticipated invasion by British forces in 1779.<sup>56</sup> Shaffer asserts that Ramsay's support for the legislation demonstrates his continued commitment to emancipation, as he later claimed that the black population from the Southern states did not have the mental capacity to serve in the military.<sup>57</sup> Giving slaves an opportunity to serve was simply a means to an end. It appears that as long as the Revolution continued, along with its prominent use of the master-slave owner metaphor to describe the relationship between Great Britain and the colonies, Ramsay maintained his anti-slavery views.

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<sup>55</sup> Shaffer, "Ramsay," 187.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 181.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 183.



**Figure 1:2 David Ramsay, historian.**

Source: <http://www.whatsoproudlywehail.org/curriculum/the-american-calendar/oration-on-the-advantages-of-american-independence>

Through the passage of time and perhaps a cooling of passions due to political realities, David Ramsay became less of an advocate for the equality of man-kind at birth, and more a proponent of maintaining the status quo. Altruism aside, being a Northern-born politician within the heart of a slave-society colony such as South Carolina, made electability more desirable than adhering to principle. However, Ramsay appears to have changed his mind by the time he wrote his famous two volume series on the history of the American Revolution. Aptly named *The History of the American Revolution*, Ramsay's mammoth work sought to create a homogenous American identity in hopes of supporting the newly created United States Constitution. As an unabashed Federalist, Ramsay felt that creating a uniquely American identity and being able to demonstrate its historical veracity would help heal the political divisions of the early Republic.

As a result, Ramsay's *History of the American Revolution* stresses the importance of unity throughout the young nation at the direct expense of his old anti-slavery views. Rather than coming across as an anti-slavery advocate, Ramsay argues that slavery developed in the South due to blacks being able to cope with the conditions more readily than the whites.<sup>58</sup> Ramsay's arguments were aided by his reputation for having medical knowledge that lent credibility to his claims.

Additionally, Ramsay toed the party line by arguing that, "domestic slavery seemed to be forced on the Southern provinces," and instead of focusing on the degradation on those enslaved, continued to point out the so-called "baneful consequences" that the institution had upon the Southern white population. Ramsay believed slavery, "was particularly hostile to the proper education of youth . . . impeded the introduction of laboring freeman, and of course diminished the capacity of the country for active defence[sic], and at the same time endangered internal tranquility, by multiplying a species of inhabitants, who had no interest in the soil."<sup>59</sup> In what was to be his most influential work, Ramsay was creating the talking points used to defend the system of slavery by countless Southern leaders during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Although he was not alone in his sentiments—Thomas Jefferson's abhorrence for slavery usually dealt with his concern on the impact of slavery upon the white population—Ramsay's position as a leading intellectual of the American Revolution helped his views reach countless people.

Ramsay's mention of Lord Dunmore's Proclamation in Virginia focused on the benefit of the altercation, not for the British, but for the colonists. According to Ramsay, "It was supposed that the proffer of freedom would detach them from their master's interest, and bind them by

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<sup>58</sup> Lester H. Cohen, ed, David Ramsay, *The History of the American Revolution*, Vol 1. (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, Inc, 1990), 23.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid*, 23-24.

strong ties to support the royal standard . . . but lord Dunmore's indiscretion deprived his royal master of this resource."<sup>60</sup> The British, Ramsay stipulated, wanted to openly exploit the immense amount of slaves within the colonies, as a source for civil strife. Ramsay continued that after six months, "the negroes had in a great measure ceased to believe, and the inhabitants to fear. It excited less surprize[sic], and produced less effect, than if it had been more immediate and unexpected. The country was now in a tolerable state of defence[sic], and the force for protecting the negroes, in case they had close with his lordship's offer, was far short of what would have been necessary for their security."<sup>61</sup> According to Ramsay, the slaves no longer believed in the sincerity of Dunmore's claim, and as such, the force raised by Dunmore amounted was "inconsiderable." The proclamation succeeded in uniting the white populace against Dunmore, but the mere fact that any slaves attempted to risk freedom in order to serve in the British Army is significant. Additionally, Ramsay seems to think that the proclamation amounted to a general emancipation, which it was not.<sup>62</sup> According to historian Woody Holton, Dunmore realized that the former slaves could be an important resource after defeating nearly three hundred patriot militiamen at Kemp's Landing outside of Norfolk, with an army of predominantly escaped slaves. Both Ramsay's and Warren's account of the Virginia situation in the early parts of the war downplays the role of the escaped slaves in the entire affair. Ramsay admits Dunmore "produced some effect in Norfolk and the adjoining country, where his lordship was joined by several hundreds, both whites and blacks."<sup>63</sup> Rather than discussing the situation

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid, 234.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Even so, Woody Holton suggests in *Forced Founders* that many women, and children joined with those able-bodied men to run towards British lines. See page 156.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 234.

objectively, Ramsay argues that any attempt by Dunmore to incite the slaves failed completely, and served only as “an object against which they [the provincials] might direct their arms.”<sup>64</sup>

Ramsay’s final mention of the institution of slavery in his first volume demonstrates more than any other example, his change from an anti-slavery advocate to a proponent of the status quo. According to Ramsay, “if a slave can have a country in the world, it must be any other in preference to that, in which he is compelled to labour[sic] for a master,” which means that in any situation slaves would prefer to not be slaves. However, Ramsay continues by arguing, “Such is a the force of habit, and the pliancy of human nature, that though degrading freemen to the condition of slaves, would, to many, be more intolerable than death, yet Negroes who have been born and bred in habits of slavery, as so well satisfied with their condition, that several have been known to reject proffered freedom, and as far as circumstances authorize us to judge, emancipation does not appear to be the wish of the generality of them.”<sup>65</sup> In an almost surreal foreshadowing of the Lost Cause ideology in the aftermath of the American Civil War, Ramsay makes the argument that slaves actually preferred enslavement to potential freedom. It should be noted that in 1789, the year Ramsay’s narrative was published, slavery was still considered by many to be a necessary evil, rather than a collective good. This change in attitude was to occur much later as slavery continued to expand in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Such an argument demonstrates Ramsay’s unwillingness to publish arguments that might set one section of the country against the other, threatening his case for unity. Ramsay’s chief goal was the creation of an American identity based upon the concept of unity. In achieving unity, Ramsay sacrificed the important role that slaves played in the American Revolution.

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 24.

Ramsay's main goal was not only to create a homogenous American identity that thirteen disparate colonies could partake of, but also to lend historical credibility to the new identity. As with all arguments in past and present, attaching history, with all of its forces of legitimacy, would help the young country congeal, especially in light of a very divisive revolution that often pitted families and neighbors against each other. All of these factors contributed to Ramsay's main desire of creating a United States of America prior to its existence. In other words, Ramsay wanted to demonstrate that an American identity had always existed, even if it was secondary to a British identity until the Revolution itself. To achieve this, Ramsay carefully and subtly runs through a quick synopsis of the history of the colonies and inserts his own views upon it. He echoes common complaints and assertions by Whig, or pro Revolutionary advocates, stating that the colonies were founded to govern themselves with minimal interference from the homeland. According to Ramsay, "Long before the declaration of independence, several of the colonies on different occasions, declared, that they out not to be taxed but by their own provincial assemblies, and that they considered subjection to acts of a British parliament, in which they had no representation, as a grievance."<sup>66</sup> Even though Ramsay's book was published in 1789, well after the war had concluded with Great Britain and the Constitution adopted, he could not refrain from the revolutionary rhetoric that had propelled the colonies into full-fledged rebellion. By arguing that the colonies had long avoided British Parliament's interference, Ramsay conveniently forgot the importance of British forces in the Seven Years War that caused Parliament to directly tax the colonies in the first place. It is understandable that taxation caused consternation within the colonies, simply due to its unprecedented levels. However, the homeland's relationship with the colonies had long been an extremely amicable one, as

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 17.

evidenced by the numerous citizens who either remained neutral, or stayed loyal during the Revolution.

Ramsay's attempts to forge an American identity via the burnishing of historical authority came full circle with his argument that the colonies were formed with the expectation that Parliament and Great Britain would not interfere in their affairs. Again adopting the arguments of some of the firebrands in favor of Revolution, Ramsay asserts that, "From the acquiescence of the parent state, the spirit of her constitution and daily experience, the colonists grew up in a belief, that their local assemblies stood in the same relation to them, as the parliament of Great Britain, to the inhabitants of that island. The benefits of legislation were conferred on both, only through these constitutional channels."<sup>67</sup> This is perhaps the most important constitutional argument that the Whigs used to argue in favor of action against the British Parliament. The argument was that, due to Great Britain allowing increased autonomy in the founding of the colonies, it allowed the colonies to de facto govern themselves without any interference from the British Isles. This ignored major British acts such as the Navigation Acts that prohibited the sale of goods to and from foreign countries within British colonies. By employing important arguments first used by those in favor of Revolution, Ramsay shows his cards and sympathies, advancing his own agenda rather than focusing on objectivity—his agenda being forming and creating a uniquely American identity steeped in history and tradition. In his version of events, the British Crown was the aggressor, and the colonies had simply desired to be left alone.

Mercy Otis Warren's *History of the Rise, Progress, and Termination of the American Revolution* provided a more comprehensive view of the American Revolution than David

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid.



Ramsay's. Published in 1805, Warren's final work was comprised of three volumes that focused on providing a history of the entire revolutionary period. Her narrative appeared roughly fifteen years after Ramsay's, so some differences exist between the two. Warren departs from Ramsay's narrative by openly discussing the role of the slaves in Dunmore's Proclamation, but refuses to discuss any major contribution of the African slaves beyond that. According to Warren, Virginia, Maryland and the Carolinas held the largest number of slaves and thus constantly lived in a state of fear of rebellion.<sup>68</sup> Lord Dunmore, while perhaps qualified for his position, did not understand the times and fears of his populace, who according to Warren, were a "people struggling with the poniard at their throat and the sword in their hand, against the potent invaders of their privileges and claims."<sup>69</sup> Additionally, according to Warren, "The Virginians had been disposed in general to treat their governor, lord Dunmore, and his family, with every mark of respect; and had not his intemperate zeal in the service of his master given universal disgust, he might have remained longer among them, and finally have left them in a much less disgraceful manner."<sup>70</sup> Understandably, Warren sides with the colonists who were rebelling against the crown, but in so doing, sacrifices her objectivity. Gone is any real condemnation or additional commentary of the situation within Virginia by Warren, other than to describe potential slave rebellions as "invaders of their privileges and claims."<sup>71</sup> Empathy for the slaves did not exist within Warren's narrative, only for those colonists who faced perceived British tyranny.

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<sup>68</sup> Warren, *History*, 200.

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

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

Warren turns her narrative to Dunmore's inclination to arm both blacks and natives against those agitating against the crown. In a curious choice of words, Warren charges that Dunmore, "had the inhumanity early to intimate his designs if opposition ran high, to declare freedom to the blacks, and on any appearance of hostile resistance to the king's authority, to arm them against their masters."<sup>72</sup> Any concern for the inhumanity of slavery itself is completely omitted, or perhaps intentionally forgotten. The escaped slaves and natives who joined Dunmore clearly exist as nefarious rebels in Warren's passage on the strife within Virginia. The end result of his proclamation was to carry on, "a kind of predatory war on the colony for several months. The burning of Norfolk, the best town in the territory of Virginia, completed his disgraceful campaign."<sup>73</sup> Instead of admitting that a large amount of Dunmore's force were the escaped slaves fighting under the royal standard, Warren simply categorizes his army as comprised of criminals, partizans[sic], banditti and a few run-away negroes.<sup>74</sup> While Warren spent considerably more time discussing the entire Dunmore situation in Virginia, she attempts to thoroughly downplay the role that escaped slaves played in creating it.

### **The Cost of Unity**

According to historian John Murrin, the forging of the national American identity was, "an expected, impromptu, artificial, and therefore extremely fragile creation of the Revolution."<sup>75</sup> Historians such as David Ramsay and Mercy Otis Warren helped continue the

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 201.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 203.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> John M. Murrin, "A Roof without Walls: The Dilemma of American National Identity," from *Beyond Confederation: Origins of the Constitution and American Identity*, Richard Beeman, Stephen Botein, Edward C. Carter II, eds., (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1987). Accessed January 15<sup>th</sup>, 2015, <http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/history/dfg/amrv/murrin.htm>.

efforts and keep the spirit of the Revolution alive through their histories of the conflict. Ramsay represented a decidedly Southern viewpoint from his adopted state of South Carolina by the time his work was published in 1789. His views represent Southern apologist thinking during the early national period, and as such, sacrifices the contributions of escaped slaves in order to not offend his contemporaries. His goal of assisting the growth of a young nation's identity took precedence over historical truth, as well as objectivity.

As important as it was for Ramsay to recount the historical events from the past twenty years, it was equally important for him to create a foundational myth that all accepted parts of society could adhere. Additionally, as Ramsay wrote his version of events, the ratification process for the United States Constitution was ongoing. As an ardent Federalist, Ramsay desired to lend historical credibility to the United States, in an attempt to persuade the required number of states to ratify. To achieve this, Ramsay infused his narrative with principles of republicanism that permeated the Revolutionary period. His partisanship did not go unnoticed by Loyalist minister Jonathan Boucher who wrote his own version of the Revolution and dedicated it to the likes of George Washington. According to Boucher, Ramsay's history, "is a work of great merit in point of composition: the author is, undoubtedly, a man of sense, and not illiterate; but his histories are no less clearly the productions of an avowed partisan of the revolt, who is by principle a puritan and a republican."<sup>76</sup> Loyalist criticism further cements the fact that Ramsay's arguments had a perceived impact upon the young United States, as Boucher took to his pen to combat the quickly crystallizing history of the American Revolution.

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<sup>76</sup> Jonathan Boucher, "A View of the Causes and Consequences of the American Revolution; in Thirteen Discourses, Preach in North America between the Years 1763 and 1775," (London: Printed for G.G. and J. Robinson, 1797), accessed January 15<sup>th</sup>, 2015, <https://archive.org/stream/viewofcausescons00boucrich#page/n15/mode/2up., iii>.

Mercy Otis Warren's narrative of the American Revolution further cemented existing trends within the historiography of the American Revolution. Warren's roots as New England anti-federalist are on full display in her work as she devotes more time discussing often forgotten parts of the Revolution, such as the loyalists and slaves. However, she follows the trend set by Ramsay and others by minimizing their impact and doubting their sincerity to their cause. Both Ramsay's and Warren's account of the American Revolution helped assist the process of creating an American foundational myth that stressed the importance of unity within the thirteen colonies. As John Murrin writes, "Early historians rewrote the past to make the Constitution the culminating event of their story. Some of the Republic's most brilliant legal minds wrote interminable multivolume commentaries on its manifold virtues and unmatched wisdom."<sup>77</sup> Unprecedented for its time, early American historians and political figures helped create a sense of Americanism that had previously barely existed. Murrin continues, "Under the shade of this lofty frame of government, the shared sacrifices of the Revolutionary war could become interstate and intergenerational memories that bound people together in new ways."<sup>78</sup>

The desire for a unified nation did not come without cost, however, as Natives were slowly pushed westward and the institution of slavery grew exponentially in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Historian Gary Nash concludes his chapter on the failure of abolitionism by lamenting that an opportunity had been lost by the Founding generation.<sup>79</sup> Nash posits that slavery was decidedly a national issue and not a sectional one, immediately following the Revolutionary period. According to Nash, "From failing to support abolition plans put forward by southerners in the

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<sup>77</sup> Murrin, *Roof Without Walls*,.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Nash, *Race and Revolution*, 48.

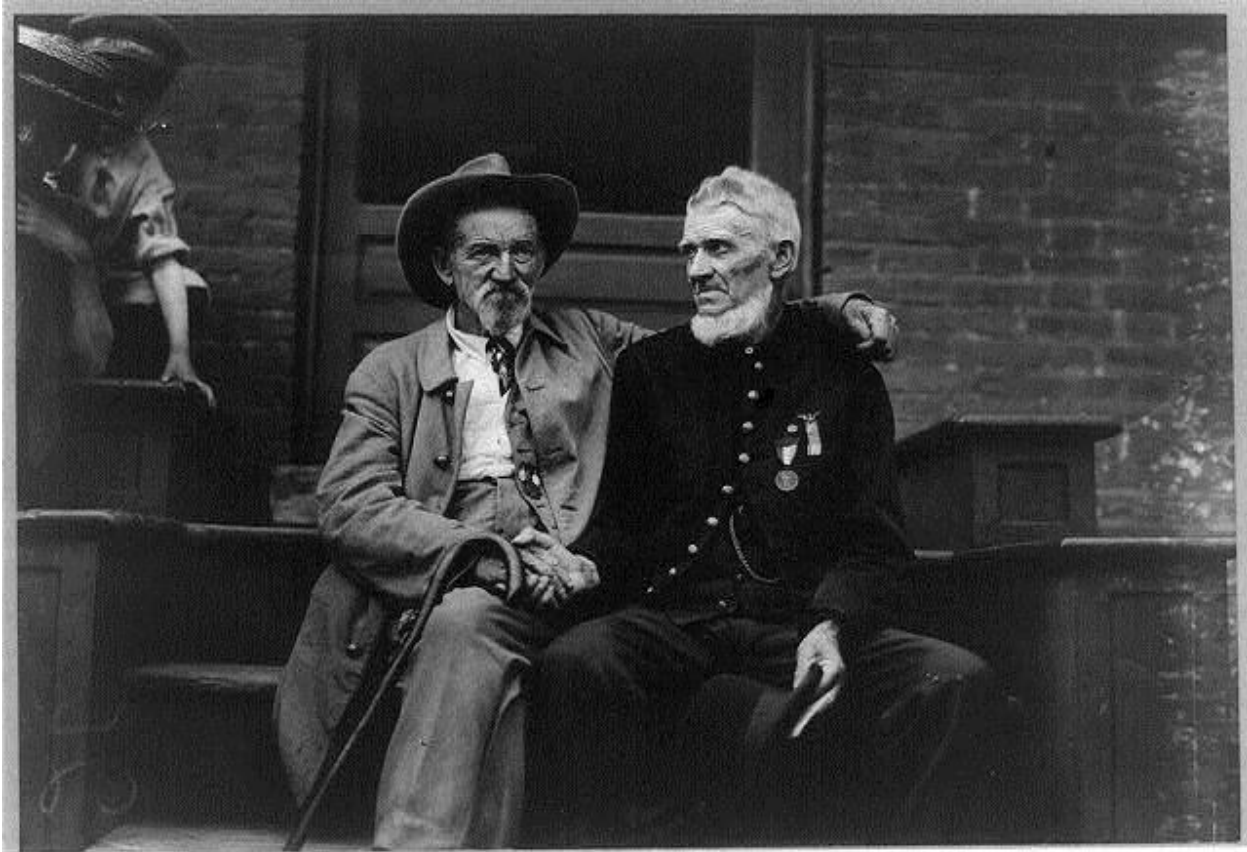
1780s and 1790s to their emergence in the first quarter of the nineteenth century as contrivers of an intellectual defense of slavery, northern leaders . . . consistently ducked the issue that the Revolutionary leaders had insisted must be solved if the nation was to be united and true to the sacred texts enunciated during its birth.”<sup>80</sup> A true opportunity had been lost in regards to dealing with slavery as a national issue. At no other time were Southern and Northern politicians as receptive to potentially ending the institution of slavery prior to the American Civil War. With manumissions increasing within the South and the Northern states adopting gradual emancipation, putting slavery on the course to extinction at the national level was a real possibility. Additionally, applying the Revolutionary rhetoric to all of mankind simply proved to be too much to ask, and African-American contributions in history were either completely removed or greatly minimized. The forces of national unity, assisted by a national economy built upon the institution of slavery, combined to create an American identity that did not include African Americans.

Unfortunately for the slave populace, the sentiments infused in the Declaration and embodied within the Bill of Rights took a bloody civil war and nearly one hundred years of Jim Crow to be granted to them. For many, the American Revolution helped create a sense of unity and belonging previously lacking within the thirteen colonies. However, in creating this unity, an entire race of people was left out, consigned to their own devices to hope and pray for deliverance—a deliverance that did not come until nearly two hundred years had passed from the founding generation.

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 50.

## Chapter 2 - American Civil War Memory



**Figure 2:1 A Confederate and Union Veteran shake hands at the 1913 Gettysburg Reunion.**  
Source: [www.crossroadsofwar.org/galleries/veterans](http://www.crossroadsofwar.org/galleries/veterans)

Less than one hundred years after the ratification of the U.S. Constitution, eleven states seceded from the Union casting in doubt all that was achieved with independence from Great Britain. The spirit of unity that proved so pervasive during the formation of the country well into the 1800s dissolved under the strain of political disagreement over the institution of slavery. For years American politics veered from one crisis to the next, finally collapsing with the election of Abraham Lincoln, the first Republican candidate to emerge victorious in a presidential election based solely on a sectional vote. In their disgust with the Northern democrat, Stephen A. Douglas, many Southerners simply sat out the election with the intention of beginning the process of leaving the Union. Thus the election of Lincoln served as a self-fulfilling prophecy

for the Southern states. What they could not have known was that their actions brought upon the end of slavery faster than any gradual emancipation scheme might have done legislatively.

The American Civil War spanned roughly four and a half years, with the last body count being revised to around 750,000 casualties.<sup>81</sup> The death toll severely impacted both sections while in the South, nearly one in five males died on account of the war.<sup>82</sup> Drew Gilpin Faust's *This Republic of Suffering* discusses the impact of such catastrophic loss in society immediately following the war. For those who served, the conflict either brought about an untimely death, or if soldiers were lucky, a return home only to find the society they once knew completely changed. Southern society was turned completely upside down with the eradication of slavery and the state of destitution of most of the states immediately following the conflict. Many former slaves—now freedmen—simply did not know where to turn once freedom became a reality. Because of this, many former slaves stayed on and worked for a wage under the exploitative sharecropping system that managed to keep slaves in a constant state of debt-slavery and elevate the former master class back into power.

As with the American Revolution, the American Civil War was fought for many on moral grounds, whether it was the preservation of the Union, defense of home and hearth, or fighting to free the slaves. Each side utilized various forms of propaganda in order to fill troop quotas and satisfy conscription laws. For the North, winning the war helped vindicate their cause and belief that the states remained a powerful force when united into one cause.

Additionally, the war served as an opportunity for many former slaves and freedman to serve within the United States army for the very first time. These soldiers proved to be an invaluable

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<sup>81</sup> Guy Gugliotta, "New Estimate Raises Civil War Death Toll," *New York Times*, April 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2012.

<sup>82</sup> Drew Gilpin Faust, *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War* (New York: Vintage Books, 2008), xi.

source of labor and fighting strength at a pivotal time in the war as U.S. Grant's strategy of "total war" began to show signs of progress. As was common during the American Revolution, the Civil War served as an opportunity for otherwise neglected groups to exert newfound autonomy. For the runaway slave, the Civil War represented a chance for a new life away from the confines of chains.

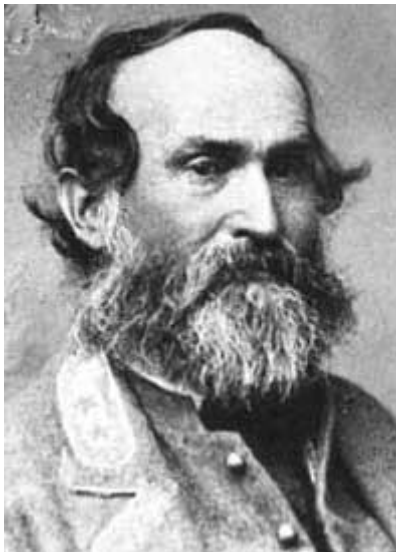
### **Southern Remembrance & The Lost Cause**

The Southern legacy from the American Civil War continues to stir passions and controversy as if the war was not fought over one hundred and fifty years ago. Faced with the destruction of their country, Southerners needed to find absolution in the form of justification for fighting on the losing side of the war. Unlike their Northern counterparts, the defeat of the Southern armies represented a rejection and complete destruction of the Southern way of life. Without the system of slavery to provide the hard labor required for cotton and tobacco, the entire Southern economy was wrecked in the years immediately following the war. The South lost virtually everything with the end of slavery, the destruction of the cotton economy and the death of twenty percent of the male population.

In order to cope with all of this change, two distinct interpretations emerged from the end of the war within the South. In light of all of this change, many former Southern leaders and generals attempted to amend the historical record in order to justify and embellish their contributions so as to improve their own standing in history. This later became known as the "Lost Cause" doctrine. Under the Lost Cause, leaders such as Alexander Stephens sought to divorce the American Civil War completely from the institution of slavery. In what seems to the modern reader as an admission of guilt, writers of the Lost Cause focused their efforts on removing slavery from the buildup into secession and war. In addition, writers of the Lost Cause



changed the narrative from the war being about slavery to being strictly about states' rights. No author exhibits these two basic tenets of the Lost Cause doctrine more than former Confederate Lieutenant General Jubal Early. Early served in the Army of Northern Virginia under such esteemed commanders as Stonewall Jackson and Robert E. Lee, and as such his word contained much clout in the eyes of Southerners after the war.



**Figure 2:2 Jubal Early during the American Civil War.**  
Source: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jubal\\_Early](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jubal_Early)

Written in the year 1866, Early's account is a fine example of Lost Cause literature. According to Early, "During the war, slavery was used as a catch word to arouse the passion of a fanatical mob, and to some extent the prejudices of the civilized world were excited against us; but the war was not made on our part for slavery."<sup>83</sup> As soon as the war concluded in 1865, one of Robert E. Lee's top ranking generals sought to change the historical record in order to improve his standing to posterity. This denial of the central role of slavery within the Civil War constitutes one of the major principles in Lost Cause ideology. Early continues his arguments by

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<sup>83</sup> Jubal Anderson Early, "A memoir of the last year of the War of Independence, in the Confederate States of America," (Toronto: Printed by Lovell & Gibson, 1866). Accessed September 4<sup>th</sup>, 2014. <https://archive.org/details/memoiroflastyear00earl/vi>.

laying the blame of slavery not at the feet of the South, but rather, “High dignitaries in both church and state in Old England, and puritans in new England, had participated in the profits of a trade, by which the ignorant and barbarous natives of Africa were brought from that country, and sold into slavery in the American colonies.”<sup>84</sup> The fault of slavery did not lie with those whose economy was predicated on the system of forced labor, but instead the blame rested with those greedy, capitalist Northerners who derived their economic well-being from the system they pretended to abhor. This second principle of the Lost Cause blamed the institution of slavery upon the North, the region who had gradually phased out the institution—in most cases due the economic infeasibility rather than altruistic motives—rather than the South. Passing the blame lasted longer than one might think as D.W. Griffith’s 1915 movie *The Birth of a Nation* depicted the Puritans as solely responsible for trading slaves to the South, and abandoning the trade when it was no longer profitable.<sup>85</sup> Rather than blaming the institution of slavery on the region that had used it to create a separate, slave society, the Lost Cause portrayed the South as a victim.

After depicting the South as a victim of the capitalist schemes from the North, Jubal Early turned to a passionate defense of the institution of slavery itself. An institution that was once proclaimed by slave owning Founding Father George Mason as a “slow Poison, which is daily contaminating the Minds and Morals of our People” now became a positive good, rather than a necessary evil.<sup>86</sup> Mason foretold that “slavery shall bring the judgment of heaven on a Country. As nations cannot be rewarded or punish in the next world they must be in this. By an

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> This might sound far-fetched especially since the Civil War had concluded well over fifty years prior to Griffith’s movie. However, the movie was a smash hit, with a private screening being arranged for the sitting President Woodrow Wilson. At the time, Wilson supposedly remarked “It is like writing history with lightning, and my only regret is that it is all so terribly true.” For more see, [http://www.pbs.org/wnet/jimcrow/stories\\_events\\_birth.html](http://www.pbs.org/wnet/jimcrow/stories_events_birth.html).

<sup>86</sup> Robert A. Rutland, ed., *The Papers of George Mason* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1970), 173.

inevitable chain of cause and effects, providence punishes national sins, by national calamities.”<sup>87</sup> Mason’s sentiments represented the Southern slave owning trend of disavowing the horrors of slavery, and yet continuing to hold slaves. Interestingly enough his sentiments differ radically from that of Jubal Early. According to Early, “the generation in the Southern States which defended their country in the late war, found amongst them, in a civilized and Christianized condition, 4,000,000 of the descendants of those degraded Africans. The Almighty Creator of the Universe had stamped them, indelibly, with a different colour and an inferior physical and mental organization. He had not done this from mere caprice or whim, but for wise purposes.”<sup>88</sup> Note Early’s deliberate use of words arguing that the Southerners “found amongst them” the many transplanted African Americans, as if the history of the slave trade had no bearing upon creating the established order within the South. Once again, the South is a victim of circumstance rather than reaping the consequences of her actions.

He continued by directly addressing concerns with the institution of slavery, in fact he becomes an apologist for slavery within the first ten pages of his memoirs. Early asserted that, “Reason, common sense, true humanity to the black, as well as the safety of the white race, required that the inferior race should be kept in a state of subordination. The condition of domestic slavery, as it existed in the South, had not only resulted in a great improvement in the moral and physical condition of the negro race, but had furnished a class of labourers as happy and contented as any in the world, if not more so.”<sup>89</sup> In his portrayal of slavery, one wonders whether or not Early ever spoke to a slave. Unfortunately, this third principle of the Lost Cause

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 966. For more information please see Gunston Hall’s website concerning George Mason’s views towards slavery, [http://www.gunstonhall.org/georgemason/slavery/views\\_on\\_slavery.html](http://www.gunstonhall.org/georgemason/slavery/views_on_slavery.html).

<sup>88</sup> Early, “Memoirs,” ix.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

depicted the institution of slavery as important for the “improvement” of the African race. Slave owners were wont to demonstrate that their slaves were happy in their condition and had no thoughts towards freedom. For Early, and the Lost Cause proponents, the institution of slavery was a collective good rather than a necessary evil and the fault with the implementation of slavery belonged to anyone but the South. Breaking completely with the founding generation of Southern leaders, Lost Causers believed slavery to be a positive force rather than cause for trepidation.

The fourth and final principle of the Lost Cause ideology was that the South truly never had a chance to win the American Civil War. In many ways, this represented the most important argument of the Lost Cause. Rather than fighting a tough, contested war, writers of the Lost Cause attempted to show that the Southern forces could never have won a conventional war against the superior manpower and economic prowess of the North. Even in the face of impossible odds, the South opted to fight a losing war in order to protect her precious honor. Any student of military history can easily determine that the South had several opportunities to win the Civil War, especially in the earlier years of the conflict, which did not go well for the North. In some ways, the idea that the war was completely unwinnable comes across as incredibly insulting, especially for those soldiers who endured so much only to lose.

However, some soldiers such as Sam R. Watkins in his incredibly insightful *Co. Aytch* began to exhibit signs of buying into the idea. Writing in 1882, Watkins strayed away from arguing the larger principles behind the war until the last couple of pages. According to Watkins, “Our cause was lost from the beginning. Our greatest victories—Chickamauga and Franklin—were our greatest defeats. Our people were divided upon the question of Union and secession. Our generals were scrambling for ‘Who ranked.’ The private soldier fought and

starved and died for naught . . . our cause lost.”<sup>90</sup> By 1882, the Lost Cause had taken hold over the lives of many of the soldiers who served during the American Civil War. Rather than depicting the war as an extremely close affair, with the North holding out to win, Lost Cause writers argued that the war was lost from its very inception.

The Lost Cause dominated much of the Southern remembrance immediately following the end of the war, as its writers began to persuade many followers that slavery did not have any impact on causing the Civil War. For most of the Lost Causers, especially those who had served in the Confederate armies, writing memoirs was a convenient way of disguising their true intentions of molding history to their own particular narrative. This, however, did not keep Jubal Early from asserting the righteousness of his cause. According to Early, “when the passions and infatuations of the day shall have been dissipated by time, and all the results of the late war shall have passed into irrevocable history, the future chronicler of that history will have a most important duty to perform, and posterity, while pouring over its pages, will be lost in wonder at the follies and crimes committed in this generation.”<sup>91</sup> Sure of their place in history, Lost Cause writers such as Jubal Early, William Pendelton and Richard Ewell attempted to change the historical record to absolve the South from blame for the institution of slavery.

Not all former Confederates partook of the Lost Cause ideology. In fact, most generals who refused to subscribe to the Lost Cause were successful in the field, while many of those who argued the principles of the Lost Cause had a dismal war record. The successful Confederate generals had nothing left to prove, while those who had assumed command and failed, such as the case for William Pendelton and Richard Ewell needed to justify their actions, as well as

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<sup>90</sup> Sam R. Watkins, *Co. Aytch* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2003 ed.), 230.

<sup>91</sup> Early, “Memoirs,” x.

change the historical record to reflect a cause better than the defense of slavery. These efforts met with much consternation from former Confederate general John S. Mosby. Commander of one the most celebrated cavalry outfits within the Confederate army, Mosby abhorred the distortion of history. In his own words, “According to Christian, the Virginia people were the abolitionists and the Northern people were pro-slavery . . . Christian quotes what the Old Virginians said against slavery. True; but why didn’t he quote what the modern Virginians said in favor of it—Mason, Hunter, Wise. Why didn’t he state that a Virginia Senator (Mason) was the author of the Fugitive Slave law—and why didn’t he quote the Virginia Code (1860) that made it a crime to speak against slavery . . .”<sup>92</sup> In his letter to his friend Sam Chapman, Mosby comes across as a staunch Unionist in this particular passage, rather than a former Confederate general. However, Mosby did not necessarily feel guilty over the South’s participation in the institution of slavery, instead arguing that, “now while I think as badly of slavery as Horace Greeley did I am not ashamed that my family were slaveholders. It was our inheritance—Neither am I ashamed that my ancestors were pirates and cattle thieves. People must be judged by the standard of their own age. If it was right to own slaves as property it was right to fight for it. The South went to war on account of Slavery.”<sup>93</sup> Known for his blunt honesty, Mosby had no problems discussing the role slavery played in the buildup into the war. He finished his letter by penning “I am not ashamed of having fought on the side of slavery—a soldier fights for his country— right or wrong—he is not responsible for the political merits of the cause he fights in.

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<sup>92</sup> John S. Mosby, “Letter to Sam Chapman,” (Washington D.C.: June 4<sup>th</sup> 1907), Accessed September 10<sup>th</sup>, 2014, <http://www.gilderlehrman.org/collections/4420081c-eb80-4104-9f34-204723373231>.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

The South was my country.”<sup>94</sup> Rather than relegating the institution of slavery to a peripheral role in the Civil War, Mosby claimed that the institution served as the catalyst for the conflict.



**Figure 2:3 John Mosby during the American Civil War.**  
Source: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John\\_S.\\_Mosby](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_S._Mosby)

Understandably, Mosby’s sentiments exiled him from the social circles within the South, especially with his decision to join the Republican Party after the war. Another Confederate general joined Mosby in his desire to move past the conflict and focus on the future reconciliation of the two sections, General James Longstreet. Longstreet, like Mosby became a Republican after the war, even going as far as serving in the Grant administration. For many in the South, this was an outright betrayal. Longstreet himself had become a target for Lost Causers as he had no problems with criticizing Robert E. Lee’s generalship. Lee ascended to the Confederate pantheon of sorts for the Lost Cause adherents, and therefore any criticism of him could not be tolerated. In particular, Lost Causers focused their wrathful venom for Longstreet’s role in the Confederate defeat at Gettysburg. According to his critics, without his delaying and arguing with Lee over the attacks on the second and third days of the campaign, Lee would have won. Such criticism was as unfair then as it seems now, but Longstreet did not seem to be

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

bothered by it, stating, “I cannot help but think that great results would have been obtained had my views been thought better of; yet I am much inclined to accept the present condition as for the best.”<sup>95</sup> Both Longstreet’s and Mosby’s actions after the war show that not all Confederate generals partook in the Lost Cause ideology, however, over time, different parts of the ideology became accepted as historical fact throughout the next fifty years. These men were ultimately treated like social pariahs in the war’s aftermath, but their blunt honesty demonstrates that the Lost Cause ideology was not the only force in Southern remembrance of the Civil War.

### **The Emancipationist Legacy**

To say that Southern remembrance of the American Civil War survived unscathed from criticism would not do justice to the many African Americans and former Union veterans who stood against sectional reconciliation. For the newly freed men and women, the freedom gained as a result of the 13<sup>th</sup> amendment drastically altered their lives from what was once a state of constant servitude to one with seemingly endless possibilities. In his comprehensive work on American Civil War memory, David Blight demonstrates that African Americans conducted their own remembrances on Decoration Days immediately following the war. According to Blight, in the midst of the destruction of the Southern slave holder aristocracy, freedmen and women celebrated the end of slavery by holding major celebrations in the middle of Charleston. These celebrations often included well attended parades for former soldiers and slaves. This victory parade showed the drastic change that occurred with the end of slavery. Never before could such a large gathering of freed African Americans be tolerated within South Carolina.<sup>96</sup> Not that the whites in Charleston endorsed such an actively—far from it—but they were

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<sup>95</sup> Robert P. Broadwater, *Gettysburg as the Generals Remembered It: Postwar Perspectives of Ten Commanders* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 2010), 95.

<sup>96</sup> Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory*, 67.



completely powerless to stop the former slaves from celebrating the downfall of the Southern Confederacy and with it the end of slavery.

Squaring off against the impulse for reconciliation proved very difficult for both former slaves and Union veterans. On the one hand, remembrance of slavery tended to elicit negative reactions towards both sections of the country for tolerating the institution for as long as it did. On the other hand, the movement towards reconciliation allowed both sections to experience the euphoria of forgetting a large blight on American history and focus on the feel good sensation of bringing the two sections together. As Reconstruction dragged ever onward, attacks against African-American communities by vigilante forces such as the Ku Klux Klan increased, leading former Union soldier, Albion Tourgée to write Senator Abbott raising awareness about the plight of the newly freed peoples in 1870. Tourgée, a white and unabashed abolitionist, was a stalwart supporter of the Emancipationist legacy of the American Civil War. This legacy, according to historian David Blight was based on the “idea of a people’s war for an expanding free labor society.”<sup>97</sup> Free labor proved to be one of the lasting legacies from the newly founded Republican Party, a belief that guided Abraham Lincoln’s political and life philosophy.

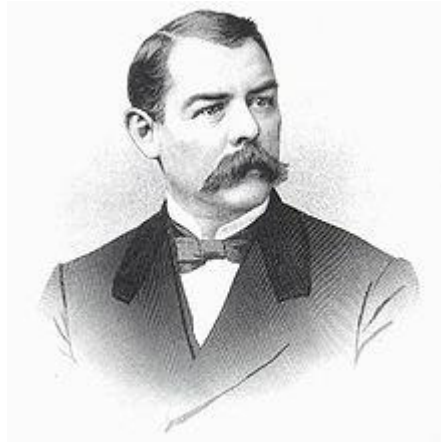
In a speech given in 1859, Lincoln defined the system of free labor as the key to social mobility. According to Lincoln, “The prudent, penniless beginner in the world labors for wages awhile, saves a surplus with which to buy tools or land for himself, then labors on his own account another while, and at length hires another new beginner to help him. This, say its advocates, is free labor—the just, and generous, and prosperous system, which opens the way for all, gives hope to all, and energy, and progress, improvement of condition to all.”<sup>98</sup> For

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<sup>97</sup> Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory*, 75.

<sup>98</sup> Abraham Lincoln., “*Annual Address Before the Wisconsin State Agricultural Society, at Milwaukee, Wisconsin, September 30, 1859.*” The Complete Works of Abraham Lincoln, vol. 5. Eds. John G. Nicolay and John Hay. New

proponents of free labor, the Civil War represented a golden opportunity to expand economic freedom to an entire race of people. By extending freedom to African Americans, they could now labor for their own benefit and reap the rewards—or so they thought.



**Figure 2:4 Albion Tourgée**

Source: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Albion\\_W.\\_Tourg%C3%A9e](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Albion_W._Tourg%C3%A9e)

The attacks by various vigilante groups, mostly the Ku Klux Klan, threatened to destroy many of the gains from the early years of Reconstruction.<sup>99</sup> With Union troops stationed throughout the South, and the entire section divided into five military districts, the Klan needed no help with spreading its message in order to recruit followers. As such, the myth formed that the South was a conquered people unjustly barred from basic civil rights due to the endless power of the newly freed slaves and carpetbaggers. Naturally, the reality was quite different as openly brazen attacks against the African-American populace continued prompting Albion Tourgée's letter to Senator Abbott. In the letter, Tourgée argues, "Four thousand or 5,000 houses have been broken open, and property or persons taken out. In all cases all arms are taken

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York: Francis D. Tandy Company, 1894)., Illinois Historical Digitization Projects, accessed September 30<sup>th</sup>, 2014, <http://dig.lib.niu.edu/teachers/econ1-lincoln.html>.

<sup>99</sup> It should be noted that while Reconstruction produced many failures, especially in the arena of civil rights, many short term gains were achieved. African-American males attained the right to vote, and many of them exercised the right in droves. Likewise, several African-American men were elected to the United States Congress signifying the progress made after the war.

and destroyed. Seven hundred or 800 persons have been beaten or otherwise maltreated. These of course are partly persons living in the houses which were broken into.”<sup>100</sup> Throughout Tourgée’s letter he chronicles the numerous heinous crimes committed against the black population in North Carolina. One poignant example he gives of the atrocities committed against the black population was a young black women who was raped by a group of KKK members and then tied to another man and burned with ashes from the fireplace.<sup>101</sup>

While these actions were horrible in themselves, Tourgée felt that the entire U.S. government was allowing the systematic slaughter of its population without any efforts to stop it. According to Tourgée, “I could stand it very well to fight for Uncle Sam, and was never known to refuse an invitation on such an occasion; but this lying down, tied hand and foot with the shackles of the law, to be killed by the very dregs of the rebellion, the scum of the earth, and not allowed either the consolation of fighting or the satisfaction that our “fall” will be noted by the Government, and protection given to others thereby, is somewhat too hard.”<sup>102</sup> Occupying his position as a federal judge in North Carolina, Tourgée likened the rebellious activities by the Klan as directly akin to the Civil War. The difference in 1870 was that the United States government avoided taking any action against the Klan until a year or so later. Any action taken to protect the African-American population within the South could potentially incite more of the white populace against the established Republican governments. For Tourgée, this was simply too much to bear. He continued his diatribe against the inaction of the federal government by arguing vehemently, “I am ashamed of the nation that will let its citizens be slain by scores and

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<sup>100</sup> Albion W. Tourgée., “Letter from Judge Tourgée to Senator Abbott, Greensboro, N.C. May 24<sup>th</sup>, 1870,”. Accessed on September 30<sup>th</sup>, 2014. [http://wps.ablongman.com/wps/media/objects/1482/1518021/primarysources4\\_16\\_1.html](http://wps.ablongman.com/wps/media/objects/1482/1518021/primarysources4_16_1.html).

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

scourged by thousands, and offer no remedy or protection. I am ashamed of a State which has not sufficient strength to protect its own officers in the discharge of their duties, nor guarantee the safety of any man's domicile throughout its length and breath."<sup>103</sup> The blame rested not only with the perpetrators of violence, but also with the federal government who did not back up its promise of protection. Albion Tourgée, a Union veteran, proclaimed his message of the Emancipationist legacy throughout the remainder of his life, even while the message continued to lose adherents. While he was not an African American, he spoke for many with concern over the effects of a national reconciliation at the cost of the true legacy of the war, in essence, the end of slavery.

African Americans tended to view the war differently than other groups in society, as it led directly to the freedom of the entire race. Historian David Blight argues that several trends of African-American memory developed after the war. One such trend viewed slavery almost with a sense of shame for the newly freed slaves; for who the two hundred years of slavery within North America was akin to the dark ages for the entire race.<sup>104</sup> Another trend, exhibited by the always eloquent Booker T. Washington, viewed the end of slavery as an opportunity for the entire race to rise up both economically and commercially. Washington's methods spurred much controversy, especially with his famous "Atlanta Compromise" speech to be discussed shortly. Another powerful trend among African-American memory of the Civil War was to view the end results with pride and patriotism. For these people, the Civil War was a source of pride as thousands of former slaves, and freemen fought on the winning side of the war. According to Blight this memory was, "characterized by the insistence that the black soldier, the Civil War

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Blight, *Race and Reunion*. 300.

Amendments, and the story of emancipation out to be at the center of the nation's remembrance."<sup>105</sup> One final group already saw the end of the Civil War and Reconstruction as a fleeting opportunity for progress with race relations that had failed. With the final withdrawal of Union troops from the South as a result of the election of 1876, a sense of despair and what might of been crept into African-American memory.

It is difficult to pin down a precise date where certain origins of memory are created. Often, societies create a foundational myth and remembrance that coalesces slowly, rather than immediately after a destabilizing event. At the close of the conflict, many politicians in the North set their sights on completely rebuilding the South. Not only did the South lag behind the North demographically, but also economically. While the institution of slavery was profitable, it did not encourage innovation in developing technology or commerce. As long as slavery proved profitable, there was no impetus to industrialize, or improve society. This led to the famous remark by James Henry Hammond that without cotton, "England would topple headlong and carry the whole civilized world with her, save the South. No, you dare not make war on cotton. No power on earth dares to make war upon it. Cotton is king."<sup>106</sup> Unfortunately for Hammond, his prophecy proved to be false as England declined to get involved during the Civil War, however his remarks demonstrate the perception of how important cotton production was to the South. Rather than emerging victorious from the war, the South's entire way of life was completely shattered. What made matters worse was that the Southern economy had next to no diversity, especially when it came to industrial plants and production. The lack of

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> James Henry Hammond, "On the Admission of Kansas, Under the Lecompton Constitution," Speech Before the United States Senate, 4 March 1858, Accessed on October 8<sup>th</sup>, 2014, [http://www.sewanee.edu/faculty/willis/Civil\\_War/documents/HammondCotton.html](http://www.sewanee.edu/faculty/willis/Civil_War/documents/HammondCotton.html).

industrialization became a deciding factor in the war's conclusion as the Northern war engine continuously churned out more soldiers and supplies, while the South had lost two of its three major industrial centers, with the fall of New Orleans in 1862 and Atlanta in 1864. The American Civil War did more to destroy Southern society than any potential election of Abraham Lincoln. At the war's end, the entire Southern population was left in a state of near destitution, especially for the newly freed slaves.

The South lagged behind economy prior to the Civil War, and the conflict only exacerbated the conditions for the poorest in the South. As previously discussed, many within the Radical Republican circles sought to completely rebuild the South as a utopia for free labor ideology. On paper, conditions appeared to be perfect for installing a completely new labor system designed to encourage social mobility among the classes. With slavery dead, the entire agricultural labor force stood alone at risk of falling into complete economic destitution, a fact well known to Thaddeus Stevens. Stevens argued in a speech given on December 18<sup>th</sup>, 1865 that, "We have turned, or are about to run, loose four million slaves without a hut to shelter them or a cent in their pockets. The infernal laws of slavery have prevented them from acquiring an education, understanding the common laws of contract or of managing the ordinary business of life."<sup>107</sup> At the heart of the Radical Republicans plan for Reconstruction was the desire to help those newly freed slaves help themselves. This was to be accomplished from direct federal assistance in the form of money, land and above all else, education. As Stevens intimated, many of the freed slaves had absolutely no formal education, which could be used a vehicle for success. Stevens understood the tenuous position of the poorest in Southern society after the war. The harsh judgment of history stood poised to destroy Congress' legacy should they fail to

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<sup>107</sup> Thaddeus Stevens, "Speech of December 18<sup>th</sup>, 1865," accessed October 13<sup>th</sup>, 2014, <http://www.let.rug.nl/usa/documents/1851-1875/thaddeus-stevens-speech-of-december-18-1865.php>.

support the newly freed slaves. According to Stevens, “This Congress is bound to provide for them until they can take care of themselves. If we do not furnish them with homesteads, and hedge them around with protective laws; if we leave them to the legislation of their late masters, we had better have left them in bondage. If we fail in this great duty now, when we have the power, we shall deserve and receive the execration of history and all future ages.”<sup>108</sup>

Unfortunately at the end of Reconstruction much of what Stevens feared came to pass. Congress was unable to fully provide land and support on a long term basis through the Reconstruction Era. As economic historian Gavin Wright argues in *Old South New South*, the end of slavery transformed the slave-owning class from laborlords to landlords.<sup>109</sup> Rather than having the ability to manage each aspect of a slave’s behavior, the planter class now had to rely upon using land, their only major resource available. While the Southern labor market contained a measure of mobility, poor whites and blacks made far less than their Northern counterparts.<sup>110</sup> Cotton remained king, and the cheap source of labor required to harvest it came in the form of the newly freed slaves and poor whites.<sup>111</sup> Economics dictated that the freed slaves remain on the bottom of society, and, coupled with the racial attitudes of the day, the post-Civil War years look drastically similar to the antebellum period for African Americans. Reconciliation was made simpler with the newly freed slaves remaining outside the confines of the American identity. With the rise of the “Redeemers” in the 1870s, Southern voters elected many of the same politicians who played an integral part in leaving the Union, thus removing many of the

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Gavin Wright, *Old South New South: Revolutions in the Southern Economy Since the Civil War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1986), 49.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 70.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 59.

federally appointed military governors and judges placed to enforce the newest amendments and to protect the freedmen. The failure of the Federal government to fully support the burgeoning freedmen population in the South led many African Americans to cast Reconstruction as a total failure.

Reconstruction had some successful moments especially early on with the passage of the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment, banning slavery, the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment, which extended the rights of citizenship to African Americans, and the 15<sup>th</sup> Amendment, which extended the right of suffrage to African-American males. In addition to newfound freedom and male suffrage, several African Americans were elected to state legislatures and even to Congress:



**Figure 2:5 African-American members of the 41<sup>st</sup> and 42<sup>nd</sup> Congress of the United States.**  
Source: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/African\\_Americans\\_in\\_the\\_United\\_States\\_Congress](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/African_Americans_in_the_United_States_Congress)



According to historian Eric Foner, the freedmen's desire for education surprised many as organizations such as the Freedmen's Bureau sought to create an educated black society.<sup>112</sup> The Freedmen's Bureau, while much smaller than what was required for its task, helped coordinate Northern societies dedicated to educating the freed slaves. As Foner suggests, the ability of a small, 900-person bureau to reach nearly 3,000 schools and over 150,000 students represents one of the best achievements from the Reconstruction period.<sup>113</sup> From these classes, a newly educated, modern African-American society emerged.

Many of these gains were very short lived as restrictive laws made their way through various state legislatures making it nearly impossible for African Americans to vote. One of the false myths perpetuated by white Southerners during the Reconstruction Era is that blacks openly controlled all of society in an effort to exact revenge. This particular charge originated in the aftermath of the Civil War as Northern politicians debated how to proceed and deal with former Confederates. The third clause of the 14<sup>th</sup> amendment directly barred any former Confederate leader or anyone who had broken their oath to the U.S. Constitution from serving in government.<sup>114</sup> The 14<sup>th</sup> amendment, combined with the Radical Republican's professed desire to inflict massive punishment upon the South, gave Southern whites the foundation upon which to build their claims of disenfranchisement. Such a claim, was of course, patently false as members of the Ku Klux Klan often patrolled voting places in order to ensure that blacks would not vote. Over time, many former Confederate leaders returned to political office as the country grew tired of Reconstruction. Additionally, many techniques were used to circumvent voting

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<sup>112</sup> Eric Foner, *A Short History of Reconstruction* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, Inc, 1990), 43-44.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

laws and prohibit the freedmen from voting. Some examples of these techniques are requiring a poll tax, which made voting too expensive or designing literacy tests that produced failure.

Unfortunately, many Northerners bought the Southerner's claims that they were being oppressed and this led to Northern acquiescence to removing troops as a consequence of the 1876 election.

### **The End of Reconstruction's Impact on American Memory**

The election of 1876 proved to be one of the most bizarre events in American political history. Republicans continued their tradition of nominating Union war heroes by tapping Ohioan Rutherford B. Hayes as their nominee. Democrats chose Samuel J. Tilden, the governor of New York, as their candidate. After a contentious election, Tilden stood poised to win with a total of one hundred and eighty four electoral votes to Hayes one hundred and sixty five.

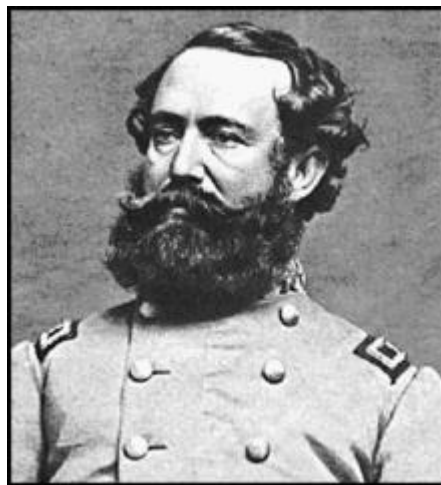
However, due to electoral disputes twenty votes remained up for grabs. The dispute originated in three Southern states and Oregon. Regardless of the electoral vote, Tilden held the popular vote lead by nearly two hundred and fifty thousand votes. In order to solve this dispute, the two sides orchestrated a deal designed to grant Hayes the presidency in exchange for the removal of Federal troops from the South.

Often referred to as the "Second Corrupt Bargain" in American politics, this deal had three major consequences for the South and Democrats.<sup>115</sup> First, the removal of Federal troops from the South had been the number one Southern Democrat concern since the end of the American Civil War. The presence of these troops made it very difficult for the former ruling class to reassert their power via controlling who got to vote. Removal of these troops made it

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<sup>115</sup> The "First Corrupt Bargain" refers to the election of 1824 that resulted in the election of John Quincy Adams in the U.S. House of Representatives rather than the popular vote and electoral college victor Andrew Jackson. The Electoral College votes were split among four different candidates resulting in no clear majority for any nominee. As such, the election went to the House of Representatives and Adams was declared the winner after striking his own deal with Henry Clay who became Adams' Secretary of State in exchange for Clay's electoral votes.

possible for African-American males to be systematically denied their rights under the 15<sup>th</sup> Amendment. Secondly, with blacks no longer allowed to vote in their previous numbers, the Southern “Redeemer” candidates no longer had any opposition. These “Redeemers” as they often referred to themselves are epitomized by former Confederate General Wade Hampton, who led a theatrical and violence filled campaign for the South Carolina governorship in 1876. The removal of Federal troops enabled Hampton to win a contentious election against the sitting Republican incumbent. Southern Democrats now stood unopposed in their efforts to disenfranchise African Americans. Finally, in what had been a bastion of Republican support, the South turned back to its roots in its support for the Democratic Party.



**Figure 2:6 Confederate General Wade Hampton during the American Civil War.**

Source: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wade\\_Hampton\\_III](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wade_Hampton_III)

The practical impact of the “Second Corrupt Bargain” was a complete overhaul of the Radical Republican plan for Reconstruction. However, the election of 1876 also held a deeper historical meaning for the United States. As discussed previously, historical memory of the Civil War was divided upon many different lines such as race, region and military service. Withdrawing troops from the South, coupled with the North’s subsequent acquiescence to the policy, demonstrate that the country was removing itself gradually from the Emancipationist legacy of the American Civil War. The occupying Federal forces served as a reminder to all of

the disastrous civil war fought over ten years previous. By removing the troops, Washington D.C. declared the end of Reconstruction while simultaneously paving the way towards a sectional reconciliation at terrible cost.

In his inaugural address Rutherford B. Hayes admitted that the South needed work, stating that, “many of the calamitous efforts of the tremendous revolution which has passed over the Southern States still remain . . . Difficult and embarrassing questions meet us at the threshold of this subject. The people of those States are still impoverished, and the inestimable blessing of wise, honest, and peaceful local self-government is not fully enjoyed.”<sup>116</sup> While Hayes acknowledged the difficulties in the post-war South, he reiterated a common Southern argument that whites had been completely disenfranchised and without the right of self-government. The reality was that when African-American males voted for the first time, elections were not always granted to the Democrats as had been custom prior to the Civil War.

Hayes continued his speech by asserting, “the two distinct races whose peculiar relations to each other have brought upon us the deplorable complications and perplexities which exist in those States, it must be a government which guards the interest of both races carefully and equally.”<sup>117</sup> It is unclear how African Americans contributed much of anything to the deplorable situation within the South after the war, unless the freedmen, by virtue of no longer being slaves, were to blame. Hayes attention to the South in his speech ended with a sentiment that appears far-sighted, yet hopelessly naïve for its time. According to Hayes, “the evils which afflict the Southern States can only be removed or remedied by the united and harmonious efforts of both races, actuated by motives of mutual sympathy and regard . . . it is my earnest desire to regard

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<sup>116</sup> Rutherford B. Hayes, “Inaugural Address, Monday, March 5<sup>th</sup>, 1877,” accessed on October 16<sup>th</sup>, 2014, <http://www.bartleby.com/124/pres35.html>.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

and promote their (the South's) interest—the interests of the white and of the colored people both and equally—and to put forth my best efforts in behalf of a civil policy which will forever wipe out in our political affairs the color line.”<sup>118</sup> Regardless of the sincerity of Hayes beliefs, he was advocating a union of the races during a time where it simply was not feasible. Rather than serving as a force for unity, the “Second Corrupt Bargain” demonstrated that the political reach of the Southern Democrats had begun to expand, and that the Federal government was abandoning the newly freed slaves to their own devices.

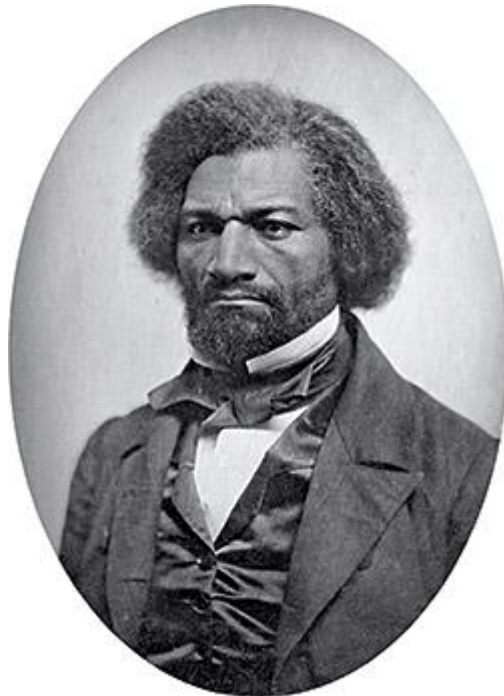
### **The Eroding of the Emancipationist Legacy**

The end of Reconstruction brought about serious restrictions and deprivations to African Americans in the South. Once the Federal troops were removed, blacks had no further recourse to address their grievances. While the Emancipationist legacy continued to be supported within the black community, the country at-large appeared to be on the road to reconciliation between the two sections of the country. This fact was not lost upon firebrand abolitionist Frederick Douglass who addressed the status of the South in 1888 in a speech at a celebration of the Emancipation Proclamation. According to Douglass the spirit of reconciliation had already won in national politics. “Well may it be said that Americans have no memories. We look over the House of Representatives and see the Solid South enthroned there. We listen with calmness to eulogies of the South and of the traitors, and forget Andersonville. We look over the Senate and see the Senator from South Carolina and we forget Hamburg. We see Robert Smalls cheated out of his seat in Congress, and forget the Planter, and the service rendered by the colored troops in

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

the late war for the Union.”<sup>119</sup> For the tireless, longtime abolitionist, seeing historical memory change before his eyes proved to be too much to bear silently.



**Figure 2:7 Frederick Douglass**

Source: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frederick\\_Douglass](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frederick_Douglass)

The spirit of reconciliation needed to end, especially since it came at the cost of African-American rights. Douglass continued, “we have had enough of good feeling, enough of shaking hands over the bloody chasm, enough of conciliation, enough of laudation of the bravery of our Southern brethren. We tried all of that with President Hayes, of the purity of whose motives I have no shadow of doubt. His mistake was that he confided in the honor of the Confederates, who were without honor.”<sup>120</sup> Many former Confederate leaders who were instrumental in attempting to defeat the United States had seats in Congress and in state legislatures throughout

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<sup>119</sup> Frederick Douglass, “I Denounce the So-Called Emancipation as a Stupendous Fraud,” (Washington national Republican, April 17<sup>th</sup>, 1888), Accessed November 5<sup>th</sup>, 2014, <http://www.historyisaweapon.com/defcon1/douglassfraud.html>.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid. Douglass is referring to the incredible amount of reconciliation and friendship displayed at reunion events over the years. Even the death of U.S. Grant led to an outcry of support and respect throughout the country, regardless of section. For more, see David Blight’s *Race and Reunion*.

the South. For those who had escaped the bonds of slavery and the clutches of the ruling class, the presence of these former Confederates—and former slave owners—in government, demonstrated that the country no longer cared to remember the harsh realities from the Civil War era.

Radical Reconstruction only served to delay the inevitable rising of the master class back into power by a decade. Douglass cautioned that Hayes naively believed that the former Confederates, “if left to themselves and thrown upon their honor they would obey the Constitution they had sworn to support and treat the colored citizens with justice and fairness at the ballot box. Time has proved the reverse of all this, and this fact should cure the Republican party of adopting in its platform any such policy or any such candidate. Let us have a candidate this time of pronounce opinions and, above all, a backbone.”<sup>121</sup> The “Spirit of Reconciliation” that permeated the entire country did not go unnoticed to other influential African-American leaders. Douglass made a career of motivating others into political action, a fact that later put him at odds with Booker T. Washington. Douglass sought “to plead the cause of the dumb millions of our countrymen against injustice, oppression, meanness and cruelty, and to hasten the day when the principles of liberty and humanity expressed in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States shall be the law and the practice of every section, and of all the people of this great country without regard to race, sex, color or religion.”<sup>122</sup>

### **The Atlanta Compromise**

The end of Reconstruction marked the close of many of the significant gains made by freedmen and women after the American Civil War. Without the support of federally appointed

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<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

governments and judges, African Americans had no recourse to address their grievances. In addition to the removal of troops, the consequences of the 1876 election allowed the country at large to move on entirely from the ordeal of Reconstruction and the fallout from the war. While the Emancipationist legacy endured within the African-American community, it began to be eroded from within from the efforts of Booker T. Washington, a prominent African-American leader during the 1890s until his death in 1915. Washington was among the last generation to be enslaved within the South and was emancipated at the end of the war. He focused almost entirely on the education and economic well-being of the newly-freed African Americans all throughout the country. In his speeches, Washington stressed the importance of strengthening the newly freed peoples into a sustainable economic force, without fighting against the firmly entrenched Jim Crow laws in the South. His pragmatic approach at first attracted many allies, especially within the Southern white population, but over time did not dominate the African-American memory of the war.





**Figure 2:8 Booker T. Washington early in his career.**  
Source: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Booker\\_T.\\_Washington](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Booker_T._Washington)

Washington's philosophy can be traced to his most memorable speech on September 18<sup>th</sup>, 1895. Known as the "Atlanta Compromise", Washington spoke in front of a mostly white audience in Atlanta, Georgia, at a gathering known as the Cotton States and International Exposition. Just the mere fact that Washington was allowed to speak in front of such a predominately white crowd in the Deep South reflects his reputation among both races. Leaders of the gathering believed allowing Washington to speak might cause a stir within the South, but that it could also demonstrate to Northern visitors the racial "progress" achieved since the end of the war and Reconstruction.<sup>123</sup> Anxious to potentially speak to thousands of Southerners, Washington gladly accepted the opportunity to speak.

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<sup>123</sup> Louis R. Harlan, ed., *The Booker T. Washington Papers*, Vol. 3, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1974), 583-587. Accessed on October 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2014, <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/39/>.

Washington began his speech by pointing out that African Americans, or the Negro race as he put it, constituted roughly one third of the South's population. The power of this third of the population could no longer be denied. In order for the South to prosper, its entire population, regardless of color, needed to work together. The Cotton States and International Exposition in Atlanta offered a chance to bring the two races together in harmony, a fact that Washington attributed to the promoters of the event. Washington's speech turned to the spirit of compromise, by agreeing with white Southern concerns that African Americans dominated early Reconstruction by focusing on Congressional or state elections. According to Washington, this enthusiasm for public office was misplaced as, "ignorant and inexperienced, it is not strange that in the first years of our new life we began at the top instead of at the bottom; that a seat in Congress or the state legislature was more sought than real estate or industrial skill; that the political convention or stump speaking had more attractions than start a dairy farm or truck garden."<sup>124</sup> By prefacing the heart of his speech with this assertion, Washington demonstrated that he emphasized with white Southerner concerns over African-American representation in Congress. However, it should be noted that in 1895, African Americans were nearly shut out of government. Without federal interference, many Southern states passed new state constitutions that deprived blacks of their right to vote and thus any meaningful form of representation was lost. Unfortunately, Washington's tacit approval of Southern criticism seems a bit naïve. White Southerners fabricated the myth that blacks controlled all aspects of government and society once the Civil War ended. The number of African Americans who served in Congress, various state legislatures or state constitutional conventions simply did not matter. It was the fact that

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

African Americans were included in the democratic process at all which truly bothered white Southerners.

Washington continued his theme of reconciliation by addressing members of his own race directly. He admonished African Americans to “cast down your bucket where you are” so it could come “up full of fresh, sparkling water from the mouth of the Amazon River.” In this metaphor, Washington likens a unified South with racial harmony as a bucket of fresh water to a ship upon the sea.<sup>125</sup> According to Washington, “those of my race who depend on bettering their condition in a foreign land or who underestimate the importance of cultivating friendly relations with the Southern white man, how is their next-door neighbor, I would say: “Cast down your bucket where you are’—cast it down in making friends in every manly way of the people of all races by whom we are surrounded.”<sup>126</sup> In an attempt to find commonality with his target audience, Washington stressed that African Americans needed to lay down their grievances to move past racial injustice, on the way to a prosperous future. He dedicated the first half of his speech to members of his own race, claiming that in order for blacks to be successful in the South, they needed to focus on industrial and agricultural jobs. According to Washington, the “greatest danger is that in the great leap from slavery to freedom we may overlook the fact that the masses of us are to live by the productions of our hands, and fail to keep in mind that we shall prosper in proportion as we learn to dignify and glorify common labour, and put brains and skill into the common occupations of life . . . No race can prosper till it learns that there is as much dignity in tilling a field as in writing a poem.”<sup>127</sup> White Southerners were extremely

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<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

pleased with what they heard coming from this eloquent former slave. In essence, Washington was suggesting African-American attempts at governance and social mobility was akin to overreaching their position in society. In order for the African Americans to flourish economically and culturally, they needed to start at the bottom and work their way up. As whites saw it, blacks permanently belonged to the lower classes of society and should not be in charge.

Washington turned to his predominantly white audience and also urged them to “cast down your bucket where you are.” For centuries, African Americans labored in support of a slave society, never striking and abandoning their work. He continued, “Casting down your bucket among my people, helping and encouraging them as you are doing on these grounds, and to education of head, hand and heart, you will find that they will buy your surplus land, make blossom the waste places in your fields and run your factories.”<sup>128</sup> In essence, if treated correctly, African Americans would assist in producing a prosperous South, just as they had labored under the system of slavery for centuries—a system that gave no benefit to blacks themselves. Proper treatment of the African Americans by the Southern whites meant that the two races could prosper and grow together, which would lead to loyalty between each race. Washington asserted that by helping blacks succeed, whites would once again receive the benefits of a loyal African-American population that was akin to black nurses caring for white families in times of pregnancy and sickness.<sup>129</sup> His supreme hope was that “in all things that are purely social we can be as separate as the fingers, yet one as the hand in all things essential to mutual progress.”<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

If African Americans were not allowed to succeed, Washington foretold disaster. “Nearly sixteen millions of hands will aid you in pulling the load upward, or they will pull against you the load downward. We shall constitute one-third and more of the ignorance and crime of the South, or one-third of its intelligence and progress; we shall contribute one-third to the business and industrial prosperity of the South, or we shall prove a veritable body of death, stagnating, depressing, retarding every effort to advance the body politic.”<sup>131</sup> In what sounds like a prophecy for the future collective political action in the Civil Rights era, Washington argued that the South would rise and fall accordingly to how blacks were treated. The sheer number of blacks in the South made it a powerful interest group who could do large amounts of damage. Such talk proved to be premature, as Washington closed with perhaps his most crucial argument of all. In his words, “the wisest among my race understand that the agitation of questions of social equality is the extremest[sic] folly, and that progress in the enjoyment of all the privileges that will come to us must be the result of severe and constant struggle rather than of artificial struggling.”<sup>132</sup> Equality would not be the product of a large scale mass protest, but rather a process that occurred over a long period of time. Washington reasoned, “no race that has anything to contribute to the markets of the world is long in any degree ostracized. It is important and right that all privileges of the law be ours, but it is vastly more important that we be prepared for the exercise of these privileges. The opportunity to earn a dollar in a factory just now is worth infinitely more than the opportunity to spend a dollar in an opera-house.”<sup>133</sup> By

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

echoing the major arguments of the day, including free labor ideology, Washington believed that economic opportunity and education would prove the worth of the African-American race.

In his concluding remarks, Washington called on God to assist the South with solving the racial problems within their society. The thirty years immediately following the end of the American Civil War was a time of progress and prosperity for both races who were left in a state of destitution at the war's end. If both sides worked together to achieve racial harmony, the future looked extremely bright.

Booker T. Washington's "Atlanta Compromise" met with much celebration throughout the country. The Boston Transcript editorial board touted, "The speech of Booker T. Washington at the Atlanta Exposition, this week, seems to have dwarfed all the other proceedings and the Exposition itself. The sensation that it has caused in the press has never been equaled."<sup>134</sup> Even sitting President Grover Cleveland praised the speech through a letter he sent to Washington personally.<sup>135</sup> Washington's speech meant different things to different people. For whites across the country, Washington's argument in favor of social mobility was lost among his desire to calm the waters among those would-be agitators in favor of immediate reprieve from the injustices of Jim Crow. His message of looking towards long term goals rather than the immediate future meant that, for now, the status quo would remain. Unfortunately for Washington, his assertion that rights would come in due time proved to be false as not until the 1960s did African Americans earn their rights back. Following Washington's logic, Southern whites would not have to fear any racial upheaval or conflict while the restrictive policies

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<sup>134</sup> Booker T. Washington, *Up From Slavery*, Accessed October 28<sup>th</sup>, 2014, <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/87>.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

remained intact. African Americans would simply have to endure being disenfranchised, until the whites saw the value of their economic contributions.

The goal of Washington's speech was not to encourage blacks to forget their past, or to endorse Jim Crow treatment of blacks. But this was the end result, at least as it was portrayed throughout the country. Washington's sentiments contained a message of self-reliance that has always found a home in the American polity, however, during the times in which he lived, blacks were not afforded the same opportunities to succeed by themselves. The net result of the "Atlanta Compromise" was to assist in the nation's rapid turn away from the Emancipationist legacy of the American Civil War. Here was a prominent, educated African-American leader who vowed not to upset the established way of things within the South, so long as blacks had an opportunity to work low paying, labor intensive jobs. His assurances that blacks need not rise up in protest served as a soothing balm to white Southern fears of a potential race riot. Not only did the spirit of reconciliation remain a strong force among Civil War veterans, but it also received support from an unlikely source, African Americans who followed Booker T. Washington's message of compromise.

### **The Triumph of Reconciliation**

The eroding of the Emancipationist Legacy culminated in a war with Spain that further bridged the nation's divisions. The thirty years after the American Civil War saw immense technological change within the North and South, as the South tried to industrialize rapidly to catch up to the North. While various conflicts ensued during the 1870s and 1880s between the United States army and various Native-American groups, no international conflict occurred until the last decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This changed when the conflict between Spain and Cuban rebels threatened the United States' perceived sphere of influence within the Caribbean. In order

to secure its interests, the United States sent the battleship USS Maine to Havana. In what has befuddled historians ever since, the Maine unexpectedly blew up and sank, killing roughly three fourths of its crew.<sup>136</sup> While historians continue to debate over what caused the ship to sink, contemporary citizens had no doubts the Spanish were to blame.

How did an event such as the loss of a naval battleship contribute to creation of American memory? For some time, Americans were looking for a distraction away from the racial conflicts, industrialization and economic downturn in the aftermath of the Civil War and Reconstruction. The 1890s were fraught with discussions over opening new markets to help alleviate the economic depression in 1893. The conflict in Cuba could potentially be the market American merchants and businesses required to get the economy moving again. Additionally, as historian Kristin L. Hoganson writes in *Fighting for American Manhood: How Gender Politics Provoked the Spanish-American and Philippine-American Wars*, America had absorbed the Southern sense of honor that had epitomized the region for so long. The attack upon the United States could simply not be ignored, for if it was left unattended it made the country appear weak. Another factor that led to the buildup of war was that many Civil War veterans had begun to pass away, leaving behind a sense that one of the greatest generations was passing to an unproven and untested one. According to Hoganson the jingoists, or proponents of war with Spain “looked to martial policies to address their anxieties about manhood. These concerns can be traced, in part, to the urbanization, industrialization, and corporate consolidation of the late nineteenth century . . . The aging of the Civil War generation and the closing of the frontier focused further attention on male character, for it seemed that modern young men, lacking their own epic challenges,

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<sup>136</sup> Naval History and Heritage Command, “Sinking of USS Maine, 15<sup>th</sup> February 1898,” accessed November 7<sup>th</sup> 2014, <http://www.history.navy.mil/photos/events/spanam/events/maineskg.htm>.



would not be able to live up to their forefathers.”<sup>137</sup> Armed with a sense of primal honor and a desire to test a new generation in the fires of combat, the United States conflict with the Spanish provided an opportunity for both halves of the country to congeal and rally in the face of a foreign enemy.<sup>138</sup>

With the United States making a play for empire in the Caribbean, the populace at home could focus its energies away from the distant arguments of the past. It was as Frederick Douglass foretold in 1888, that the country seemed destined to become whole at the expense of the very history that had divided it in the first place. Former Confederates now occupied several positions of authority within the armed forces at the express appointment of President William McKinley, himself a former Union veteran. Even the nephew of Robert E. Lee, Fitzhugh Lee was commissioned as a Major General of the VII Corps. Fitzhugh Lee, once a Confederate cavalry commander, now occupied a largely ceremonial position within the United States army, roughly thirty years after the Civil War. Similarly to Lee, another Confederate cavalry commander, “Fighting Joe” Wheeler also served under the United States flag during the Spanish-American war. Although Wheeler, in what amounts as battlefield humor, mistook the Spanish for Yankees as he shouted “Come on, we’ve got the damned Yankees on the run again!”<sup>139</sup> While Lee was mostly a ceremonial leader within the army, Wheeler commanded the same cavalry division that contained Theodore Roosevelt’s famed Rough Riders and saw action within Cuba.

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<sup>137</sup> Kristin L. Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood: How Gender Politics Provoked the Spanish-American and Philippine-American Wars* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 201.

<sup>138</sup> For more on the Southern sense of honor please see Bertram Wyatt Brown’s *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South*.

<sup>139</sup> Dupuy, Trevor N., Curt Johnson, and David L. Bongard. *The Harper Encyclopedia of Military Biography* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992), 794.

The United States government decided to appoint these former Confederate officers, most of them far beyond their prime years of service. This signified the country's desire to move towards a new era of reconciliation away from the divisions of Reconstruction. Once divided, American Memory now coalesced around the spirit of reconciliation that allowed both sections of the country, winners and losers, to celebrate their shared history and absolve each other of the sins of the past. Once again, the American identity served as a uniting force between both sections of the country. Past divisions were forgotten as the nation struggled to find its way through industrialization. Reunions on battlefields would continue to be a mainstay for Union and Confederate veterans alike, providing an opportunity for a ritualistic-like cleansing at each event. The powerful images of Union and Confederate veterans reaching across Cemetery Ridge at the 1913 Gettysburg Reunion remind us all that time heals almost all wounds, however not without a significant price.

While the reunions among soldiers continued, African Americans struggled against the forces of law within the Jim Crow South. The country rallied around the principle of reconciliation, but had omitted from its considerations the very same people whose plight had caused the war that Abraham Lincoln saw through to conclusion. Lost in the nation's appetite for reconciliation and renewed economic growth was the central legacy of the American Civil War, emancipation. Never before had the institution so centrally defined a conflict. The 13<sup>th</sup> through the 15<sup>th</sup> amendments, combined with the Radical Republican's design for Reconstruction, had hoped to give the newly freed men and women economic opportunity, and a stake in the United States unlike ever before. However, any chance to participate in government vanished under the strain of sectional reconciliation and the need for the nation to continue

having a cheap source of labor. Fifteen years after the war, blacks occupied nearly the same position as before, but had exchanged actual slavery for a lack of economic and social mobility.

## Chapter 3 - Conclusion



**Figure 3:1 Union and Confederate Veterans shake hands across Cemetery Ridge in 1913.**  
Source:[crossroadsofwar.org/galleries/veterans](http://crossroadsofwar.org/galleries/veterans)

Throughout the last two chapters, we have attempted to answer two major questions that arise from both the American Revolution and American Civil War. Those questions are: How after an entire separation from Great Britain that was predicated on the rights of mankind versus that of monarchy, did the institution of slavery not only continue to exist, but experience exponential growth? For the American Civil War: how did the United States emerge from a civil war that brought about the destruction of the institution of slavery, only to see African Americans lose their rights and fall under the oppressive system of Jim Crow for the next one hundred years? When delving into the two major conflicts one major theme resonates in the aftermath of both: unity and reconciliation. In both cases leaders consciously stressed the

importance of national unity at the expense of the rights of minorities. With the South fully entrenched in the institution of slavery during the American Revolution, ending the institution would have threatened their economic well-being and caused a national crisis at a time where leaders in Congress and the Constitutional Convention were attempting to forge an American identity that all land-owning whites could subscribe. Targeting slavery carried an immense amount of risk, as the idea of the United States was a relatively new concept. As such, rather than take on the institution of slavery directly, the Founders and Framers sought to limit it in places where it was not economically feasible, and end the mass importation of slaves in 1808. In addition, many Northern states adopted gradual emancipation laws that took nearly forty years to complete, but nonetheless helped grow a burgeoning freedmen population.

By ending the importation of slaves via the international slave trade, the Founders helped the domestic slave trade explode in popularity. This might have been unforeseen, but through limiting the supply of slaves, coupled with the overall improvement in the consideration of their well-being, the institution experienced exponential growth to cope with the rising demand of cotton production. Economics and national unity superseded any attempt to bolster the rights of minorities, who had experienced an increase in autonomy during the Revolutionary period. Creating and bolstering the idea of an American nation was the most important objective for the Founders and Framers. In order for the Constitution to pass muster and be fully enacted, the Southern states needed to ratify. Upsetting the Southern states was not a policy that promised success.

This process of creating the American identity at the expense of minorities was aided and abetted by major historians of the era. While both David Ramsay and Mercy Otis Warren mentioned slaves, they did not occupy major portions of their narratives and often had their

contributions downplayed. Both wanted to ensure that their version of the events from the Revolution until the adoption of the Constitution molded the national story for the nation's founding. At a time where it was still possible to speak openly against the institution of slavery, historians and leaders alike balked on the issue and instead focused their efforts on ensuring national unity. And so, the republican rhetoric concerning the rights of man was not extended to the enslaved, and those Native Americans who occupied territory in the way of Westward expansion.

The second question concerning the American Civil War is a bit more perplexing, as the Emancipation Proclamation clearly targeted the destruction of the institution of slavery as a war measure for Union forces. As the end of the war drew near in the early months of 1865, President Lincoln faced a decision about whether to accept a Confederate peace offer that would sacrifice the proposed 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment in exchange for the Southern states reentering the Union. Lincoln chose to pursue the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment—which proposed to end the institution of slavery within the United States forever—instead of assured peace, demonstrating his determination to end the institution that had divided the nation for so long. Although African Americans served in the American Revolution, often for the British if at all, thousands of blacks served in the American Civil War as a way to end the institution. While slavery loomed large in the aftermath of the American Revolution, it completely dominated the American Civil War in everything from war policy to political rhetoric. How was this forgotten less than fifteen years after the conflict ended?

In short, the American identity that was created in the buildup into the adoption of the Constitution still held considerable sway over the American populace, even in the midst of a divisive civil war. In fact, once the war ended there was an immense amount of cooperation

among generals and soldiers once the firing stopped. This would not have occurred if Southerners felt completely ostracized from the American identity. While they had been defeated, the generous terms outlined by U.S. Grant began a fifteen year-long process of reconciliation between the two sides. With the war's conclusion, following Robert E. Lee's advice to once again be good citizens was as simple as returning to the status quo.

In his book *April 1865: The Month that Saved America*, well-known author Jay Winik discusses scholar John Murrin's assertion that at the time of the American Civil War a national Southern identity existed more than an American one at the start of the American Revolution. According to Winik, "there is more than an element of truth to this. And from then on a new sense of nationality, at once Southern and Confederate, had gathered in volume and strength as Richmonders confronted one of the most daunting armies the world had ever known."<sup>140</sup> By agreeing with Murrin's postulation, Winik argues that by the time the Civil War began Southerners boldly faced Northern opposition in near solidarity. He continued by stating that Southerners, "unanimity may be overstated, but there was little doubt that they were now a people united by a sense of common culture and a flickering, but nonetheless real, national spirit."<sup>141</sup> Winik overstates the power of a Southern nationality by ignoring that Union regiments existed in virtually every Confederate state, minus fire-brand South Carolina. In addition, the secession votes and conventions were incredibly close in several major states that eventually joined the C.S.A. such as North Carolina and Georgia. Bread riots broke out as conditions continued to deteriorate for the many poor women who were left without their husbands year after year. In no way is this meant to take away from the sacrifices made by those who did serve

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<sup>140</sup> Jay Winik, *April 1865: The Month that Saved America* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2001), 47.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

under the Confederate banner, but to claim that a Southern national identity existed at the time of the American Civil War is simply not proven and is a topic still being debated and discussed by scholars. For those who served, a Southern identity more than likely coincided with a desire to be the true heir of the Revolutionary Spirit of 1776. The Confederate Constitution is evidence of this desire, as it had few changes from the U.S. Constitution, other than to affirm the right of secession and strengthen slavery. In addition, the Confederate national seal portrays George Washington rather than any other Southern politicians indicating a desire to retain some semblance of the American identity.

While it is a subjective opinion to assert that an American identity was weaker in the Revolutionary period than a Confederate one at the start of the American Civil War, the American identity endured far longer and even resurfaced quickly after 1865. Of course this is partially due to the fact that the colonies emerged victorious in their bid for independence, while the South did not, however it does not explain why so many in the South felt the need to fight against their neighbors in defense of the Union. Wayne K. Durrill's *War of Another Kind: A Southern Community in the Great Rebellion* chronicles one North Carolinian community's divisions during the Civil War, with many Unionists opting to sit out of the war entirely, or forming their own regiment to fight for the Union. For those who opted to serve for the Union against the wishes of their state and neighbors, the mystical opportunities provided by the Union were too profound and important to abandon. This is not to say that the North did not encounter similar difficulties with a strong peace movement whose support solely depended upon how the war was progressing.

For those who chose to opt out of the war, or serve in the Union forces within the South, the belief in the God-sanctioned United States reigned supreme. The commonalities between the



two sides demonstrate that the war pitted two very similar peoples against one another. Unlike Europe, both sides spoke the same language—although often with dissimilar accents—prayed to the same God—America was overwhelmingly Protestant at this time—and shared a common history first begun with the creation of the United States. Having these commonalities allowed both sides to reconcile themselves much faster than expected. And while the differences between the two sides led to war, the common ground shared between the two alleviated hostilities once the war concluded. Although many Radical Republicans wanted a trial and hanging for Robert E. Lee and other Confederate leaders, they were ultimately spared the noose. In an extraordinary case of honesty and keeping his word, U.S. Grant came to Lee's defense when Lee was going to be charged with treason by vindictive Unionists in Virginia. This was symbolic of what was to occur over the next two decades between two sections of the country. The American identity created in the aftermath of the American Revolution served as the balm needed to soothe sectional wounds once the war was completed. Despite their assertions to the contrary, the South was not treated as an occupied country under Andrew Johnson's plan for Reconstruction, and only had to wait out the more punitive Reconstruction prescribed by Radical Republicans until the North tired of allocating resources to support the policy.

The commonalties between the two sides assisted the process of Reconciliation, but that still left the four million African Americans emerging from the chains of slavery. Sadly, it would not be long before their hopes of improved autonomy would be dealt a severe blow. Still for the period of Reconstruction, roughly twelve years after the American Civil War, unprecedented gains occurred in the African-American community throughout the country. According to historian Eric Foner, the desire of the freedmen for education surprised many as

organizations such as the Freedmen's Bureau sought to create an educated black society.<sup>142</sup> Blacks served openly in state legislatures and in Congress for the first time. Additionally, black men voted in overwhelming numbers in support of Republican candidates such as Ulysses S. Grant, and it appeared that Congress would assist the freedmen in the South with land and the ability to work for their own benefit. Unfortunately, these new found rights quickly disappeared as many freedmen had no choice but to continue working for their former masters in the oppressive system of sharecropping. This system allowed former masters to retain their power and kept the freemen in a state of perpetual debt, due to earning a meager salary that could not pay the bills. Not only that, but vigilante terrorist organizations sprung up to harass and scare African Americans away from voting places, forcing many to live in constant fear for their lives. While the Grant administration responded by infiltrating the Ku Klux Klan and keeping troops within the South, the North gradually tired of the seemingly endless occupation and white Southern complaints of being controlled by Scalawags, blacks and Carpetbaggers. The election of 1876 marked the end of Reconstruction, as a compromise was reached to end occupation of the South, in exchange for a Republican Presidential victory. The impulse for sectional unity pushed the country away from the legacy of emancipation onto the path of sectional reconciliation.

As discussed in chapter two, the initial attempts to gloss over the role that slavery played in the conflict was taken up by Lost Cause writers and apologists. These Southern writers glorified the Antebellum South, while conveniently downplaying the impact of slavery upon the war itself. According to these writers, the slaves were content in their condition of servitude and could not handle freedom if given to them. The South fought for its sacred rights, whatever

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<sup>142</sup> Eric Foner, *A Short History of Reconstruction* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, Inc, 1990), 43-44.

those might be, while the North fought to keep the Union intact. Such an argument was ripe for sectional reconciliation and many of the famous pictures from Civil War battle reunions stem entirely from this sentiment. The Lost Causers were nothing if not persistent and once the occupation of the South ended in 1877, Northern veterans, newspapers and politicians began echoing much of the Lost Cause rhetoric. The war's emancipationist legacy would only endure within the black community, and remained sadly dormant until the 1960s. Once the war with Spain began in the late 1890s, Southerners were once again back into the fold as several former Confederate officers served, albeit for most in a symbolic capacity, in the nation's armed forces. National reconciliation was achieved at the cost of the true legacy of the American Civil War. The Lost Causers had lost the war, but won the peace.

For the nation's first one hundred and fifty years, the impulse and desire for sectional unity drove the results of war and conflict. While sectional strife certainly did occur in 19<sup>th</sup> century, with several threats of secession from states both north and south, only twice did the country actually split itself. The split during the American Revolution was not divided upon state lines, but rather among the populace, as Loyalists and Patriots alike battled throughout the colonies. The American Civil War saw actual secession and a new nation briefly formed that existed for roughly four and a half years. The divisions between the two sides were legitimate and very real, however in both instances the drive for reconciliation and removal of those who stood in the way of that narrative, once the war was over, charted the national course. Reconciling thirteen disparate colonies as well as two major sections of the country was no small feat due to the efforts of a few, but rather through the systematic efforts of leaders and citizens alike striving for some sense of normalcy within a region with a shared history and sense of destiny. The paintings of the American Revolution, while embellished, display the importance

of many leaders coming together from different regions to form a nation unlike any other. Similarly, the pictures from the Fiftieth anniversary of Gettysburg show just how far the nation had cohered in such a short time. The veterans sitting together wearing blue and grey, or shaking hands over a ridge where they once fought, show the best part of this desire for unity and reconciliation. Both sides could forgive and forget. The sentiments expressed by all were real and authentic, but not without a price.

For those who fit the mold, sectional unity and reconciliation achieved after the American Revolution and American Civil War, demonstrated God's sanction that the United States should always exist. Even in the midst of destruction and political divisions, a heterogeneous people could adhere to the idea of an American nation where anything was possible. For those who were left out, such as African Americans and Native Americans, sectional unity brought about an expansion of slavery due to the Founder's unwillingness to deal with the problem of slavery. The profitability of slavery made it easier to consign African Americans to slavery and contributed to their removal from the history of the Revolution. The Revolution stood as an example of freedom from British tyranny therefore slaves could not be counted as equals in a society that used slavery as a chief means of economic success. As such, blacks were ostracized from society and relegated to the role of slave. The second time the United States faced major sectional divisions in the Civil War, brought the end of slavery, but with it empty promises for the black community. Slavery was now ended, but the nation desired to move on from the conflict, instead of remembering those who had paid the price for slavery's continued existence. Reconciliation in the 1880s and beyond healed a nation, but removed blacks from the legacy of the American Civil War in the national conscious, as the nation slowly turned towards industrialization and economic progress. As a result, the blacks were quickly disenfranchised

and restricted in their movements and legal protections in the South. While this occurred, the North did nothing and allowed Jim Crow, which was a direct assault on the Civil War amendments, to be established without interference. Northern acquiescence was due to the national need for cheap labor following the Civil War. If the newly freed slaves occupied the same position they had held under bondage as an unskilled labor force, so much the better for the nation's economic well-being. By the time of the Plessy V. Ferguson decision in 1896, which allowed for the establishment of "separate but equal", the nation had fully moved on.

The drive and impulse for patriotism and unity can be clearly demonstrated any time a national crisis occurs within a country. For the United States, this has occurred often at the expense of those who could not partake of the national conscious. Whether it is the American Revolution or American Civil War, no stronger impulse has continued to pull the nation through national tragedies or hardship like the desire for national unity. Unfortunately, this lesson tends to be forgotten in the midst of conflict. The German-Americans who supported the United States during World War I were often lumped in with those who openly supported the Kaiser, regardless of their personal opinions. One of the largest national embarrassments occurred with the internment of Japanese-Americans during World War II completely out of fear. More recently, the attacks on September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001 brought the nation together but at the expense of several attacks against both Muslim-Americans and Sikh-Americans. In an unbelievable display of ignorance and hatred, many Sikhs were wrongly targeted as militant members of Islam and murdered for their faith.<sup>143</sup> In times of crisis, tensions are understandably high, but it is then that we must remember the lessons of history. Let us strive to be a country that coheres to an American identity open to all, regardless of faith, previous nationality and language. The echoes

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<sup>143</sup> Ethan Bronner, "Mourning Victims, Sikhs Lament Being Mistaken for Radicals or Militants," *The New York Times* (August 6<sup>th</sup>, 2012), accessed January 29<sup>th</sup>, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/08/07/us/sikhs-mourn-victims-and-lament-post-9-11-targeting.html>.

of those who were ostracized remind us that our work to create a “More Perfect Union” is never finished.

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