

WALKING MEMORIES: THE ORIGINS AND SIGNIFICANCE OF CIVIL WAR
REENACTMENT

A Thesis

by

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This thesis meets the standards for scope and quality of
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ABSTRACT

Civil War Reenactment has become a popular pastime for the past fifty years. Thousands of people don Civil War era clothing, march on national battlefields in military units, and fire muskets at one another in order to celebrate the men who fought and died at these battles. They see themselves as “living historians” embodying historical subjects in order to represent their lives to contemporary audiences. Why do they do this, and how do they differ from more traditional academic historians? This paper shall investigate the historical origins of Civil War reenactment, how they see themselves as conveyors of history, and the means by which they practice their craft. The distinctions between the ideals portrayed in Civil War soldiers and their reality of their historical subjects can be examined by their performance of history.

DEDICATION

To my beloved wife Amelia

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CONTENTS	PAGE
ABSTRACT.....	v
DEDICATION.....	vi
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	vii
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	viii
INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER ONE: HISTORICAL ORIGINS OF REENACTMENT	23
CHAPTER TWO: LIVING HISTORY AND AUTHENTICITY	48
CHAPTER THREE: ACTORS, COSTUME, AND STAGE	70
CONCLUSION.....	91
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	103

INTRODUCTION

On July 3, 1913, a sea of gray-clad men marched, rifles in hand, toward Cemetery Hill in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. Opposite them, a similar wall of blue soldiers waited for their approach. Fifty years prior, these same men had desperately shot at one another, contesting this ground at a cost of over fifty thousand casualties. On this day, however, they embraced and shook hands. The once bitter enemies reconciled and commemorated their pasts. What had been the scene of the largest battle of the American Civil War was now a testament to national unity and common heritage.¹

The Civil War (1861-1865) was the bloodiest conflict in United States history. The growing tensions brought on by the existence and spread of slavery in the territories resulted in the southern states seceding and attempting to form a new nation, the Confederate States of America. After four years of bloodshed which killed 2.4 percent of the U.S. population, the South failed in its goal and was compelled to remain a part of the Union. The legacy of this war has been memorialized ever since through celebration, oratory, and reenactment. Thousands of people to this day clothe themselves in Civil War-era uniforms and equipment and march around on old battlefields to bring to life this grand struggle for modern audiences.²

¹ Charles H. Gillespie, "Pathetic Night Scene in Veteran's Great Reunion," July 1, 1913, *The Pittsburgh Press*, accessed July 2, 2019, <https://news.google.com/newspapers?id=TEQbAAAAIIBAJ&sjid=IEkEAAAAIIBAJ&pg=4129,23763&dq=gettysburg+high-water-mark&hl=en>;

² James McPherson, *The War that Forged a Nation: Why the Civil War Still Matters* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2015), 2, 167-171.

The continued practice of reenactment brings about delight and controversy. The opportunity to witness the drama of battle, gunfire, and massed charges allows people to connect themselves to those who fought and died to shape the country into what it is today. At the same time, the issue of what is being commemorated and the historicity of reenactment recalls many of the more shameful elements of the nation's past. The question of the importance and relevance of Civil War reenactment is tied to the significance of the war itself. The Union victory not only ensured the survival of the nation, but of the very concepts of democracy and liberty. The founding of the United States was an experiment in whether or not republican principles of representation and human rights could succeed. The beginning of the war emboldened those who hoped to see democracy fail, and the end renewed the vigor of pro-republican peoples throughout the world. Therefore, the triumph of the North over the South and the subsequent implementation of the Reconstruction amendments vindicated the U.S. values of democracy and republicanism.³

That such a conflict would be commemorated does not seem controversial, but the means by which the war is remembered have shaped the narrative of why it was fought. Soon after the war's end, white Southerners began to commemorate those who fought for their cause and initiated the "Lost Cause" mythos, which held that the South did not fight to preserve slavery, but for the preservation of state sovereignty over the federal government. This mythos attempts to justify secession by casting the Confederacy in the same legacy as the colonies in the Revolutionary War. This set of beliefs was forged through ritual celebration, oratory, and

³McPherson, *The War that Forged a Nation*, 167-171.

memorials. Southerners reshaped the meaning of the Civil War by retelling and re-presenting events as a celebration of Southern values and heritage.⁴

This trend continued through the turn of the 20th century. The aforementioned fiftieth anniversary, as did the one hundredth anniversary of the Civil War in the 1960s, brought a renewed focus on the war and celebrated the reconciliation between the North and South through common notions of heroism and liberty. Just as the war threatened to split the country in two, the memorials of the war might bring the two sides back together. By the 1980s and 1990s, movies and documentaries such as Ken Burns' "The Civil War" had reawakened the country's fascination with the conflict and its legacy. Along with these TV and film depictions came a surge of interest in Civil War reenactment, whose participants seek to keep the war's memory alive and glorify its participants.⁵

In hopes of accurately representing the Civil War, reenactors tend to focus their attention on the material realities of the conflict. They seek authentic reproductions of weapons, uniforms, equipment, and mannerisms. They try to recreate events in such a way that their audiences gain a glimpse into the sights and sounds of the war. They relive events and present them to the public in as authentic a manner as they can. By doing so, they create sympathy and admiration for those who participated in the struggle, and in turn impart respect for the soldiers in the minds of their

⁴W. Stuart Towns, *Enduring Legacy: Rhetoric and Ritual of the Lost Cause* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2012), xi-xiii.

⁵McPherson, *The War that Forged a Nation*, 1.

audience. This is why reenactors style themselves as “living historians”; they mean to educate the public about the importance of the Civil War and the sacrifices made by soldiers.⁶

Unfortunately, in their attempts to lionize Civil War soldiers, reenactors tend to blur some of the more repugnant issues surrounding the conflict. These include not only the larger themes of slavery and secession, but also more concrete aspects of soldiers’ lives, such as venereal disease, desertion, and trauma. This divergence has two roots. First, reenactment evolved from the Lost Cause and earlier movements to memorialize the war, which aimed to fit the Civil War, and in particular the Confederacy, neatly into the general narrative of United States history. Confederates, in this view, were not fighting against the principles America stands for, but for a complementary set of principles that Northerners tended to neglect, such as states’ rights, self-determination, and local heritage. Secondly, reenactors pursue their hobby in order to experience a sense of heroism and sacrifice not commonly found in contemporary society. Their interest in the past and a desire to re-experience some elements of combat causes them to emphasize aspects of the Civil War that cater to its nobler elements, in the process creating a dissonance between the historical events as they are understood by academic historians, who

⁶Gregory Hall, “Selective Authenticity: Civil War Reenactors and Credible Reenactments Selective Authenticity,” *Journal of Historical Sociology* 29, no. 3 (September 2016): 416-417; The term “living history” is ubiquitous amongst reenactors. While it may seem like it contrasts itself with written, academic histories, reenactors are signifying the impact and educational merit of performance. As will be discussed, they are emphasizing the richness of sensory, material experience as a means of learning about historical events.

focus on primary sources, and amateur reenactors, who look to shape a narrative more palatable to a contemporary audience.⁷

Many of the divisions that gave birth to the war remain unresolved. The legacy of slavery, segregation, and Jim Crow has left an indelible scar throughout the history of the country; to this day, issues surrounding race, equality, citizenship, and rights are hotly debated. Likewise, the economic and social divisions between industry and agriculture, chattel slavery and wage slavery, the role of the government to regulate and control property, wealth, and the people's moral obligations towards working for the freedoms of others have never ceased to cause controversy. Passage of the Fourteenth Amendment after the war laid the foundation for the Civil Rights movement. In other words, the great social changes that took place in the 1950s and 60s are due to the war's legacy. Understanding the roots of the current condition allows for better understanding of modern controversies. Therefore, while reenactors seek to connect with past events, in a certain sense the past has never ceased to exist. Examining the role of reenactors is crucial because it not only tells us about how contemporary people explore the past, but how the past continues to live through reenactment. The public's perceptions of the war and its causes and consequences shape the meaning they draw from U.S. history. As such, reenactment must be viewed in the light of the legacy of the Civil War, Reconstruction, and the Lost Cause in order to understand how it both furthers and hinders the goals of the participants and their audience.

⁷ Dennis Hall, "Civil War Reenactors and the Postmodern Sense of History," *Journal of American Culture* 17, no. 2 (Fall 1994): 8.

Reenactors see themselves as educators, and it is necessary to examine the connection between what is taught and how it is received.⁸

The discord between subsequent presentations of Civil War battles and academic histories has begun to invite criticism of the hobby, as more recent controversies surrounding the use of the Confederate flag and memorials to Confederate leaders seem to have led to a decline in the participation of reenacting. Assessments of an activity that tries to divorce itself from the political and cultural meaning of the Civil War reflects the greater social question of the real importance of the conflict itself. The magnitude of bloodshed and political division inflicted by the war fundamentally reshaped the nation and its professed values. Given the United States' identity as a bastion of liberty, democracy, and civil rights, the Civil War solidified the notion that the purpose of government is to protect the rights and freedoms of its citizens. Therefore it would seem that while Civil War reenactors intend their role as living historians to be truly educational and an appreciative tribute to Civil War soldiers, the split caused by pursuing a narrow narrative of heroism obscures the many hardships endured by the war's participants and divorces reenactors from the greater meaning of the war. Ultimately, the Lost Cause roots of Civil War reenacting have misrepresented the war's impact on the nation and the soldiers who fought in the war. A better integration must occur between practicing, amateur historians, and scholarly, academic historians in order to allow the practice to achieve its ultimate goals,

⁸ McPherson, *The War That Forged a Nation*, 4-5.

allowing greater understanding of the complexity and depth of the war that remains so crucial to Americans' conceptions of themselves and their nation.⁹

Relatively few scholars have directly addressed Civil War reenactment. Fundamental to this literature, Gregory Hall's "Selective Authenticity: Civil War Reenactors and Credible Reenactments" is an excellent introduction to the relationship between the practice of reenactment and the question of authenticity. Hall acknowledges that Civil War reenacting bases itself on constructed authenticity. By this he means that the interpretation of what is authentic is created by the interaction between the reenactor and the activity of reenacting. He divides the investigation of reenactors into three categories. First is an extension to the tourism industry, specifically the preservation and maintenance of historical battlefield sites. Mass reenactments draw in tourists, whose money goes to the upkeep of these parks. In this role, authenticity is determined by the park officials to tell the story they want to the public. The performance has more of an entertainment quality, seeking to present something enjoyable to the audience. The second category is the concept of the "living historian," whereby reenactors take up the role of

⁹McPherson, *The War that Forged a Nation*, 13-14; While this study will discuss the development of Civil War reenacting as a whole, it will observe the social, cultural, and political impact of the legacy of the Lost Cause Mythos and its role as a foundation to current reenacting practices. This means that the focus will be directed towards the southern United States and the transmission of historical interpretation in the years after the Civil War. Reenactment's importance as a medium of historical memory is intertwined with the contemporary controversies concerning the legacy of the war and the propriety of memorializing Confederate leaders.

educators. Reenactors thus seek to impart their love and knowledge of the Civil War to viewers with the intent of convincing them to return and even participate in reenacting. They do this by providing a background and context to the event they depict, thus providing more dynamism than simply acting as museum pieces. Finally, Hall writes that there is an understanding within the reenactment community that what they perform is not truly realistic but is a form of simulated reality. Since it is physically impossible to recreate an actual battle, there is, by the nature of the act, a selection as to what is presented and what is not. The result is not necessarily a deliberate fabrication but is an outgrowth of the participation of the actors in the performance. They transfer and communicate their contemporary desires through the physical activity of reenacting, thus creating a bridge that links the present with the past.¹⁰

Hall's article uses interviews with reenactors to gain insight into how they see themselves and the authenticity of their craft. His interviewees affirm that reenactment is not time travel and that certain rules and expectations continue to exist. Therefore, the priority is not true reproduction, but believability and communication with the audience. He even suggests that the audience does not want to witness certain aspects of the war, particularly the gruesome details of its combat. This suggests that for the reenactor, authenticity lays within the intent rather than the final product. As Hall explains, the mode of authenticity used by reenactors is brought into the hobby by outside influences. Therefore, the link between the hobby and the larger cultural narrative of the Civil War is important, since it ultimately shapes how the participant pursues realness. Hall shows that reenactors shape their performance according to the reception of the audience. This means that reenacting walks a line between a search for historical realism and

¹⁰G. Hall, "Selective Authenticity," 415, 420-424.

entertainment that caters to the tastes of those who are watching. This leads to a complex web of differing forms of authenticity which emerge depending on the context of the act.¹¹

While Hall provides insight into the various forms of authenticity reenacting can take, significant gaps remain. While he acknowledges that authenticity is constructed and that reenactors realize that their presentations inevitably fail to fully capture the past, he does not identify in what respects they fall short. Hall's threefold schema for authenticity does demonstrate variation as to the motives and methods that go into reenactment, but issues such as the politics and social dynamics of the 19th century get little mention. He often refers to authenticity as constructed and an engagement but does not fully explore its consequences. This is where a necessary conversation between reenactors and Civil War scholars needs to occur, in order to accurately communicate what is lacking and left unsaid during a reenactment performance.

Dennis Hall also addresses the question of authenticity in his "Civil War Reenactors and the Postmodern Sense of History." Hall links reenacting to a sense of nostalgia, which is not only a remembrance of the past, but a reaction to the present. Nostalgia comes about when people are faced with some immediate discomfort and seek solace in some aspect of the past. This is a key concept in understanding the phenomenon of reenacting, for it goes beyond telling a historical story and presents an experience of an era no longer extant. He utilizes this in reading reenacting as a postmodern phenomenon. Hall contends that reenactors search for a simulacrum of historical events to have a conscious experience and feeling of participation in the past. This is an important point when discussing the gaps between the presentation of reenactors and the writings of more scholarly historians, since the desire for experience shapes how the reenactors seek

¹¹G. Hall, "Selective Authenticity," 430, 427, 429.

authenticity. A concrete experience causes participants to alter their appearance and behavior in such a way that they can live in another time but serves to mask undesirable aspects of soldiers' lives. As with Gregory Hall's article, this work does well to address the desirability of reenacting and the reasons people participate in it. Reenactors create a desired event and transcend the here and now in order to participate; at the same time the audience has a world opened to them which they could otherwise only access by reading and imagination. Lacking, however, is the awareness that there is an inherent selectivity when deciding to engage a subject which can overshadow less pleasant but no less crucial aspects.¹²

Tom Dunning addresses some of these concerns in his "Civil War Re-enactments: Performance as a Cultural Practice." Dunning examines the historical context that led to the genesis of Civil War reenactment, tracing its roots to the memorials held for Civil War veterans at Gettysburg in 1913. He uses the lens of performance to evaluate the tensions existing within the field of reenactment. The author first delineates the hardcore reenactors from the "farbs" (speculated to arise from the statement "far be it for me to complain" –in other words, criticizing their casualness). Performance acts as a means to unite the past and present, North and South. Dunning's work demonstrates the points of tension within reenacting and why performance works within these spaces. While he shows sympathy towards reenactors, his article only touches on the notion that reenactment keeps alive some of the sentiments that caused the Civil War in the first place. Although he acknowledges the unease between black and white actors as well as northerners and southerners, he fails to address the failure of reenactors to present these issues to their audience. Rather, the attempted demonstration of authenticity can imply that these issues

¹²D. Hall, "Civil War Reenactors and the Postmodern Sense of History," 9.

did not exist or were not important. Furthermore, he discusses the distinctions between northern and southern reenactors; southerners in particular tend to downplay the role of slavery and race to see reenactment as an appreciation for heritage and culture. This stands in contrast to northern and black reenactment units, for whom issues such as the Union and slavery are integral. Interestingly, he also raises the issue of the participation of women, who are generally only allowed to engage in period-appropriate tasks. While some exceptions are made for instances where women did participate as soldiers, the act of reenacting battle is generally a male-only sphere. Dunning, as with the previously mentioned authors, explains these phenomena by considering reenactment as a form of performance or theater.¹³

A far more intriguing and direct critique of Civil War reenactment is found in James O. Farmer's "Playing Rebels: Reenactment as Nostalgia and Defense of the Confederacy in the Battle of Aiken." Farmer centers his work on a reenactment of the Battle of Aiken, South Carolina, in mid-February 1995. "Confederate reenactors," asserts the author, "are taking part in an oblique but powerful counterattack aimed at those who by devaluing the symbols and relics of the Confederacy insult their ancestors and their traditions." He clearly associates reenactment with the legacy of the Lost Cause and connects the reenactment at Aiken (which had been a Confederate victory) within greater controversies surrounding the use of the Confederate battle flag. Farmer describes the reenactment as having the air of a sporting event, complete with spectators cheering the Rebels and booing the Yankees. He notes that at this and other events, Confederate reenactors often outnumber their Union counterparts, compelling some to

¹³Tom Dunning, "Civil War Re-enactments: Performance as a Cultural Practice," *Australasian Journal of American Studies* 21, no. 1 (July 2002): 67, 69-70.

“galvanize” or temporarily join the Union side for the sake of balance. Thus, Farmer situates reenactment directly in the aura of the Lost Cause and pro-Confederate feelings, whereas the former writers imply but do not directly connect the two. Since reenactors tend to participate out of a feeling of personal enjoyment and interest in history, it can be difficult to prescribe an overly political agenda to their actions. Where Gregory and Dennis Hall tie together the different types of authenticity, the roles reenactors play, and their motivations, Dunning and Farmer remind us that the debate over authenticity stems from the underlying social and cultural debate of the Civil War.¹⁴

One work that attempts to balance the enthusiasm and idealism of historical memorials with scholarly understanding is Peter S. Carmichael’s “Relevance, Resonance, and Historiography: Interpreting the Lives and Experiences of Civil War Soldiers.” Carmichael discusses the time he spent as a reenactor at the Appomattox Court House in the summer of 1985, and as a subsequent National Park Service seasonal. He underlines the delicate balance of bringing in historical realism and communicating it in an effective and entertaining way for tourists. He notes that certain elements of soldiers’ lives were omitted, such as the use of alcohol to brace themselves for combat and recover afterwards. The author also identifies an ideological shift in how the Civil War was presented. The mid-1980s reflected a deep cynicism towards governments and political ideology; thus, the narrative portrayed soldiers as dutiful victims of grander schemes. He credits James McPherson for causing a shift to the perspective that saw the

¹⁴James O. Farmer, “Playing Rebels: Reenactment as Nostalgia and Defense of the Confederacy in the Battle of Aiken,” *Southern Cultures* 11, no.1 (Spring 2005): 50, 59-60, 60-62.

soldiers as ideological, idealistic, and motivated. This is profoundly important for looking at both past soldiers and contemporary reenactors. While reenacting has its roots in past memorials to the Lost Cause, reenactors nowadays have their own set of ideals and agenda. Therefore, it is not enough to simply link the two practices together, but to see how the development of reenactment has occurred in response to contextual events.¹⁵

Understanding just how formative the Civil War was for the country is necessary to understand the social and cultural debate behind reenacting. James McPherson's recent *The War that Forged a Nation: Why the Civil War Still Matters* does an excellent job in demonstrating the war's transformative powers. While the war is generally seen as lasting from 1861 to 1865, McPherson notes that there had not been peace in the country since the war with Mexico in 1846. With the defeat of Mexico came the debate over the expansion of slavery into the newly acquired territories; this in turn set off myriad acts of violence and division until the firing on Fort Sumter. Likewise, the surrender of General Robert E. Lee at Appomattox only signaled the end of secession and organized military conflict. The author points out that the next decade of Reconstruction brought continued conflict between the U.S. Army and southern paramilitary groups. Hostility and animosity bred towards northern rule and the loss of slavery led white southerners to enact laws that disenfranchised blacks and segregated them from society when Reconstruction ended. McPherson lays out well the effect of the war in shaping the country's notions about itself as united nation. He describes the legacy of President Abraham Lincoln as

¹⁵Peter S. Carmichael, "Relevance, Resonance, and Historiography: Interpreting the Lives and Experiences of Civil War Soldiers," *Civil War History* 62, no. 2 (June 2016): 171, 173, 178-179, 180-181.

not only being a leader during the war, but the man who shaped its meaning for future generations. Lincoln was thus an author of American identity by seeing the war to its conclusion. He also had an indelible mark on the rest of the world by demonstrating that a republic was capable of surviving its internal divisions, which in turn encouraged other democratically minded peoples.¹⁶

The legacies of the Lost Cause, Jim Crow laws, lynching, and violence shaped the United States even through the 1950s and 1960s, when civil rights organizations sought to end segregation and reestablish rights for African Americans. Developed by white Southerners after the war, the Lost Cause held that the South was right all along. Adherents insist that the South was justified in its efforts to secede, that the Civil War was more about fighting against government tyranny than slavery, and that the South embodied a nobler and purer society than the industrialized, money-grubbing Yankees. This myth continues to this day, giving people a rationale to admire the Confederacy while detaching themselves from slavery and racism.

An insightful work exploring these themes is W. Stuart Towns' *Enduring Legacy: Rhetoric and Ritual of the Lost Cause*, which traces the memorialization of the Confederate cause in the South by oratory, pageantry, memorial, and organized celebration. He notes the South's formation of local celebrations in order to preserve the memory (if not the history) of the war. The creation of veterans' organizations, such as the United Confederate Veterans and the United Sons of the Confederacy, the celebration of Confederate Memorial Day, and the erection of statues served as vehicles to pass on the lionization of the Confederate cause. Using pageantry and festivity, the Lost Cause was created, transmitted, and amplified. This continued

¹⁶McPherson, *The War that Forged a Nation*, 173-175, 179-186, 164-168.

remembrance carried on the message that the South was right, that Confederate soldiers were heroes, and that the North betrayed the legacy of the American Revolution. Towns observes that the intensity of these memorials reached religious dimensions, serving to solidify the Lost Cause in the minds of southerners.¹⁷

Interestingly, he notes that orators in the South used the notion that the North's continued anger towards the South for both its role in the war and its resistance to Reconstruction as evidence that southerners wanted peaceable reconciliation and it was the North that remained bitter and hateful. This is a clever means by which blame of the South may be diverted towards the North. The South created the image of themselves as reasonable and patriotic, while those who continued to harp on secession and slavery were narrow-minded and divisive. Thus, memories created by the Lost Cause both justified the South and served as a tool for reuniting the country. This can be seen in the fiftieth anniversary of Gettysburg, when veterans from both sides reenacted the battle and then embraced one another.¹⁸

Towns' book is important when looking at the phenomenon of Civil War reenactment, since it demonstrates that public spectacle, theatrics, and performance were used to create a certain narrative in the South since the end of the war. These narratives sought to forge a sentiment and memory distinct from actual historical events. When looking at the issues surrounding reenactment, it must be kept in mind that what is perceived as authentic memory and innocent remembrance does not re-present history but reshapes it into a new story. This is, as Dennis Hall puts it, "not so much a reading of history but a writing of it." By choosing which

¹⁷Towns, *Enduring Legacy*, 13, 24-25.

¹⁸Towns, *Enduring Legacy*, 103-104.

elements to experience, they in turn choose which elements the audience will take from it. This creates a preferred narrative, one that portrays certain positive elements of soldiers' lives and obscures more troubling elements.¹⁹

Catherine Clinton has investigated the gap between expectation and reality in *Public Women and the Confederacy*, which emphasizes that the Civil War caused the largest expansion of the sex trade in U.S. history. The large-scale movement of people and the destruction of homes forced more women to maintain themselves through prostitution, either in brothels or as "camp followers." The increase in such activity was of acute importance for military authorities due to the spread of venereal disease among soldiers. Military leaders tried everything from prosecuting to deporting to licensing public women in order to moderate the health risks to the partaking soldiers. As one Confederate soldier wrote, "this war is the most damnable curse that ever was brung [sic] upon the human family." Added another, "You would think there was not a married man in the regiment but me." Their witness to the sexual proclivities of Civil War soldiers stands in contrast to the depiction of Victorian-era mores as prudish and reserved. In fact, Clinton points out that the war expanded access to sexual activity on a level not seen before or after the conflict.²⁰

Clinton's work is deeply important when evaluating what reenactors and memorials of Civil War soldiers portray against the reality the soldiers' lives. Towns, for instance, references how soldiers were commemorated as noble martyrs: "for they were all of the same noble lineage

¹⁹D. Hall, "Civil War Reenactors and a Postmodern Sense of History," 10.

²⁰Catherine Clinton, *Public Women and the Confederacy* (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 1999), 9-10, 17-18.

and true nobility of soul . . . each one being that highest type of genuine manhood – a Southern gentleman.” The Lost Cause established the Confederate soldier as a mythical hero, sacrificing self and pleasure for the greater cause of home and family. The subsequent narrative of the Confederacy sought to forge the soldiers into objects of reverence, therefore ridding them of any unseemly activity. Likewise, reenactors tend to focus on the battles as the center of the Civil War and the lens by which to portray its soldiers. While they do try to simulate soldiers’ camp lives, they tend to avoid portrayals that would be uncomfortable before an audience. Therefore, Clinton’s book is essential for looking into those aspects of soldiers’ lives that clash with the romantic notion of the men as stalwart heroes. Instead, it demonstrates that they engaged in the same sexual activities of soldiers in all time periods. This provides an example of the reenactors as selecting which aspects to portray and which to gloss over. Nevertheless, to truly understand the lives of Civil War soldiers, their sexual activities, and the consequences brought on by them are indispensable to those seeking an “authentic” image of their lives.²¹

A further study into underrepresented facets of soldiers’ lives is the reality of trauma, mental illness, and suicide. Eric T. Dean’s *Shook Over Hell: Post-traumatic Stress, Vietnam, and the Civil War* is one of the first in-depth examination of the impact of the war on soldiers’ lives both during and after the war. Dean parallels the testimony of Civil War veterans with Vietnam veterans to uncover the existence of severe trauma lingering among them many years after the war. He brings forth numerous testimonies of the suffering endured by Civil War veterans, their subsequent inability to recover during peacetime, and the records of pension agencies recording their fates.

²¹Towns, *Enduring Legacy*, 64.

Dean's diagnosis of the trauma suffered by Civil War soldiers as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and comparison with PTSD as suffered by Vietnam veterans is not without controversy. Wayne Wei-Siang Hsieh's "'Go to Your Gawd Like a Soldier:' Transnational Reflections on Veteranhood," challenges Dean's assertion that the two events are comparable. Hsieh sees Dean's claim as an anachronism; that is to say, the Civil War's differing cultural atmosphere created distinct reactions to warfare than those found in contemporary times. Hsieh does not claim that Civil War veterans did not suffer but instead sees the diagnosis of their condition as PTSD as unwarranted and a relic of contemporary attitudes towards war. Likewise, Carmichael cautions us not to let our contemporary disillusionment with war impact our study of the past. He notes that historians must be careful not to strip away the authentic idealism and romanticism that Civil War soldier possessed. The concept of trauma includes both the injury sustained by the individual and the social dynamic which can both set it up and resolve it.²²

Whether or not Civil War soldiers can be diagnosed with PTSD as it is currently defined is not as important to this study as the fact that soldiers experienced lasting traumatic effects from the war. Furthermore, it is significant since this reality of soldiers' lives is not presented in the reenactment and memorialization of soldiers in popular memory. This, in turn, increases the gap between the presentation of the war and the individual experiences of its soldiers. The

²²G. Hall, "Selective Authenticity," 425; Eric T. Dean, *Shook Over Hell: Post-traumatic Stress, Vietnam, and the Civil War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 1-4; Wayne Wei-Siang Hsieh, "'Go to Your Gawd Like a Soldier:' Transnational Reflections on Veteranhood," *The Journal of the Civil War Era* 5, no. 4 (December 2015): 552-553; Carmichael, "Relevance, Resonance, and Historiography," 183-184.

tendency of reenactors to focus on the material aspects of the war can, by implication, create false expectations that these people did not undergo emotional trauma.

Gregory Hall points out that the priority for reenactors is “looking the part”; that is, creating an authentic looking persona to present to the public, but eschewing the more disturbing realities of soldiering. This is understandable, since there must be something attractive about roleplaying a soldier to entice a person to spend hundreds if not thousands of dollars to buy replica gear. In addition, the content of reenactments needs to address the desires of the parks that host them and the audience that comes to them as a form of recreation. This ties back into the actor/audience dynamic: the audience wants to spend time witnessing something enjoyable, and the reenactors in turn must attempt to remain authentic and yet communicate themselves in a presentable manner to the general public. This gulf between the actual experiences of Civil War soldiers and the practices of hobbyists creates tension between the various modes of authenticity and the differing goals of the reenactors themselves.²³

²³The relationship between actors and history has been well studied by Robert Toplin in *Reel History: A Defense of Hollywood*. He argues that while movies (and by extension various forms of performative history) take artistic license in order to present historical events in a dramatic narrative, they nevertheless can communicate real historical truths. While they strive for authenticity through costume and set design, they tend to condense complex events into simplified stories. The inaccuracies found in performative histories shed light on how a given culture gives meaning to the past. This study will likewise look at the discrepancies between reenactment and scholarly treatments of the Civil War to discover how and why the meaning of the war has been transmitted and changed over time; Robert Brent Toplin, *Reel History: A*

This phenomenon must be examined in order to grasp the importance of Civil War reenacting and how it is practiced. The significance of history and how historical events are memorialized is derived from how the living wish to learn from the dead. Commemorating the past by its nature involves selecting those elements that should be remembered and how those elements are to be judged. Therefore, when looking at the titanic impact of the Civil War not only in terms of death and destruction, but in regard to politics and society, we evaluate how it transformed the country and decide how to interpret the principles that were fought for. The development of the Lost Cause mythos sought to defend and extol the Confederacy, which allowed southerners to reconcile themselves with the outcome of the war. Oratory, pageantry, and performance shaped and solidified the notion that the South was right for seceding and was perfectly legitimate in attempting to defend the principles of the American Revolution. While contemporary reenactors seek to honor the individual soldiers for willingly endangering themselves for the sake of their beliefs, their own performances maintain the divorce between the created narrative and historical personages.

In order to understand the development and practice of Civil War reenactment, this study will first trace its historical origins. It will examine the practices and forms by which the memorialization of the war was carried out and how those practices shaped the legacy of the war. It will then investigate reenactments carried out by veterans at Gettysburg in 1913 and how these celebrations continued into the 1950s and 1960s, where they clashed with the emerging civil rights movement. The study will also explore how a revival in Civil War movies, documentaries,

Defense of Hollywood, (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002); G. Hall, "Selective Authenticity," 425.

and other media combined to rekindle interest in the war and give impetus to the reenacting hobby. Finally, it will examine how reenactment has become problematic in the early decades of the 21st century and how contemporary controversies have seemingly dampened enthusiasm for the practice.

To investigate the aims and motivations behind Civil War reenactment, the websites representing reenacting units will be surveyed. Like all primary documents, these websites are imperfect, reflecting the voices of their creators more closely than those of all members of the larger unit. Nonetheless, they serve as a public record of the reenactors' vision. By closely reading the text, organization, and content of each website, this inquiry will document how they see themselves, how they encourage new members, and what they see as the significance of the war they commemorate. Websites act as an important link between reenactors and the public; they are the means by which hobbyists present themselves and establish contact with potential new members. Therefore, the manner in which reenactors communicate themselves is a crucial clue into how they practice their hobby. In turn, how they engage in reenacting can reveal how it affects them and how they wish to be seen by others.

The study will also turn to the practice of reenactment itself looking at the material culture surrounding the hobby, the lengths members pursue in the quest for authenticity, and the correlation between costume and performance. From there, how reenactment takes place, the types of performances, and their rules will allow us to understand the boundaries between the history created by reenactors and history as it has been studied by academic historians. It will apply new areas of academic research which have broadened and complicated the Civil War narrative, in order to better comprehend the problems that arise when there are divisions between the source and the presentation.

This study will attempt to fill in the gaps within our understanding of Civil War reenacting by revealing its historical antecedents, its influences, and the cultural context in which it operates. Reenactors strive to produce authenticity and appreciation by means of the physical make and appearance of their costume, but the larger social and political legacy of the Civil War, the Lost Cause, and the civil rights movement shapes the message in ways that reenactors may not intend or realize. The aim to remain politically neutral echoes the shift in the Civil War narrative in the early 20th century that sought to reconcile North and South by diminishing the role of slavery, racism, and treason for the Confederacy. This in turn masks the true purpose of the war, and the legacy of the Reconstruction amendments. Unfortunately, when reenactors seek to avoid issues of guilt or responsibility for the parties in the War, they unwittingly distort its true historical consequences and the struggle endured by the men who endured its horrors.

CHAPTER ONE: HISTORICAL ORIGINS OF REENACTMENT

Civil War reenactment originates from the long-standing practice of commemorating and celebrating the Civil War. Shortly after the war's end, communities in the South sought to memorialize dead Confederate soldiers. These took the form of public gatherings complete with speeches, festivities, and prayer. These civic occasions created and shaped a narrative concerning the meaning of the Civil War and justification for the South's actions. This retelling of history formed into what is known as the Lost Cause, the notion that the Confederacy fought for state's rights and the values of liberty, independence, and civilization. It diminished the importance and harshness of slavery, and focused on the clash between the industrial, centralized north versus the agricultural, self-governing south. The continued celebration of Confederate memorials reinforced this narrative and became the cornerstone of Southern identity.²⁴

History can provide the foundation for creating narrative and connection that gives a society meaning. With that meaning, people craft their sense of political belonging and social ethics. Organizations like the United Confederate Veterans, the Sons of Confederate Veterans and the Daughters of the Confederacy continued to carry on this legacy and spread it to the broader populace. In order to see the importance of Civil War reenactment, its context in the greater Lost Cause narrative must be understood. This mythos purified the South of wrongdoing and developed into a means by which the entire country could soothe itself with the outcome of the war. The end of Reconstruction and return of white power throughout the South overturned the temporary efforts of the North to end the political disenfranchisement of African Americans. To reconcile the principle of republican government and constitutional rights with the

²⁴Towns, *Enduring Legacy*, 6.

segregationist South, the Confederacy was cast as well-intentioned but erring section of the country that attempted to separate on distinct yet legitimate interpretations of state power. They framed the conflict as a cultural divide in which slavery played only a tangential role. The legacy of the Lost Cause can still be felt as neo-Confederate sympathies continue to exist throughout the nation. Furthermore, conflicts over the legacy of slavery, Jim Crow, and civil rights persist as unresolved conflicts that contribute to bitter political divides.²⁵

The Civil War brought death, destruction, and deprivation to Confederate soldiers as well as the entire population of the South. The subsequent outlawing of slavery and occupation by Union troops transformed the life of every Southerner. To cope with this catastrophe, whites forged a narrative to solidify broken communities and provide solace for those who survived. Southern society did not focus on simply rebuilding towns and mourning the dead, but instead needed to understand what had happened to them. Though defeated, Southerners came to view their struggle as a holy effort against the godless Yankees. This narrative of history blended with religious conviction until it provided a renewed source of Southern pride.²⁶

By early 1866 a Confederate Memorial Day began to be celebrated; by 1875 it had spread throughout the South. It became an opportunity to not only remember the dead but to teach future generations the meaning of their struggle. Not only were these events an opportunity to celebrate but served as a meeting ground for Confederate veterans. Within a few decades formal

²⁵ Grace Elizabeth Hale, "The Lost Cause and the Meaning of History," *OAH Magazine* 27, no. 1 (January 2013): 14-15.

²⁶ Charles Reagan Wilson, *Baptized in Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause 1865-1920* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2009), 7-8.

organizations had formed to perpetuate the legacy of the cause: The United Confederate Veterans in 1889, the Daughters of the Confederacy in 1894, and the United Sons of the Confederacy in 1896. These societies and their annual memorials served as vehicles to fashion a new history of the South, one that would preserve its legitimacy and dignity.²⁷

In order to do this, the righteousness of the war and its participants had to be established. The repeated commemoration of the Confederate dead took on a religious and ritualistic dynamic. The Lost Cause became intermingled with religious belief that buttressed the notion of the South's providence. Even churches took up the message; as Charles Reagan Wilson puts it, "ministers saw little difference between their religious and cultural values, and they promoted the link by constructing Lost Cause ritualistic forms that celebrated their regional mythological and theological beliefs."²⁸ This correlation between Christianity and the Civil War reassured Southerners that their sacrifices had been meaningful and that they ought to maintain their fidelity to the Cause their predecessors had fought for. It also provided the fervor to vigorously defend the rightness of the Cause to any who would disparage it.

Oratory and ritual propelled this message. W. Stuart Towns notes the fondness for public speaking in the South and how these speeches reinforced the rightness of the Confederate cause. As he explains, "There was never a Confederate Memorial Day celebration, a Confederate veterans' reunion, or a Confederate monument dedication without the program including at least one oration by a local dignitary."²⁹ The combination of celebrating fallen soldiers and the

²⁷ Towns, *Enduring Legacy*, 16-18, 20, 15,

²⁸ Wilson, *Baptized in Blood*, 11.

²⁹ Towns, *Enduring Legacy*, 40.

presence of veterans strengthened the profundity of the moment. Oratory and public demonstration provide a sensory impact that engages the emotions and the intellect. Thus, the audience could be drawn into the festivities and bond with their neighbors over their shared cultural values. The openness of the celebrations also could intimidate and drown out any who might question their legitimacy. This ensured that the vindication for the Southern cause became ingrained into the popular imagination.

The story of the Lost Cause also embraced the legacy of Reconstruction. After the war, the United States passed the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments, which abolished slavery, granted citizenship to all born in the country, and prohibited racial discrimination regarding voting. The Federal government enforced these laws through the Freedman's Bureau, dedicated to aiding the newly freed slaves, and later the Department of Justice. The U.S. Army was placed in charge of the South to quell violence and suppress resistance to these amendments. When the Army was withdrawn in 1877, white "Redeemers" seized power and sought to undo Reconstruction as far as it was possible. Subsequent Lost Cause orators would tar the memory of Reconstruction as "the long, dark night," as well as demonize Scalawags (Southerners who cooperated with the Republican Party). Veterans and other associated Confederate societies aimed to impart this interpretation through churches, schools, and public functions. This ensured that the Lost Cause would remain deeply rooted in Southern culture and would continue to shape political and racial views.³⁰

Even as the numbers of veterans diminished, public demonstrations of veneration to the Confederacy and the memory of Civil War continued through the early years of the 20th century.

³⁰ Towns, *Enduring Legacy*, 97, 99-100; Wilson, *Baptized in Blood*, 142-146.

Continuing a long tradition, among the most important of these were battle reenactments; even before the Civil War, “sham battles” commemorating Revolutionary War clashes had drawn large crowds of onlookers. Reenacting historical battles is a way of connecting people with the people and events of the past. The Revolutionary War provided not only independence, but the moral and political foundations of the country. Publicly glorifying these battles lionizes those who fought and forges a bond between the historical personages and the contemporary audience. In turn, this reinforces society’s cultural cohesiveness. This connection is used to create sympathy and agreement between various communities within the larger nation.³¹

Civil War reenactment began as a means of commemorating those who fought and died in the war. The 1913 veterans’ reunion at Gettysburg served to reconcile former enemies in the bond of memory. Rather than dwell on former grievances, the event fostered mutual respect and a desire for peace. A year later, Colonel Andrew Cowen of Louisville, a former Union Army artillery officer, declared: “The opportunity to commemorate that wonderful event by erecting a noble monument to stand forever as a beacon light of patriotism for the inspiration of generation yet unborn must not be lost.” The act of coming together and recreating a spectacle of grey and blue clad combatants was not meant to reignite passions, but to set them aside. Furthermore, the message it had for future generations was to let go of the controversies that split the country asunder and look for mutual understanding under a common notion of nationalism. Likewise, Charles H. Gillespie wrote: “Mere words can do no justice to the atmosphere of joyous, loving brotherhood that pervades the camp.” The spirit of reunion spread even unto the onlookers and caused them to reflect the same spirit of fraternity between these former enemies. This moved

³¹Hadden, 2-3.

the memorialization of the Civil War from one of justification and lionization, to empathy and understanding.³²

Such a change was both beneficial and problematic. On the one hand the newly fostered sense of national unity reduced regional hostilities and encouraged a respect for both sides of the conflict. On the other hand, it glossed over the immediate causes and results of the war, erasing any moral difficulties or divisions that caused the problem in the first place. As James McPherson notes, by the 1870s the North was exhausted over the question of political rights for African-Americans: “The Negro question, with all its complications, and the reconstruction of the Southern States, with all its interminable embroilments, have lost much of the power they once wielded.” Fatigue over having to constantly monitor the white South and fight off its attempts to strip freedmen of their rights, combined with a desire to profit from the peace that promised to accompany the military withdrawal from the former Confederacy, led the North to abandon the cause, allowing the collapse of Reconstruction and the rise of the “Redeemers” who quickly acted to undo its efforts. The South’s ability to circumvent the Reconstruction amendments threatened to undo all the effort undertaken by the North to fight the war. Indeed,

³² Andrew Cowan, “The Peace Memorial Bill,” *Gettysburg Compiler*, April 1914, accessed July 29, 2019, <https://news.google.com/newspapers?id=kdElAAAAIIBAJ&sjid=yfQFAAAAIBAJ&pg=7214,4563599&dq=andrew-cowan+gettysburg&hl=en> ; Charles H. Gillespie, “Pathetic Night Scene in Veterans’ Great Reunion,” *The Pittsburgh Press*, July 1913, accessed July 29, 2019, <https://news.google.com/newspapers?id=TEQbAAAAIIBAJ&sjid=IEkEAAAIBAJ&pg=4129,23763&dq=gettysburg+high-water-mark&hl=en> .

the desire for peace between the two sides left the recently freed slaves at the mercy (or lack thereof) of unsympathetic whites.³³

In the decades following the Civil War supporters of the Lost Cause built monuments, statuary, and other physical depictions of prominent Southern leaders. They were created parallel to the formation of the Lost Cause mythos and served as a public touchstone of reverence. They were initially built in cemeteries in order to memorialize those who died in the war. Afterwards they were established in public areas as the movement to strengthen and spread the remembrance of the Confederacy grew. They served as concrete reminders of the legacy of the Confederacy and the lionization of its soldiers and statesmen. In the early decades of the 20th century Confederate monument building reached its peak. There are several reasons for this timing. First, in 1896 the Supreme Court case *Plessy vs Ferguson* ruled that racial segregation was constitutional so long as it maintained separate but equal facilities. While the Southern states had been already been in the processing in establishing Jim Crow laws, *Plessy vs Ferguson* granted moral and legal legitimacy to their efforts to suppress African Americans. Monuments served as public reminders that the legacy of the Confederacy and its efforts to maintain white supremacy remained in full force. Secondly, a political alliance of poor white and blacks referred to as the Farmer's Alliance (a predecessor to the Populist Party) had been gain traction in the late 19th century. This political movement sought to improve the life of lower-class farmers by expanding the money supply, regulating the railroads, and creating an income tax. The reforms were motivated by common hardships faced by poorer farmers, both black and white. Upper-class Southerners responded by and appealing to white supremacy to divide the Farmer's Alliance and

³³ McPherson, *The War that Forged a Nation*, 186-187.

protect their own interests by setting them against each other. The promotion of white supremacy allowed Upper-class Southerners to break up biracial efforts to reform economic practices that maintained their social superiority. Furthermore, they reflected the establishment of formal racial segregation that both justified the actions of the Confederacy and helped secure the economic and social domination of Southern whites.³⁴

In decades following the turn of the 20th century, there was a movement to reconcile the two halves of the country and renew a sense of common nationalism. This desire to put away the conflicts of old could again be seen in the 75th anniversary of Gettysburg (1938), which was attended by nearly 3,500 veterans. While the event lacked a battle reenactment, it did provoke a sense of “peace and harmony of all the land.” Then president Franklin Delano Roosevelt gave a speech on calling for renewed unity in order to face the nation’s challenges. He remarked that “a democracy can keep alive only if the settlement of old difficulties clears the ground and transfers energies to face new [tasks]”. The emergence of the Lost Cause narrative scoured away any notion that the South fought to defend slavery and blamed the North for attempting to impose its

³⁴ Heather A. O’Connell, Monuments Outlive History: Confederate Monuments, “The Legacy of Slavery, and Black-White Inequality,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 43, no. 3 (June 2019), 462-463; John J. Winberry, “‘Lest We Forget’: The Confederate Monument and the Southern Townscape,” *Southeastern Geographer* 23, no. 2 (November 1983), 114-118; Stephen Davis, “Empty Eyes, Marble Hand: The Confederate Monument and the South,” *Journal of Popular Culture* 16, no. 3 (Winter 1982), 8-9, 19; Fred Arthur Bailey, “Free Speech and the Lost Cause in the Old Dominion,” *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 103, no. 2 (April 1995), 238-239, 242-243, 266.

will on the states. As Jabez Curry put it, “The actions of Congress, of Northern States and Legislatures, in direct and hostile contravention of the theory of Government which had been maintained consistently from the beginning of the Federal Union . . . satisfied the Southern States that the Union could not permanently exist.” Such an interpretation left the impression that the South neither wanted the war nor strove to maintain its slave system, but was a peaceable, patriotic region that was coerced into secession by abolitionist aggressions. Common sympathy and reconciliation between the two halves would then be accomplished if only the North abandoned its obsession with African Americans and instead focused on their common heritage.³⁵

³⁵ “Gettysburg Celebration to be attended by 3,500 Vets,” *The Daily Times*, June 1938, accessed July 29, 2019, <https://news.google.com/newspapers?id=7goiAAAAIIBAJ&sjid=sK8FAAAAIBAJ&pg=3518,3595922&dq=1938+roosevelt+gettysburg&hl=en> ; Edward W. Pickard, “Blue and Gray Meet: Veterans of Gettysburg Celebrate Together on Field of the Crucial Civil War Battle,” *The Cambridge City Tribune*, July 1938, accessed July 29, 2019, <https://news.google.com/newspapers?id=snpVAAAAIIBAJ&sjid=dj8NAAAAIIBAJ&pg=2846,2267519&dq=1938+roosevelt+gettysburg&hl=en> ; “Speech of the President, Gettysburg, July 3, 1838,” File No. 1142, Franklin D. Roosevelt Master Speech Files, Series 2, Franklin: Access to the FDR’s Digital Collections, http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/_resources/images/msf/msf01179 (accessed February 4, 2020); Jabez Curry, “J.L.M. Curry (1825-1903), The Southern States of the American Union, 1895,” in *Confederate and Neo-Confederate Reader: The "Great Truth" about the "Lost Cause,"* ed.

Reenactment, even in its beginnings, was tied to the image of the war its participants wanted to portray. The scene of thousands of veterans putting aside their former feud created an impression that all was reconciled and that there was no need for recrimination over old quarrels. This meant that both sides could, at least publicly, conclude that the other had noble intentions during the war. As subsequent generations grew up after the war, the conflict became an ever-fading memory. The public spectacles became their primary source of personal contact with the war, the message set by reenactors woven into the minds of their audiences. Thus, commemorations of the Civil War became an agent of history, creating and shaping the attitudes of the public that witnessed them.

The struggle between the peaceful aura surrounding the anniversaries of the early 20th century and the centrality of slavery and secession during the war itself came back into the light as African American began to reassert their perspective into the meaning of the war. In the 1950s African Americans publicly strove to undo the established system of segregation, discrimination, and racism that had permeated the country. They pushed to revive what the Civil War and Reconstruction had started--an end to the subjugation of African Americans and reestablishment of constitutional rights regardless of race. It was in this era of increased attention on race relations that the centennial commemoration of the Civil War occurred. The U.S. Civil War Centennial Commission had been established in 1957 to coordinate and unify the celebration across the country. This required addressing the thorny issue of the causes of the war and its consequences. The Commission initially sought to avoid the racial dimension of the war and

James W. Loewen and Edward H. Sebesta (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2010), 213-214, and 228.

focus on the restored sense of national unity. However, by the early 1960s the problem was too large to ignore, and the Commission instead tried to move to a position whereby all sides -- Northerners, Southerners, and Black soldiers-- were equally noble and honorable. This message glossed over the markedly different aims of each of these groups and the contradictory nature of their sacrifices.³⁶

These inconsistencies manifested themselves in the numerous commemorations held for the centennial. Montgomery, Alabama, held a major celebration from February 12-18, 1963, which featured lavish oratory, festivities, and pageantry. The city reenacted the creation of the Confederate government and the inauguration of Jefferson Davis amid cheering onlookers. Participants decked themselves out in period costume and sought to reimagine themselves as their noble ancestors. These revelries stood in stark contrast to the bus boycott that had occurred only seven years prior, when Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King, Jr., had coordinated a program to fight racial segregation on public transportation through their refusal to use and pay for these services. While Parks and King had successfully dented the segregationist policies of the city, the

³⁶ Kristopher A. Teters, "Albert Burton Moore and Alabama's Centennial Commemoration of the Civil War: The Rhetoric of Race, Romance, and Reunion," *Alabama Review* 66, no. 2 (April 2013), 126-127; Kevin Allen, "The Second Battle of Fort Sumter: The Debate over the Politics of Race and Historical Memory at the Opening of America's Civil War Centennial, 1961," *The Public Historian* 33, no. 2 (May 2011), 98.

wild enthusiasm for the memory of the Confederacy demonstrated that the white population had not lost its adherence to the Lost Cause and the racial policies it engendered.³⁷

The conflict between memorializing the Civil War and the emergent civil rights movement could be more directly seen in the clash over the commemoration of the firing on Fort Sumter in April 1961, when tensions flared between the New Jersey Civil War Commission (NJCWCC) and the South Carolina Commission (SCCWCC) over the presence of African American delegate Madeline A. Williams and South Carolina's segregation laws. Both sides wrangled over how to accommodate Williams, which led to threats of boycotts and protests. These disputes reopened the wounds that previous sentiment had tried to smooth over. The only message provided during the official celebration regarding African Americans reiterated the assertion that slaves had been happy and loyal to the South throughout the war. The heated controversy over segregation during a national commemoration of the Civil War reinforced Southern adherence to the Confederate cause. Southerners had maintained the illusion that the "peculiar institution" had not been a harsh practice but a paternalistic and beneficial one, and that even after the war African Americans were content with their situation in society.³⁸

The NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) quickly mounted a counter-rally. Here the focus was on the contributions of African Americans in the Union Army, and, unlike the message of the national commemoration, it openly celebrated the defeat of the Confederacy. This incident and others like it reveal that the memorials to the Civil

³⁷ Teters, "Albert Burton Moor and Alabama's Centennial Commemoration of the Civil War," 131-132.

³⁸ Allen, "The Second Battle of Fort Sumter," 104-105.

War were wrapped in political and social meaning. Southerners saw these festivals as solidifying the rightness of the Confederate cause and the nobility of their ancestors. Northerners had come to accept this picture as a means of reconciling the two halves of the country, abandoning the efforts of Reconstruction in order to create a common national narrative. The advent of the civil rights movement cast down these illusions and brought back to the fore the legacy of slavery and racism that permeated the South. Thus, it was impossible to separate the memory of the Civil War from the values and meanings that the public imparted to them through ritual and reenactment.³⁹

It was in this context of civil rights and the centennial that Civil War reenactment emerged as a public hobby. One of the first major organizations to develop was the North-South Skirmish Association (N-SSA), founded in 1950 primarily by gun enthusiasts who wanted to shoot Civil War era weaponry. The Association promoted interest in the Civil War and enthusiasm for obtaining authentic reproductions of period equipment. Over time they organized themselves along the lines of historical military units, which offered their members a sense of belonging and identity. Their website avows their stated purpose “to commemorate the heroism of the men, of both sides.” This politically neutral stance seeks to make people from across the country feel welcome in their ranks. The energy focused on common interests in Civil War weaponry and clothing acts to put aside the causes and consequences of the war, in the process echoing the narrative of the Civil War that had arisen earlier in the century. While the N-SSA

³⁹ Allen, “The Second Battle of Fort Sumter,” 101, 104-107.

focuses on target shooting rather than battle reenactment, it set the pattern that would be picked up by subsequent reenactment units.⁴⁰

While some battle reenactment groups, such as the 1st Maine Cavalry, had started up in 1959, it was in the wake of the centennial that more and more organized groups formed. For example, the 4th Virginia Infantry, Co. I, “Liberty Hall Volunteers,” based out of Indianapolis, Indiana, was founded in 1971 to exhibit the efforts of Confederate soldiers. Proclamations on their modern-day website reflect the values held during the mid-20th century regarding the war. They claim to “honor Civil War veterans, the ideals they upheld and any struggles they endured,” echoing that idea that both sides held to noble ideals that are still worth of remembrance. Based out of Indiana, a Union state, the 4th Virginia honors the memory of men who fought against that state. The disassociation between their geographic location and the attitudes of the people they portray suggests that they have disconnected the motivations of the historical subjects with the principles they wish to see instead. According to *The Drumbeat*, their own newsletter, they see themselves as “interpreters of the past,” suggesting that they are aware that they give the past meaning and display that meaning to their audience. And yet “Captain” Richard K. Harding, their commanding officer in 2012, writes that they “honor the bravery, commitment, and sacrifice of the soldiers who fought then, regardless of their motivation,” thereby divorcing Civil War soldiers from their own feelings and beliefs. This creates a schism between the image of the soldiers as the bearers of virtue and the actual persons who can hold a complex set of ideals and values. This seems to suggest that the purpose of reenacting is to

⁴⁰ “About the N-SSA, North-South Skirmish Association,” <http://www.n-ssa.org/about-nssa>, accessed July 9, 2019.

associate a certain set of virtues with Confederate soldiers while diminishing the causes and consequences of their actions. The reenactor then acts as the new orator of the history of the war, with their enthusiasm and focus on authenticity granting them an air of authority. They become the lens through which the war is viewed.⁴¹

While reenacting as an organized hobby gained momentum in the 1960s and 70s, it was in the late 1980s and early 1990s that Civil War reenactment even more growth. In 1986, *Time* Magazine estimated that there were 50,000 Civil War reenactors around the country. The 125th anniversary of the Battle of Gettysburg was estimated to draw around 2 million people, up from the average of 1.4 million. This increase parallels the release of several major TV documentaries

⁴¹ It is customary for Civil War reenactors to organize themselves along the lines of historical military units. To this end they tend to style themselves in rank and grade to those they represent. I shall include their given rank in quotations to indicate that these are not proper commissions, and yet still represent the image they are attempting to portray. Gerald Todd, “1st Maine Cavalry: Half a Century of Living History,” [mainecav.org](http://www.mainecav.org), accessed July 10, 2019, <http://www.mainecav.org/>; “A Civil War Reenactment Unit Based In Indianapolis, Indiana,” 4th Virginia Infantry, Co. I “The Liberty Hall Volunteers,” accessed July 10, 2019, <http://www.4thvirginia.com/index2.php>; “Join,” 4th Virginia Infantry, accessed July 10, 2019, <http://www.4thvirginia.com/join.php>; “Private” Steve Arnold, “A Living History Opportunity: The 4th Virginia Way,” *The Drumbeat*, accessed July 10, 2019, <http://www.4thvirginia.com/publications/drumbeat/0110/index.php>; “Captain” Richard K. Harding, “Looking to 2012,” *The Drumbeat*, accessed July 10, 2019, <http://www.4thvirginia.com/publications/drumbeat/1211/index.php>.

and films regarding the Civil War. The use of visual media works well in tandem with reenacting. The combination of historically accurate costuming combined with a moving narrative makes the distinction between the presentation and the actual events difficult to distinguish. Ken Burns' PBS series *The Civil War*, along with popular movies such as *Glory*, *Gettysburg*, and *Gods and Generals* inspired a new generation of Civil War enthusiasm. *The Civil War* was an 11-hour documentary created by Ken Burns and broadcast by PBS in 1990. First seen by an estimated 14 million viewers, by its conclusion that figure had nearly tripled. It combined historical photographs with narration by Civil War historians and quotations from numerous contemporary sources. The film *Glory* depicted the creation and engagement of the 54th Massachusetts Regiment, one of the earliest African American units created in the wake of the Emancipation Proclamation. *Gettysburg*, adapted from Michael Shaara's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel *Killer Angels*, depicted the bloodiest battle of the Civil War in four hours of screen time. These screen depictions, along with the publication of James McPherson's widely acclaimed *Battle Cry of Freedom* (1988) and the 135th anniversary of the Battle of Gettysburg in 1998 created a renewed public connection to the Civil War. In an interview with African American reenactor Bernard George, Macy Freeman asserts that the movie *Glory* inspired a new wave of African Americans to reenact U.S. Colored Troops. The movies' heroic depictions combined with a drive to reassert African Americans' role in history exemplify the interaction between artistic representation and historical reproduction.⁴²

⁴²John Skow, "Bang, Bang! You're History, Buddy," *Time* (August 11, 1986): 58; David Morris, "Battle Anniversary Begins with Parade," *Associated Press*, May 28, 1988, apnews.com, accessed February 5, 2020, <https://apnews.com/63a478c1626e49d2ae642f245eb75091>; Hadden,

These artistic presentations of history still carried on some of the older legacies and interpretations that had been traditionally a part of Civil War history. *Gettysburg* and *God and Generals* (its 2003 prequel, based upon a novel by Jeffrey Shaara, son of the deceased Michael Shaara), both depict Union and Confederate soldiers as noble characters fighting for admirable values. They focus on the personal connections between many officers on both sides and the tragedy of having to come to blows. The issue of slavery is mentioned, but pushed to the side, and rarely becomes central to the struggle. *Gods and Generals* portrays southern leaders as sympathetic, stoic, and honorable with little connection to the peculiar institution of slavery. Their cause is rather one of family, home, and land, which compelled them to fight for things

Reliving the Civil War: A Reenactor's Handbook; Gabor S. Boritt, "Ken Burns' Civil War," *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies* 58, no. 3 (July 1991), 212-221 ; Drew Jubera, "Gettysburg: Ted Turner, a cast of thousands and the ghosts of the past," *The Baltimore Sun*, accessed July 16, 2019, <https://www.baltimoresun.com/news/bs-xpm-1993-10-09-1993282122-story.html> ; Allen C. Guelzo, "Keep Civil War Reenactment Coming: Opinion," Penn Live, accessed July 16, 2019, <https://www.pennlive.com/opinion/2019/03/keep-civil-war-re-enacting-coming.html> ; Mitchell D. Strauss, "A Framework for Assessing Military Dress Authenticity in Civil War Reenacting," *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal* 19, no. 4 (September 2001), 146-147; Macy L. Freeman, "Civil War Reenactor Keeps History of U.S. Colored Troops Alive: African Americans relive their role," *AARP Bulletin*, October 26, 2011, aarp.org, accessed February 5, 2020, <https://www.aarp.org/politics-society/history/info-10-2011/civil-war-reenactor-bernard-george.html>.

which are dear to them. Thus, both movies carry on the narrative that the Civil War was a tragic misunderstanding; a conflict between two equally admirable yet distinct societies inevitably drawn into regrettable bloodshed. Furthermore, these films not only inspired more interest in the Civil War and reenacting, but their battle scenes involved hundreds of reenactors, whose participation suggests both an eagerness to portray Civil War soldiers, and the desire to share their fervor with the general public. This meeting of aims allows the films to maintain an air of historical accuracy while at the same time perpetuating the myths that have contributed to reenactors' understanding of history. Ken Burns' documentary *The Civil War*, while initially putting the issue of slavery in the foreground and addressing the institution's horrors, then focuses mainly on the war itself with its myriad sufferings. Confederate leaders and soldiers are praised for their bravery and sacrifice. The music and still photography evoke images of horror and death, but also sadness and sympathy. Both Union and Confederate soldiers are seen in an honorable light, struggling for their homes and beliefs. Critics, however, charge that it avoids questions of moral culpability for the war and instead inspires compassion for both sides, regardless of cause.⁴³

⁴³ Stephen Holden, "Film Review: Gory, Glory Hallelujah: Not Just Whistlin' 'Dixie!'," *The New York Times*, February 21, 2003, accessed July 17, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2003/02/21/movies/film-review-gory-glory-hallelujah-not-just-whistlin-dixie.html>; Patrick Brown, "Gods and Generals: A Lament," *Historical Digression*, February 23, 2012, accessed July 17, 2019, <https://historicaldigression.com/2012/02/23/gods-and-generals-a-lament/>; Greg Caggiano, "'Gods and Generals' Extra Discusses his Filmmaking Experience," *Caggiano's Corner*, February 9, 2011, accessed July 17, 2019,

A similar ethical equivalency can often be found amongst Civil War reenactors. Waverly Adcock, a member of the Sons of the Confederacy and the West Augusta Guard, asserts that “If everybody was ‘equally’ guilty of slavery, then fighting for the Confederacy can’t be about slavery. The war can’t be about slavery. The [Confederate] flag can’t be about slavery.” His point about the nation as a whole benefitting from and therefore being responsible for the institution of slavery is valid, yet the issue here is his claim that the Confederacy did not fight for slavery. Even those who recognize the controversy involved in using Confederate symbols insist that it is an integral part of replicating historical Confederate culture. Chris Ackerman, a manager at Regimental Quartermaster in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, protests that, “Bottom line, this flag is about heritage, not hate,” he said. “But if this symbol is successfully toppled, what’s next?” There is a feeling that to remove symbols of the Confederacy would be to remove the reality of its political and cultural reality from the fabric of U.S. history. The central issue that is overlooked, however, is the numerous state declarations of secession in which Confederate states explicitly identified the threat to slavery as the primary grievance that demanded leaving the country. The issue of slavery had dogged the United States even from the formation of its Constitution with its 3/5ths Compromise and Fugitive Slave Clause. From the Missouri Compromise, through the Mexican American War and Bleeding Kansas, arguments over the

<https://gcaggiano.wordpress.com/2011/02/09/gods-and-generals-extra-discusses-his-filming-experience/>; *The Civil War (1990) s01e01 Episode Script*, “The Cause,” Ken Burns, *The Civil War*, 1990, accessed July 17, 2019, https://www.springfieldspringfield.co.uk/view_episode_scripts.php?tv-show=the-civil-war-1990&episode=s01e01.

spread and propriety of slavery had only grown more heated as the decades passed. The very trigger for secession, again in the states' own declarations, named the election of Lincoln and the potential threat to their "peculiar institution" posed by abolitionists as the immediate cause for breaking away. South Carolina, the first state to secede, feared that once Lincoln and the Republican Party come into power, "The guaranties of the Constitution will then no longer exist; the equal rights of the States will be lost. The slaveholding States will no longer have the power of self-government, or self-protection, and the Federal Government will have become their enemy." Likewise, Texas abhorred the abolitionist idea that Africans could exist alongside white Americans. Its Declaration of Causes proclaimed: "We hold as undeniable truths that the governments of the various States, and of the confederacy itself, were established exclusively by the white race, for themselves and their posterity; that the African race had no agency in their establishment." In a similar vein, Georgia's Declaration of Secession recorded that "For twenty years past the abolitionists and their allies in the Northern States have been engaged in constant efforts to subvert our institutions and to excite insurrection and servile war among us." Although each Southern soldier may not have fought for slavery, the preservation and expansion of slavery was the primary motivation for the formation of the Confederate States of America. Any attempt to circumvent this reality only diminishes the historical context as to the motivations and goals of the South during the war, and the overall legacy of its defeat.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Jesse Dukes, "Confederate Reenactors Take Pride in their Southern Heritage, but They Struggle with the Centrality of Slavery and Racism to the Confederacy," *Lost Causes*, *VQR A National Journal of Literature & Discussion*, Summer 2014, accessed July 17, 2019, <https://www.vqronline.org/reporting-articles/2014/06/lost-causes>; "Civil war re-enactors on the

This legacy of fighting for slavery has resulted in the decline in Civil War reenacting in the first decades of the 21st century. The 155th anniversary of the Battle of Gettysburg, for example, hosted an estimated 6,000 reenactors, down from the 30,000 reenactors and 50,000 spectators seen at the 135th anniversary in 1998. While the event is still popular, reenactors and vendors are noticing that the general age of participants is growing older with fewer young adults participating in reenacting. Louis Varnell, operator of a military memorabilia store near Chickamauga, Tennessee, notes that he used to have numerous competitors but by 2019 he now is the only one remaining. Younger people are seemingly less drawn to the hobby for several reasons. First the expense and complexity of assembling all the correct gear easily reaches into the thousands of dollars. A more likely issue is the increasing discomfort with glorifying the Confederacy as controversy over the Confederate battle flag and monuments rises in intensity.

Confederate flag: 'It's complicated,'" *The Guardian*, June 28, 2015, theguardian.com, accessed February 5, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2015/jun/28/confederate-flag-civil-war-re-enactors>; Confederate States of America - Declaration of the Immediate Causes Which Induce and Justify the Secession of South Carolina from the Federal Union, December 24, 2860, *The Avalon Project: Document in Law, History, and Diplomacy*, accessed July 18, 2019, https://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th_century/csa_scarsec.asp; Declaration of Causes: February 2, 1861: A Declaration of the Causes which Impel the State of Texas to Secede from the Federal Union, Texas State Library and Archives Commission, accessed July 18, 2019, <https://www.tsl.texas.gov/ref/abouttx/secession/2feb1861.html>; Georgia Declaration of Secession, January 29, 1861, The Civil War Home Page, accessed July 18, 2019, http://www.civil-war.net/pages/georgia_declaration.asp.

The most infamous was the protest that occurred in Charlottesville, Virginia in August 2017, during which a woman was killed during clashes between those who wished to remove a statue of Robert E. Lee and a gathering of white supremacists who opposed them. This violence has cemented the association between memorializing the Confederacy and the legacy of white supremacy in the United States. The inescapable centrality of the slavery question makes romanticizing the South increasingly difficult. The intensity has become so acute that several events, such as the 2020 Gettysburg reenactment, had to be cancelled, and reenactors have begun to question their role regarding the ethical questions surrounding the Confederacy. The nation has begun to reevaluate how it looks at the Civil War's legacy, moving from a sense of mutual misunderstanding and empathy, to a desire to hold the South morally accountable for its actions and refusing to separate the men who fought from their larger cause. Other historians, including Keith S. Bohannon, William C. Davis, and Peter S. Carmichael argue that interest in the Civil War is in fact growing, but the over-commercialization of reenactment events has given way to smaller, more personal experiences that capture the broader dynamics of the war. This reveals that the public attitude towards commemorating the Civil War is bound to the larger national narrative about the meaning of the war and the responsibility for the conflict.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Related to the question of the seeming decline of Civil War reenacting is the general shift in cultural communities in the United States as a whole. Robert Putnam discuss this at length in *Bowling Alone*. He describes the general decline of social activity communities in the United States since the 1990s. With advent of the internet and other forms of digital communication, he notes that Americans have reshaped their communities based on virtual sharing rather than in-person interaction. Doubtlessly, the overall decline in community

participation would significantly impact membership in reenacting units. Furthermore, the dissemination of information by the internet provides the public with a wider variety of historical information that can be compared to that which reenactors provide. This would in turn stoke the controversy between commemorating the Confederacy and the legacy of slavery; Robert D Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000); Bryn Stole, “The Decline of the Civil War Re-enactor: The 155th Anniversary Gettysburg Re-enactment was a Snapshot of a Hobby with Dwindling Ranks,” *The New York Times*, July 28, 2018, accessed July 22, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/28/style/civil-war-reenactments.html>; Cameron McWhirter, “Civil War Battlefields Lose Ground as Tourist Draws: As Recent Events Change how Visitors see Confederate Imagery, Sites Work to Broaden the Audience,” *The Wall Street Journal*, May 25, 2019, accessed July 22, 2019, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/civil-war-battlefields-lose-ground-as-tourist-draws-11558776600>; Glenn W. LaFantasie, “The foolishness of Civil War reenactors: A historian grapples with the right -- and wrong -- ways to commemorate a war that should horrify all of us,” Salon.com, May 8, 2011, accessed July 22, 2019, https://www.salon.com/2011/05/08/civil_war_sesquicentennial/; Hiawatha Bray, “Civil War Reenactors are in the Line of fire,” *The Boston Globe*, September 25, 2017, accessed July 22, 2019, <https://www.bostonglobe.com/business/2017/09/25/civil-war-buffs-line-fire/eesm3oKdVwyzocX0bZwNmL/story.html> ; Warren Christian and Jack Christian, “The Monuments Must Go: Reflecting on Opportunities for Campus Conversations,” *South: A Scholarly Journal* 50, no. 1 (Fall 2017): 47-56; Mariana Veloso, “Gettysburg Anniversary Committee doesn't plan on hosting Civil War reenactment in 2020,” *Hanover Evening Sun*,

Civil War reenacting is an outgrowth of the war and the way it has been remembered. Soon after the war ended, Southerners began to memorialize fallen soldiers with public spectacle and celebration. These festivities helped solidify the “Lost Cause” mythos by closely binding Southern communities with glorified heroes. In the early 20th century, the nation took to commemorating Civil War battles by having veterans reenact their struggle. These became regular performances that reconciled the former adversaries by recasting the struggle in moral equivalency. In the 1950s and 1960s, however, the confluence of the civil rights movement and the war’s centennial led many to question the assumption that both sides had been right. Nevertheless, films and documentaries in the late-1980s and 1990s reinvigorated interest in the Civil War and spurred many to join the ranks of reenactment units. By the end of the second decade of the 21st century, the dissonance between honoring the Confederacy and opposing slavery had come to the fore. Given that Southern soldiers fought to preserve slavery, whether or not they owned any themselves, they also shared in the moral condemnation associated with the institution. Furthermore, since Confederate symbols, memorials, and celebrations reinforced political violence and degradation of African Americans throughout the subsequent centuries they cannot be divorced from their roots and exonerated. They were given meaning by generations of commemoration and those meanings have endured to this day. While reenactors

September 4, 2019, [eveningsun.com](https://www.eveningsun.com), accessed February 5, 2020,

<https://www.eveningsun.com/story/news/2019/09/04/gettysburg-civil-war-reenactment-wont-returning-157th-year/2208244001/>; Dana B. Shoaf, “Is Civil War History Losing Ground?”

history.net, accessed February 5, 2020, <https://www.historynet.com/is-civil-war-history-losing-ground.htm>.

rarely openly support or condone the Confederacy's motives, they face the impossibly contradictory task of striving for authenticity while at the same time turning a blind eye to integral aspects of the war that they find distasteful.⁴⁶

Partaking in reenacting allows people to connect with values and qualities they wish to experience in their own lives. As these values change, so does the appropriateness of reenacting come under greater scrutiny. The growing controversies in the early 21st century over the propriety of memorializing Confederate leaders has contributed to the general decline in participation in reenactment events. Thus, Civil War reenactment has been closely tied to the way the Civil War has been remembered. The glorification of soldiers and leaders has come into conflict with overall goals of the Confederacy. Since slavery lay at the core of secession, the South cannot escape its centrality to the remembrance of its soldiers. Reenactment therefore embodies and expresses the narrative its members wish to convey to their audience. As critiques grow over the memory of the Confederacy, so do critiques of honoring its supporters. Reenactors have sought to divide the celebration of individuals from celebration of the defense of slavery, but since slavery provides the essential context for the war, such a division grossly distorts the reality they so badly seek to recapture.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Andrea Tinning, "Civil War Battle Rises Again in East Texas," Reporting Texas, May 6, 2019, accessed July 25, 2019, <https://reportingtexas.com/civil-war-battle-rises-again-in-east-texas/>.

⁴⁷ Sarah Sloat, "The Strange, Sustaining Power of Civil War Reenactments, With 200,000 People Expected to flock to Gettysburg for the 150th Anniversary of the Battle, Civil War Reenactments still Appear to be going Strong," Pacific Standard, July 3, 2013, accessed July 24,

CHAPTER TWO: LIVING HISTORY AND AUTHENTICITY

It is important to investigate the organizations that host reenactors to understand how the craft is practiced. One way to do this is by looking into their unit websites. Reenactors typically organize and style themselves according to historical military units and ranks. They do this to create an authentic impression of being soldiers. By modelling themselves on historical units, they can place themselves into a concrete persona and create a connection between themselves and Civil War soldiers. As of December 2019, there were approximately 250 Civil War unit websites, which serve as important windows into understanding how reenactors see themselves. The internet provides a means by which reenactors can express their enjoyment, methods, and goals of their hobby. Reenactor websites tend to have several common features. They usually contain a unit history. There are often pictures of their events, as well as scheduling for future events. The sites typically also have some section describing who they are and why they reenact, as well as contact information for those interested in joining. Websites allow the general public to get to know the purposes and methods of reenacting. As such, unit websites provide a direct point of contact between the public and the reenactors. Examinations of these reveal not only how reenactors see themselves, but also the ways they want to be seen by others.

Admittedly, websites are not entirely transparent. Since they serve as a public face of the unit, they only portray those elements of their hobby that reenactors wish to be observed. The personal thoughts and disputes within the unit are hidden from the general viewer, and they can

2019, <https://psmag.com/social-justice/the-strange-sustaining-power-of-civil-war-reenactments-61902> .

mask any troubles that might arise within their ranks. Furthermore, they do not typically supply statistical data as to their numbers, their income, or the location of their members. The units are portrayed rather than the individuals who comprise them. Only a few sites have discussion forums (which would allow some insight into the opinions of the members), but such forums often fall into disuse. Even the location of the unit and its members can be confusing; while many units portray a historical regiment from the general region of their homes, there is no necessary connection between the two. For example, the 69th Pennsylvania Volunteer Infantry Regiment operates out of Southern California. Similarly, the 10th Virginia Company “B” is in Pennsylvania and has members from the surrounding states of Delaware, New Jersey, and Maryland. There is (or was) also a 4th Texas Volunteer regiment that is based in the United Kingdom. This means that the name of regiment does not necessarily reflect the geographic or perhaps even cultural milieu in which the reenactors are located. However, it does suggest that the interest in certain historical units reaches far beyond their local demographic and can attract the attention of peoples beyond their historical region.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ 69th Pennsylvania Volunteer Infantry Regiment, Facebook.com, Accessed September 4, 2019, https://www.facebook.com/pg/69thPVIcal/about/?ref=page_internal ; 10th Virginia Company "B", “Welcome to the Home of the Rockingham Rifles,” b10va.com, Accessed September 4, 2019, <http://www.b10va.com/index.html> ; 4th Texas Volunteers, “A Regiment Within The American Civil War Society,” texasbrigade.jigsy.com, Accessed September 4, 2019, <http://www.texasbrigade.jigsy.com> ; The 4th Texas Volunteers have not updated their website since 2012, therefore there is no way to be sure whether or not there are still operating, but since the website exists it can be assumed that the unit once existed.

Furthermore, websites can fall into disuse. Of the nearly 250 units found at least twenty-five are dead sites, meaning they have no content whatsoever and are gone. Others, such as the aforementioned 4th Texas, the 9th New York Cavalry, and the 1st North Carolina Volunteers, have not been updated in years. This could suggest that the units have become defunct or that they simply no longer maintain their internet presence. Nonetheless, even as websites on their own cannot speak to the internal workings of a reenactment unit, they can serve as an outlet for members to explain themselves to the public. Even if the site is no longer active, its mere presence remains a testament to what was once a functioning reenactment cadre. Websites, therefore, can be useful tools to investigate the nature and purpose behind Civil War reenacting, provided that the relative advantages and disadvantages are accounted for.⁴⁹

Such an investigation can be done by reading the language of reenacting websites. Reenactors often write and talk to one another as fellow practitioners of a craft. A common set of terminology has thus arisen that shapes their self-understanding. One of the most pervasive phrases is that of “living historian” or “living history” to describe the ultimate purpose of Civil War reenactment. These terms are meant to elevate them above simple hobbyists and provide a mission to teach and carry on the legacy of the Civil War into contemporary times. As the 7th Tennessee put it: “we participate in living histories, parades and battle scenarios throughout New

⁴⁹ 9th New York Cavalry, “To Arms! To Preserve the Union! Recruits Needed!,” web.archive.org, Accessed September 4, 2019, <https://web.archive.org/web/20170412120210/http://www.9thnycavalry.webeditor.com/> ; 1st NC Volunteers 11th NC Troops, web.archive.org, Accessed September 4, 2019, <https://web.archive.org/web/20160309121801/http://the11thnc.com/> .

England and beyond. Our mission is to present a visual and educational perspective of a civil war confederate infantry unit.” Likewise, Battery A of the Ohio Statehouse claims: “Battery A exists to serve the State of Ohio and its citizens by being accomplished living history educators and the best Civil War artillery unit in the United States.” In a similar vein the 8th Kentucky Infantry proclaims: “We are Living Historians and some members are civil war reenactors. We live as our ancestors did in order to teach others the history of the past.” This linking of reenacting with education reflects their advocacy of living history and gives the hobby a greater social purpose to act as an educational tool, which in turn provides justification for the time and money poured into the effort. The fact that numerous units use these terms in relation to their hobby is a testament to how important it is to reenactors.⁵⁰

This raises the question, what is living history, and how does it differ from other forms of history? More traditional sources of history include static portrayals, such as letters, diaries, government documents, advertisements, newspapers, and other written or visual media. To extract their connection with their original authors, a certain level of imagination is required to visualize and analyze the motives, actions, and consequences of historical persons. Living history involves dressing up in period-appropriate clothing, adopting the mannerisms of the

⁵⁰ 7th Tennessee Co. D, The Harris Rifles, “Welcome to the home of the 7th Tennessee, Co. D Infantry!,” 7thtennessee.com, Accessed September 16, 2019, <https://www.7thtennessee.com/>; Ohio Statehouse, “Battery A”, ohiostatehouse.org, Accessed September 16, 2019 <http://ohiostatehouse.org/museum/battery-a>; 8th Kentucky Infantry, “C.S.A & U.S. Living Historians & Civil War Reenactors,” [the8thkentuckyinfantry.org](http://www.the8thkentuckyinfantry.org), Accessed September 16, 2019, <http://www.the8thkentuckyinfantry.org/>.

historical character, and providing a concrete model for audiences to experience. As the 3rd Iowa Cavalry phrases, it:

A Living Historian is an amateur historian who interprets and teaches in a whole new way. As a living historian, you become that soldier or civilian, a time traveler so to speak. And as you go through the day to day activities as they would have done back then, you teach with the 5 senses: sight, sound, touch, smell, and taste. Which can leave a haunting impression of life during the Civil War, upon those who experience it at an event.

The combination of physical experience with intellectual presentation can be an excellent means of conveying information about past events in a manner that resonates with those who otherwise might not be inclined to read multiple academic volumes on a subject. Author Gerry Kohler writes of her experience of using a living history performance to teach about the life of John Brown, noting that students keenly remember information about her performances years after they witness them. Her ability to embody the subject of her presentation allows her students to see the subject as a person with complex thoughts and actions. In her advice on how perform living history, she stresses that teachers are morally bound to provide multiple perspectives of the subject so the audience can formulate their personal interpretation of events. For Kohler, historical accuracy is intimately tied up in the complexity of people; by showing nuance in her depiction of John Brown she seeks to avoid imposing a singular judgment of him upon her students. Authenticity therefore for her is to be found in bringing forth the multifaceted subject and allowing the audience to perform the act of interpretation.⁵¹

⁵¹ 3rd Iowa Cavalry Reenactors Inc., “I Want to be in the Cavalry,”

3rdiowacavalryreenactorsinc.com accessed October 2, 2019,

A distinct view of living history can be found in Kristen Whissel's examination of "Buffalo Bill's Wild West" show, hosted by William F. Cody. These performances portrayed the western United States as an exciting, mythical land where brave pioneers battled Indians and the elements to bring civilization to the wilderness. Whissel sees Cody's performances not as "recreations but reductions of complex events into 'typical scenes.'" The Buffalo Bill Show mixed melodrama and myth with performance, so "that those who will can see actual pictures of life in the West, brought to the East for the inspection and education of the public." Like Kohler, Cody framed his reenactments in the objective of education, bringing far away peoples and places into the present for the edification of the audience. Whissel shows that Cody's use of dynamic action "captured and preserved past events through ritualistic repetition." She also demonstrates that Cody utilized melodrama and mythology to paint a romantic picture for his audience. Thus, the show had already done the work of interpretation, which it then portrayed as fact.⁵²

Gerry Kohler's depiction of John Brown and William Cody's presentation of the "Wild West" are examples of some of the tensions found within living history and reenactments. The presentation of a historical subject through representations of their speech, clothing, actions, and manners creates a bond between the observer and the observed. This puts moral weight on how

<http://www.3rdiowacavalryreenactorsinc.com/>; Gerry Kohler, "Becoming John Brown: Living History in the Classroom," *OAH Magazine of History* 25, no 2 (April 2011) 52, 54.

⁵² Kristen Whissel, "Placing the Spectator on the Scene of History: The Battle Re-enactment at the Turn of the Century, from Buffalo Bill's Wild West to the Early Cinema," *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 22, no. 3 (August 2002) 227, 228.

the portrayal is conducted. The reenactors must choose what aspects of the subject to display and how it will be conducted. In doing so, they either consciously or unconsciously prioritize what they want their audience to learn. In Kohler's case she depicts John Brown as a complex man whose actions can only be judged by looking at them through numerous points of view. Cody, on the other hand, attempted to generate income by giving the onlookers an exciting show. Authenticity for him was that they encountered a sense of romance and danger that he wanted them to feel. Civil War reenactors find themselves in a similar situation; they are compelled to select what aspects of soldiers' lives they want their audience to learn about, while thereby also unwittingly selecting other aspects to hide.

In order to understand what is shown and what is hidden it is necessary to survey what aspects of Civil War soldiery are prominent among reenactors. The 2nd Minnesota Battery of Light Artillery post that they reenact so that observers are able to "Step back through time to learn what Minnesota soldiers and their families experienced during the Civil War." They wish to act as a bridge through time that allows the present to experience the past. The 3rd Regiment, Co. "G," Georgia Volunteer Infantry, state that they "recreate the war between the states to teach and inform spectators, to lose ourselves in the time, and to share the comradery of the members of our unit." Likewise, the 6th South Carolina Volunteers declare, "It is the intent of the regiments members to present to the general public a historically accurate depiction of the life of the common soldier and civilian of the period from 1861 to 1865 both Confederate and Union." This common theme of education and recreation runs throughout many of the reenactors' websites. Orienting themselves towards teaching the public grants them a social purpose that elevates them above simple enthusiasts.

A few units claim a more distinctive purpose. The 1st Stuart Horse Artillery says that part of its mission is “To promote Southern history, its symbols, and preserve the honor of the Confederate soldier,” thereby echoing the memorials to the Lost Cause in previous decades. In a similar vein the Liberty Greys website posits an uncited quote from Confederate General Patrick Cleburne which warns: “our youth will be trained by Northern school teachers; learn from Northern school books THEIR version of the war; and taught to regard our gallant dead as traitors and our maimed veterans as fit subjects of derision.” Such a straightforward statement suggests that the unit wishes to provide a counter-narrative to the notion that the Confederacy’s actions were treasonous and motivated by the profits derived from slavery. Not to be outdone, the Palmetto Partisan Rangers style themselves as “an unreconstructed, Christian, confederate reenacting group whose purpose is to honour [sic] our confederate ancestors and the cause which they gave so much.”⁵³

⁵³ Second Minnesota Battery of Light Artillery Reenactors, “About,” Facebook.com, Accessed September 17, 2019, https://www.facebook.com/pg/Second-Minnesota-Battery-of-Light-Artillery-Reenactors-371220336239/about/?ref=page_internal ; Co. “G”, 3rd Regiment, Georgia Volunteer Infantry, “Confederate Light Guards,” 3gvi.org, Accessed September 18, 2019, <http://www.3gvi.org/> ; Sixth South Carolina Volunteers, “About the 6th South Carolina Volunteers,” 6thregimentsc.org, Accessed September 18, 2019, <https://www.6thregimentsc.org/about-us> ; 1st Stuart Horse Artillery, “Mission Statement,” 1stsha.com, Accessed September 18, 2019, <http://www.1stsha.com/> ; The Liberty Greys, 6th Regiment, 1st Division, ANV, “Any Fate but Submission!” libertygreys.org, Accessed

This open endorsement of the Confederate cause is not commonly found on reenactment websites. However, it does raise the question that if reenactment in general seeks to honor the memory of Civil War soldiers (the South included), then they should be honoring both causes by association. The political and social causes of the war undergirded the soldiers' bravery and commitment. Living history suggests that the present-day reenactor brings the past into the present by using those elements that are deemed worthy of remembrance. This in turn means that the reenactors must judge which of those elements are valuable, and which can be forgotten. They become interpreters of history, though they rarely acknowledge the extent to which they are filters of history.⁵⁴

The tension between the historical subject and the reenactor can be seen as a tension between the living historian and the academic historian. The scholar is free to investigate multiple perspectives of a subject and present it as text. The audience for a historian's work is often other historians (or students). The living historian with its colorful theatrics and grand display has more direct contact with a broader population and can create a deeper impression. Both are interpreters of history, who choose what to discuss and what to leave behind. Yet the

September 18, 2019, <http://www.libertygreys.org/>; Palmetto Partisan Rangers, "Welcome to Our Website," palmettopartisanrangers.webs.com, Accessed September 18, 2019, <https://palmettopartisanrangersorg.webs.com/>.

⁵⁴ McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades: Why Men Fought in the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press 1997), 21-22, 92-93, 98-99.

more scholarly approach is less restricted by public sentiment and propriety and can delve into those areas of an era that might be more distasteful to a general audience.

In order to understand how reenactment units, interpret “living history,” they can be contrasted with more academic historians to see where they differ. Noted Civil War historian James McPherson professes in an interview that historians were “the custodians of a people's sense of identity.” As such, they shape and preserve the collective memory of a society. He notes that: “one job of the historian is to try to cut through some of those myths and get closer to some kind of reality.” Acknowledging that there can be multiple perspectives for historical events historians, nevertheless, have a responsibility to ground memory in fact. Myths tend to simplify complex narratives into narrow stories that convey moral and cultural meaning. The use of primary sources and historical records reintroduces the intricacy of human lives and the difficult moral quandaries that they faced. Peter S. Carmichael goes a step further when discussing his book, *The War for the Common Soldier*. He asserts: “I became concerned about the methodology used to recover the motivations of the rank-and-file. The persistent problem, as I saw it, was the cherry-picking of quotes from soldier writings. This contributed to a static view of volunteers as men who acted upon beliefs in a fairly predictable manner.” Historians tend to concern themselves with the works of other historians as well as primary sources. As a result, the selection of sources can

result in an overly narrow picture of historical subjects that blur the dynamics behind their choices and actions.⁵⁵

In contrast, reenactors desire to convey the moral significance of their subjects by grounding them in moral and material terms. The 11th Pennsylvania Volunteer Infantry Co. K wants members to take “you back in time to a period when life was made up of ideals.” It does so through the sights, smells, and sounds of a Civil War soldier’s life. For them the sensory impact of reenacting allows member to experience life in a different era, connecting them to the past. Likewise, the 37th Ohio Volunteer Infantry Regiment wants their audience to believe that “we slept, ate, drilled, fought using civil war tactics, and wore the wool uniforms; just like the soldiers who fought during the Civil War.” Once again it is the physical and material aspect of the soldiers they aim to portray, in the process connecting to the viewer with the past based on their dress and mannerisms. In a similar vein, the 18th Virginia Infantry Co. E seeks authenticity through “dress, grooming, equipment and conduct.” This common refrain from reenactment units shows the linkage between their view of historical authenticity and the material, sensual dynamics of their craft. Yet missing are elements soldier’s personal

⁵⁵ David Walsh, “An exchange With a Civil War Historian,” June 19, 2995, wsws.org, accessed February 10, 2020, <https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/1999/05/mcp2-m19.html>; Niels Eichhorn, “ Author Interview--Peter Carmichael (War for the Common Soldier) ½,” February 4, 2019, networks.h-net.org, accessed February 10, 2020, <https://networks.h-net.org/node/4113/discussions/3610293/author-interview-peter-carmichael-war-common-soldier-12>;

lives, behaviors, and ideologies. While some of this is shown through reenactor's performances, they fail to recreate the entire past.⁵⁶

Since reenactors focus on the men who were present in the camps and thus endured the suffering of soldiering, this leaves a certain class of men unrepresented: the deserter. Desertion was a widespread problem for both sides during the Civil War. Joseph Glatthaar, author of *General Lee's Army: From Victory to Collapse*, calculates that roughly one of every seven soldiers in Robert E. Lee's vaunted Army of Northern Virginia deserted. Peter Berman, in "Desertion as Localism: Army Unit Solidarity and Group Norms in the U.S. Civil War," argues that desertion was a major component in the Confederacy's defeat. He points out that from the start of the war Confederate authorities noticed desertion as a significant problem. Not only did soldiers abandon their units, but sometimes they became protesters and resisters who actively challenged the authority of their respective governments. Motivations for desertion were varied. In the South, for example, divisions between wealthy planter families and poorer farmers created an uneven intensity in devotion to the Confederate cause. A person could be exempted from conscription if they owned twenty or more slaves. This antagonized people from differing social classes and regions leading to a perception that lower class southerners were fighting for the

⁵⁶ 11th Pennsylvania Volunteer Infantry Co. K, "Civil War Reenacting," 11thpvi.org, Accessed September 23, 2019, <http://www.11thpvi.org/civilwarreenacting.html> ; 37th Ohio Volunteer Reenacting Unit, "Our Reenacting Unit," angelfire.com, Accessed September 23, 2019, <http://www.angelfire.com/oh4/81stOVI/> ; 18th Virginia Regiment Company E, "Welcome to the Home of the Black Eagle Rifles," blackeaglerifles.com, Accessed September 23, 2019, <http://www.blackeaglerifles.com/home> .

profit of planters. In fact, the possible motivations for desertion were wide ranging and often depended on the particular situation of the regiment involved. Disease, homesickness, military setbacks, poor leadership, inferior equipment, to sheer boredom could induce soldiers to abandon their unit. Individual motivations, commitment, and enthusiasm could wax and wane from unit to unit as the progress of the war unfolded.⁵⁷

Such a disparity in zeal is rarely represented by reenactment units. The 21st Virginia Infantry Co. F honors soldiers because of their “unselfish sacrifices and incredible deeds of valor,” suggesting that they see Civil War soldiers as having a singular mind to fight for their homes. The reenactors look up to those they portray as models of virtue. Likewise, the 23rd Regiment of Infantry, Virginia Volunteers, had on their site the phrase “Look into their eyes and you will know them: Images of the real men.” This casts the soldiers in the light of true, heroic masculinity, suggesting that this was a time of heroes, unflinching in a time of need. On a lighter

⁵⁷ Joseph Glatthaar, *General Lee's Army: From Victory to Collapse* (New York, Free Press), 2008, 409; Peter Berman, “Desertion as Localism: Army Unit Solidarity and Group Norm in the U.S. Civil War,” *Social Forces* 70, no. 2 (December 1991), 323; Victoria E. Bynum, *The Free State of Jones: Mississippi's Longest Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press 2003); Robert M. Sandow, *Deserter Country: Civil War Opposition in the Pennsylvania Appalachians*, (New York, Fordham University Press) May 2009; Katherine A. Giuffre, “First in Flight: Desertion as Politics in the North Carolina Confederate Army,” *Social Science History* 21, no. 2 (Summer, 1997) 248-249; Bob Sterling, “Discouragement, Weariness, and War Politics: Desertions from Illinois Regiments during the Civil War,” *Illinois Historical Journal* 82, no. 4 (Winter, 1989): 245-253.

note, the 97th Pennsylvania Volunteer Infantry calls people to join them saying that they are “preserving the memory of the participants of the Civil War, we do it with a sense of fun and camaraderie.” Such examples suggest that reenacting is enjoyable because it allows reenactors to embody people who, in their minds, are paragons of heroism. In turn, the communal celebration of these historical figures and events creates an enjoyable atmosphere of fellowship and common interest. It would be reasonable that reenactors find their hobby entertaining and interesting; the question is whether such an attitude can accurately portray the complex web of motivations, personalities, and ideologies that existed among the three million men who fought in the war. Whether participating out of a sense of amusement or commemorating the bravery of the dead, they gloss over not only the hardship of the soldiers, but the fact that many of them abandoned their posts. Because of this neglect, they cannot capture the myriad motivations found in men of that period. While it may be impractical to represent the men who left the camps and thus avoided the fighting, it would be impossible to achieve historical accuracy without mentioning or describing the very real disenchantment with the war.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ 21st Virginia Infantry Co. F, “So none are forgotten: In remembrance of the men who served in F Company, 21st Virginia Infantry 1861-1865,” 21vafco.org, Accessed September 27, 2019, <http://www.21vafco.org/NoneAreForgotten.html> ; 23rd Regiment of Infantry, Virginia Volunteers, “Companies A-K,” web.archive.org, Accessed September 27, 2019, <https://web.archive.org/web/20160920091908/http://23rdva.netfirms.com/welcome.htm> ; 97th Pennsylvania Volunteer Infantry, “About,” 97thpvi.com, Accessed September 27, 2019, <http://www.97thpvi.com/about.html> .

The desire to honor fallen soldiers lends itself to idealizing and glamorizing the lives of the dead. This brings up another aspect of soldiers' lives: their quest to fulfill sexual desires. Prostitution, venereal disease, and pornography can be very difficult subjects to discuss even in contemporary settings. They can be completely hidden when applying them to people whose lives are being honored. Since reenactments involve numerous people performing in public, the role of sex in a soldier's life is impossible to appropriately portray. An often-found phrase within reenacting websites is "family oriented." The 3rd Minnesota, for example, proclaims that they: "believe in family values and promote family involvement." The 19th Virginia Co. C "emphasizes family values, authenticity, and inspiration. that encourages an ongoing participation in historically accurate education, not only for our members but also the general public." Combining family values with authenticity and inspiration thus serves as a singular lens with which to view soldiers of that period. An interview with Norma Holley, a 71-year-old resident of Tyler, Texas, member of the United Daughters of the Confederacy and the Texas Society Order of Confederate Rose, and reenactor, said that "there are wonderful families involved in re-enactments, which teach children family values. The kids get a much better ... education of what the world was like, what it is like and what values they need to work on in their life." Thus, the notion of being family orientated and teaching family values involves allowing woman and child to participate in reenacting, as well as revealing that the unit promotes and follows certain values that are deemed suitable for children and a general audience.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ Third Minnesota, "Reenacting with the Third Minnesota," [thirdminnesota.com](http://www.thirdminnesota.com), Accessed September 27, 2019, <http://www.thirdminnesota.com/AboutUs.html> ; 19th Virginia Co. C, "About Us," 19thvirginiacoc.org, Accessed September 27, 2019,

Sadly, there is a problem with assigning these values to the historical reality of the Civil War era. During this time the numbers of brothels and prostitute, primarily in the major cities, exploded. Venereal disease became a significant issue for the health and effectiveness of soldiers. Richmond, for example, was overrun with prostitutes who went from being shunned to walking about in daylight. Far from supporting family values, the war, according to one recruit, “was the most damnable curse that ever was brung [sic] upon the human family.” While women, including wives and family, did accompany the armies, this did not stymie the bawdiness of soldiers’ behavior. Another soldier told his wife, “don’t never come here as long as you can cee p [sic] away for you will smell hell here.” A soldier’s camp was a menagerie of people cooking, drilling, gambling, gossiping, reading, and indulging their more physical needs. Not exactly the family friendly environment that a living history event presents. Another, somewhat odder tale is that of the steamship *Idahoe*. In July of 1863 Lt. Colonel George Spalding rounded up numerous prostitutes throughout Nashville, Tennessee, and loaded them on the *Idahoe* in order to stem the contagion of venereal disease. He shipped north to Louisville, Kentucky, which refused to let them disembark. It then proceeded to Cincinnati, Ohio, and other points further north without success; they were eventually forced to return to Nashville. The inability to remove prostitutes from the city led Union Army leaders to establish licensed brothels and provide medical screenings. The complaint and effort directed towards prostitutes demonstrates how

<http://www.19thvirginiacoc.org/page3.html> ; Kelly Gooch, “Battle Day: Re-enactors bring Civil War back to life,” *Tyler Morning Telegraph*, tylerpaper.com, March 22, 2014, accessed September 27, 2019, https://tylerpaper.com/news/local/battle-day-re-enactors-bring-civil-war-back-to-life/article_4e6f26d3-91b9-5a9f-963b-ed9f1ab06219.html .

commonplace their presence was. Nevertheless, given the family-oriented nature of historical reenacting, one would be hard pressed to find a unit willing to recreate that spectacle. Condoms and other form of contraception and abortifacients were similarly known and used. Sheepskin condoms were seized in the mail, abortion-inducing herbs such as cottonroot, seaweed, and snakeroot, and ergot were advertised in newspapers and sold in pharmacies. Again, not a topic a contemporary family-friendly organization would be comfortable explaining to an audience.⁶⁰

Related to the issue of prostitution and venereal disease is the extensive pornographic and erotic literature that circulated the army camps. Judith Giesberg's *Sex and the Civil War: Soldiers, Pornography and the Making of American Morality* illustrates that the circulation of erotic picture and literature became a distinct source of anxiety for Northern authorities. She quotes Colonel Lafayette Baker, the man tasked with watching for vice in Washington D.C., asserting that "the vile book, photograph, and wood-cut, were scattered by sutlers, mail agents, and others, throughout the army." So serious was the problem that Giesberg recounts the court-martial of Colonel Ebenezer Peirce for conduct unbecoming an officer for having consorted with prostitutes and possession of erotic literature. Her presentation of his trial exposes how widely popular pornographic books and suggestive songs were distributed throughout army camps. The presence of pornography and other types of sexual materials reveals that Civil War soldiers were

⁶⁰Clinton, *Public Women & the Confederacy*, 14-16, 17, 20; James Boyd Jones Jr., "A Tale of Two Cities: The Hidden Battle against Venereal Disease in Civil War Nashville and Memphis," *Civil War History* 31, no 3 (September 1985): 271-274; Thomas P. Lowry, *The Story the Soldiers Wouldn't Tell: Sex in the Civil War* (Mechanicsburg: Stackpole Books, 1994), 94-98.

not beholden to abstract ideals, but like all men past and present possessed sexual desires and the means necessary to satisfy them. Yet, when surveying unit websites, the subject of pornography is, not surprisingly, nowhere to be found.⁶¹

It would be unreasonable for reenactors to present such explicit subjects to a general audience due to the presence of children and those who might find the subject distasteful. The real issues here are the idealization of past soldiers, which transforms them into objects upon whom the people of the present can project their values, and how authentic reenactors truly want to be. Men in the 1860s had sexual appetites. Yet, reenacting tends to esteem these soldiers as possessing collective bravery and unblemished character, harkening back to the commemorations following the war. Given the spectacle and solemnities surrounding the honoring of Southern soldiers, it is easy to see why they would be cast in such a glorious hue. The canonization of Civil War soldiers was in part caused by its linkage with the Lost Cause. The South wanted to maintain its nobility in the face of defeat and cast onto its veterans the embodiment of all that was admirable. The continued celebration by the entire nation further cemented the legacy of the dead in the popular mind. Reenactors carry on this legacy, even if not to openly celebrate the Confederacy in particular, but in their desire to commemorate the Civil War they obscure the humanity of their subjects in order to see in them the nobility they (the reenactors) want to experience. Thus, reenacting can unintentionally run counter to its intended purpose. Rather than providing an accurate picture of what men were like 1860s, they instead impose an image of what contemporary viewers would prefer to see. It is not their uniforms or

⁶¹ Judith Giesberg, *Sex and the Civil War: Soldiers, Pornography, and the Making of American Morality*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 26, 33-42.

mannerisms that are unauthentic, but that soldiers were more than their uniforms. Their personal interests, needs, and motivations are an essential component of human life.

The political and social causes of the war are likewise obscured by the efforts of reenactors. When the Southern states seceded from the Union, they explicitly did so to protect their right to own slaves. The rise of the Republican Party and the election of Abraham Lincoln convinced them that the northern states would conspire to eventually end the institution of slavery and destroy southern society. Secession was thereby an act of self-defense to preserve those political, social, and economic structures that constituted southern life. Therefore, it would seem necessary that to authentically portray Civil War era soldiers these larger political and social beliefs must be reflected. What one finds, however is summed up nicely by the 6th Regiment of Florida Volunteer Infantry: “We do not tolerate any organization or individual that advocates the overthrow of the government of the United States of America or discriminates FOR ANY REASON against our fellow man.” Given the current cultural climate this would be nothing unusual. Reenactors practice their craft out of a love of history and enjoyment of the experience, they are not motivated to cause political strife or turn away people from their hobby. The problem is the people they are portraying fought the war for the explicit purpose of overthrowing the authority of the U.S. government and discriminating against fellow men. As the 35th Virginia Cavalry puts it: “As a Confederate unit we are honoring the memories of those who fought and died for what they believed in.” Yet immediately after this they proclaim, “Our unit is about history - not hatred!” This is a seeming contradiction, for the Confederacy quite explicitly, fought to maintain the institution of slavery and was willing to fight and die for this issue. By ignoring the issues of the period reenactors protect themselves from the accusation that they are advocating the Confederate cause. While that might be the conscious motivation of the actors,

how authentic can they be if they fail to portray the ideology that caused secession in the first place? ⁶²

These differences could be bridged by examining the intricate web of motivations that kept soldiers going. James McPherson catalogs these in his work *For Cause and Comrades: Why Men Fought in the Civil War*. He surveys numerous factors that drove soldiers to enlist, fight, and remain with their armies throughout four years of savage fighting. Causes ranged from notions of duty and honor in which men were expected to uphold values of bravery and heroism. The members of a soldier's unit formed another major component of endurance as they formed bonds through struggle that became almost a new family to them. Also included are the goals of preserving the Union, fighting for one's home, alongside abolishing and preserving slavery. In regard to abolitionism, McPherson points out that most Union soldiers did not fight for racial equality or the end of slavery, though as the war progressed many did see the need to destroy the institution in order to win the war. It follows, then, that, reenacting Union soldiers fighting against the immorality of slavery would be just as much of an anachronism as ignoring the role of slavery in the South. While reenactors do portray the concepts of honor, brotherhood, and home, they still eschew the political and social elements of the war. All of these motivations served as fuel for the war to achieve a genuine understanding of the past and all of them need to

⁶² 6th Regiment of Florida Volunteer Infantry, Company H, the 'Union Rebels', "Home," unionrebels.com, accessed September 30, 2019, <http://www.unionrebels.com/>; 35th Virginia Cavalry, "Company A – White's Battalion," 35thvirginiacavalry.com, accessed October 2, 2019, <http://www.35thvirginiacavalry.com/index.html>

be portrayed. Reenacting must address these more distasteful attitudes as well as the noble ones to provide a more accurate memory of Civil War soldiers.⁶³

Reenactors' websites provide an opportunity to gain a sense of how Civil War reenactment units see themselves and wish to be seen by the general public. Given the accessibility of the internet any person wishing to find their sites can do so. Reenactors thus seek to attract those who might be inclined to join their work. While they all do not give detailed insight into the workings of the units, they do express what they want to be heard. With the focus on practicing living history they seek to portray the lives and values of Civil War era soldiers. They focus on the material aspects of the soldier's lives (i.e. the weapons, clothing, and manners they possessed) to create an emotional connection and empathy between the historical subject and the contemporary audience. Websites, like reenacting itself, both reveal and hide; they allow the public to view those aspects of the subject that they are most proud of and which they believe would cause others to be attracted to their hobby. On the other hand, they conceal those personal ideas and beliefs that might be controversial to contemporary society, and thereby fail to tell their whole story.

There are, of course, discrepancies between reenactors and academic historians. Issues such as desertion, sexuality, political causes, and individual motivation complicate the notion that Civil War soldiers had uniform values and beliefs. Rather than being singular examples of heroism and virtue, soldiers had a variety of needs and desires that they tried to achieve; and even these changed as the course of the war played out. Therefore, the tension between the historical subject and the contemporary portrayal is one of simplicity versus complexity. The

⁶³ McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades*, 18, 25, 85-86, 110-113, 117-120.

multi-faceted nature of Civil War soldiers, particularly in the South, was never a feature of the post-war commemorations. Instead, their memory provided moral and political justification for the Confederacy's actions which in turn validated the continued resistance to Reconstruction and racial equality. The soldiers became templates on which later generations could impose their ideals and thus become heroic exemplars to be emulated rather than investigated. Reenacting continues this canonization in a similar vein. Portraying battles and army maneuvers allows them to feel excitement and connection to events and people. This has educational value and places the audience into a relatively authentic simulation of selected historical events in camp and field. However, there are always those portions of life that remain obscured, some such as sexuality out of practicality, but other such as desertion or racism out of a desire to keep soldiers on their heroic pedestals. So even though reenactors maintain high levels of authenticity in certain areas of the Civil War, they avoid the more unpleasant, but more realistic, realities of the men they seek to portray.

CHAPTER THREE: REENACTORS, COSTUMES, AND STAGE

It is in the material culture of the Civil War that reenactors seek authenticity. What is worn, where it takes place, and who looks the part are all integral to creating that connection with the past. They undertake great effort to match the weapons, uniforms, organization, and mannerisms of Civil War soldiers. To understand how physical appearance is integrated into public performance, the methods of reenacting must be investigated. First, there is the equipment, the guns, uniforms, camping gear, musical instruments, and numerous other paraphernalia are some of the most sought-after items among avid reenactors. Historic dress allows the participant to put on a character and embody the historical subject. Whole industries have arisen in order to make replicas as accurate as possible. The sensory experience of seeing muskets, hearing cannons, and smelling gunpowder transports the audience out of the present and connects them with the past. Secondly there is the setting of the performance-- the historical battlefields and monuments connect action with remembrance. The location and type of the reenactment can produce differing effects on both the participant and audience. Furthermore, there is the question of who participates. Generally speaking, Civil War reenactment is dominated by white American males. While there are African American units, and roles for women are provided by many reenactment units, the core of the production is generally a white masculine sphere in which it is difficult to embrace a wider set of participants.

The cornerstone to proper Civil War reenactment is authentic gear. Wearing the proper uniforms, carrying the proper weaponry, speaking the proper language, and carrying oneself in the proper demeanor unites and drives the entire hobby. It has created an entire terminology to describe those who have fallen short of authenticity --the dreaded Farb! A farb (or farby) refers to someone participating in a reenactment event using improper gear and/or conducting themselves

in a manner unbecoming of a historical representative. According to “Historically Speaking,” a website and blog dedicated to historical reenactments (including a much wider array of time periods than the Civil War), calling someone a farb is the worst possible insult that can be levied at a reenactor. Farbery implies more than inaccurate clothing, but includes laziness, carelessness, and disrespect towards the historical subjects and fellow reenactors. While it is difficult for a new reenactor to immediately acquire an entire set of gear, the community expects that they will quickly. These feelings are seconded by Blake Stilwell, a journalist and former combat photographer, who posits that “The farb is someone who wants the glory of the job without putting in the work. It’s a judgmental term, one that, when used, ensures that the farb knows he’s not just factually wrong, but he’s also morally wrong.”⁶⁴

Stilwell’s comment hints at the deeper purpose of historical reenactment as not just education, but commemoration. To skimp on the historical accuracy suggests a disregard for the efforts of the soldiers being represented. The website, *Civil War Reenactments and their role in Commemorations*, clearly delineates between classes of reenactors. First are the Farbs, who contain a mixture of the historical and the modern. Second are the Mainstreams, who maintain a thoroughly authentic appearance, at least when they are performing. This seems to be the

⁶⁴ Wilson Freeman, “Ask A Reenactor: What’s a Farb?,” *Historically Speaking: The Life and Times of a Historical Reenactor*, May 7, 2011, accessed October 14, 2019, <http://historicallyspeaking.driftingfocus.com/2011/05/07/ask-a-reenactor-whats-a-farb/> ; Blake Stilwell, “Civil War re-enactors have their own POG-level slang,” *We are The Mighty*, August 10, 2018, accessed October 14, 2019, <https://www.wearethemighty.com/military-culture/civil-war-reenactors-farbs> ;

standard for reenactment--projecting authenticity but not going to extreme lengths. Then there are the hardcore, also known as Progressives, who take reenacting to its limits. Not only do they strive for accuracy in their clothing, but also in their speech, habits, and diets. They will partake in era appropriate diets to obtain the physical form of the Civil War soldier, count the stitches in their hand-sewn uniforms, and only speak in era-appropriate dialogue. Some truly hardcore reenactors even avoid public events, preferring to march and camp on their own time. The division between reenactors comes from a combination of practicality and passion. Hand stitching clothing is expensive and time consuming. Yet, there is considerable disdain for those who cannot or will not go to the lengths needed to be properly authentic.⁶⁵

Why would people go to extremes to pretend to be someone from 150 years ago? The blog “Passion for the Past: Thoughts and Social History for the Living Historian”, produced by a reenactor going by the name “Historical Ken” has this to say:

Authentic. This is the key word. You should carefully consider every object before allowing it to become part of your site. It's this type of vigilance that maintains the appropriate period appearance for each and every one of us. Every object should tell a part of the story. Nothing should be there by accident, and nothing is there that shouldn't support the overall story. If you do this correctly, the signs of the modern world become non-existent. . . This, my friends, is what I consider real living history. This is giving the visitor the impression that they have stepped into the past.

⁶⁵“Reenactment Terms,” *Civil War Reenactments and their Role in Commemoration*, accessed October 16, 2019, <https://fyecreenacments.wordpress.com/reenactmentterms/> ;

“Extreme Reenacting,” *Passion for the Past: Thoughts and Social History for the Living Historian*, Historical Ken, passionforthepast.blogspot.com, May 16, 2012, accessed October 21, 2019, <http://passionforthepast.blogspot.com/2012/05/extreme-reenacting.html> .

Historical Ken posits that authentic reenactment allows the viewer to leave the present and experience the past. The greater the authenticity, the thinner the barrier between the now and the then. D.A. Saguto, writing on a blog aimed at reenacting Colonial Williamsburg, presents an insight into such motivations: There is an element of escapism involved in dressing up like dead people, and playing make-believe, escapism in which J. R. R. Tolkien, author of *Lord of the Rings*, saw “an attempt to figure a different reality and found emancipation.” Thus, the drive for authenticity allows the participant to live in a different world from the one they normally do. This suggests that reenactment goes beyond honoring the past to a desire to live in the past. That reenactors can engage his or her time, imagination, and energy into act means that the historical personage becomes a sort of second self, an identity that the reenactor freely chooses to be. Rory Turner reveals that allure of authenticity in “Bloodless Battles: The Civil War Reenacted:”

Reenactors acquire the paraphernalia of reenacting, making it part of their individual or unit identity. This identity is a “play” identity, but in the curious inversion of leisure culture, play identity can count more than “real” identity. The play identity transforms the reenactor into someone else- a Civil War-period personage- and at the same time someone more fully himself: a creative individual freely engaging in a personally meaningful activity. In a world where even the most stimulating economic roles can fail to respond to what Marx called “species being” . . . our human capacity for engaged experience, it remains for us to use leisure to pick up the slack. Reenacting is a fruitful response to this problem -the problem of boredom.

Turner suggests that reenacting offers people the means to be a different person. The personality selected is freely chosen in contrast to the one developed, often involuntarily, over one’s lifetime. This means that authenticity serves a dual purpose. First, it allows reenactors to continue the legacy of performance as a means of honoring and commemorating Civil War soldiers. Attention to material detail becomes a sign of personal dedication to the task of remembrance, whereas farbs, with their haphazard accoutrements, suggest that reenacting is not

a meaningful effort, and that the persons represented are merely a character performed for attention. Authenticity also draws both the audience and the reenactor into a different world. Reenactors experience a different world, with a culture and manner distinct from the present. Hardcore participants are able to escape on a deeper level and leave the modern world behind. The farbish amateur, on the other hand, keeps one foot in the past and one in the present, breaking the immersion. Fidelity to the material world of the Civil War provides the means to live a different life. The degree to which the reenactor does this, combined with the elements they elect to portray, creates a deeper connection between the reenactors and the historical subject. Contemporary actors are thus honoring Civil War soldiers by trying to *be* them physically and psychically.⁶⁶

An excellent presentation of these dynamics can be found in Tony Horwitz's *Confederates in the Attic: Dispatches from the Unfinished Civil War*, in which he embarks on a tour of the South and participates in the memorialization of the Civil War through reenactment and ritual. His survey of the South during the 1990s reveals the devotion that reenactors have towards the people they represent. Horwitz's very first experience puts him in contact with the

⁶⁶ "We Take Our Fun Seriously," *Passion for the Past*, March 11, 2012, accessed October 21, 2019, <http://passionforthepast.blogspot.com/2012/03/we-take-our-fun-seriously.html> ; D.A. Saguto, "Reflections on Reenacting: Seeking an Authentic Past in a Specious Present", Colonial Williamsburg: That the Future may Learn from the Past, history.org. (Winter 2011), accessed October 21, 2019, <https://www.history.org/Foundation/journal/Winter11/reenacting.cfm> ; Rory Turner, "Bloodless Battles: The Civil War Reenacted," *TDR: The Drama Review* 34, no. 4 (Winter, 1990) 126;

hardcore/farb distinction, meeting men who soaked their buttons in urine, ate hardtack and salt pork, and even despised the word reenactor (preferring living historian). The deep attachment formed by such devoted participants provides a sense of vicarious worth. One reenactor, Robert Lee Hodge, in explaining his admiration for Confederate General Thomas “Stonewall” Jackson, noted, “He wasn’t stable. That’s attractive to me. . . Plus the fact that he always won. I may be a loser but at least I was born on the same day as a winner.” His admiration for Confederate soldiers in general and General Jackson in particular demonstrates that by surrounding himself with Confederate trapping he participates in the honor that they are shown. Hodge’s personal value is joined with the value of the Confederacy. Furthermore, Hodge and other reenactors express their disgust at contemporary attempts to replace or commercialize “sacred” battlefields. His expresses his admiration for the Blue Ridge Mountains, as well as his distaste towards Disney’s attempts to lay claim to central Virginia, by stating that “It TKOs you, this one-two punch of history and landscape. You don’t get that in Ohio, or almost any place outside Virginia.” The spaces that mark the historical presence and activities produce an almost religious awe. Horwitz’s journey reinforces the personal connection between reenactors and their historical subjects. Participating in mock battles allows the reenactor to participate in the perceived glory and heroism of those so honored. The ritualistic memorialization of the Civil War in the decades after it lionized the soldiers and transformed them into heroes to be emulated. Dressing up in their period costume allows the reenactor to don a second skin of sorts that allows

them to be a different person and gain a sense of glory otherwise absent in contemporary society.⁶⁷

To meet the demand for replicas of Civil War-era gear, a cottage industry has arisen. Such businesses are referred to as sutlers, a term used to describe civilian merchants who followed nineteenth century armies to sell wares to the soldiers. They would often set up just beyond the military camp and provide all manner of goods and services. With the development of Civil War reenactment, and in particular, the growth of the internet, sutlers are the central means for one to enter the reenacting lifestyle. One such business, The Regimental Quartermaster, provides an excellent example of the range of goods offered by sutlers. Not only do they sell rifles and infantry uniforms, but also artillery equipment, cavalry spurs, musical instruments, canteens, blankets, even forks and knives. Sutlers such as C&C Sutlery offer writing quills and game boards for Fox and Geese. According to their websites, Regimental Quartermaster was incorporated in 1984, while C&C Sutlery has been in business since 1976. These dates reveal that by the 1970s and 1980s Civil War reenacting had grown to the size sufficient to merit accompanying commercial ventures.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ Tony Horwitz, *Confederates in the Attic: Dispatches from the Unfinished Civil War*, (New York Vintage Publishing, 1998), 7-10, 233, 218,

⁶⁸ The Regimental Quartermaster: Supplying the Troops for Over 50 Years, “Shop,” regqtm.com, accessed October 23, 2019, <https://regqtm.com/>; C&C Sutlery: Your One-Stop Source for Civil War Reenactment Supplies, “Civil War Personal Items,” ccsutlery.com, Regimental Quartermaster, “Our Founder”, accessed October 23, 2019,

While the soldier's equipment is vital to reenacting, the setting of the activity also plays a major role connecting the hobbyist with the historical subject. The epicenters of living history are located at the major battlefields of the Civil War. Gettysburg is the largest such event, but other sites such as Manassas, Virginia, Sharpsburg, Maryland, and Vicksburg, Mississippi. One of the largest recorded, was the 135th anniversary of the Battle of Gettysburg (1998), involved 30,000 reenactors and 50,000 spectators. These National Military Parks grew up alongside the development of the Lost Cause mythos. The first four battlefields were founded in the 1890s: Chickamauga and Chattanooga in 1890, Shiloh in 1894, Gettysburg in 1895, and Vicksburg in 1899. During this time something of reconciliation had developed between the North and South regarding the war. Both sides had come to see that they both had justifiable causes for the war and concluded that it was really the result of divergent economies and cultures rather than the preservation of slavery. During this time meetings of veterans and other visitors wanting to come together became routine:

A contemporary observer enumerating the reunions that occurred between 1881 and 1887 was able to list twenty-four more prominent, formal ones. The twenty-fifth anniversary of the battle of Gettysburg in 1888 was marked by a particularly moving reunion. The dedication of the Chickamauga and Chattanooga National Park in 1896 was an even more impressive national observance presided over by Vice President Adlai Stevenson [Sr.]. It lasted several days, during which eminent Northerners and Southerners alike joined in eloquent pleas for understanding and brotherhood. Such national gatherings reflected the very great need deeply felt in the 1890s, to further reestablishment of national unity, in part by a national program of historic preservation of the tragic battlefields of the war.

<https://regtqm.com/history/>; C&C Sutlery, "About Us," accessed October 23, 2019,

<https://www.ccsutlery.com/store/about-us.html>;

The creation of National Battlefields and the joint commemoration of the Civil War developed alongside each other. This also suggests that they would have developed with the same purposes: to honor the veterans, remember the dead, and reconcile the two halves of the nation.⁶⁹

The combination of reenactment and historical parks is mutually beneficial. Reenactors can put themselves into the mindsets of their historical subjects with greater ease when they can see and interact with the very landscape upon which the battles took place. These battlegrounds become a place of pilgrimage that allows hobbyists and tourists alike to honor and remember those who fought in the past. The ground became associated with authenticity just as much as the clothing and equipment. In return living historians provide a dynamic presence to the static parks, increasing their popularity as tourist destinations. Reenactors act as educators, giving meaning to the artifacts and signposts that visitors see. The reenactors draw in visitors to the National Parks, while the locations provide context and material authenticity to reenactors.⁷⁰

The parks also act as a sort of bellwether to the state of the reenacting hobby. As reenacting grew in popularity, the parks could plan larger events to showcase the mock battles. They also demonstrate the recent decline in reenactment participation. According to the *Evening*

⁶⁹ Ronald F. Lee, “The First Battlefield Parks, 1890-1899,” *The Origin & Evolution of the National Military Park Idea*, nps.gov, 1973, accessed November 6, 2019, https://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/online_books/history_military/nmpidea5.htm .

⁷⁰ Bryn Stole, “The Decline of the Civil War Re-enactor: The 155th anniversary Gettysburg Re-enactment was a Snapshot of a Hobby with Dwindling Ranks,” *New York Times*, July 28, 2018, accessed November 6, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/28/style/civil-war-reenactments.html> .

Sun, the Gettysburg Anniversary Committee does not plan on having a reenactment event for 2020, citing an aging demographic in the reenactment community and a lack of films relating to the Civil War, such as *Gettysburg* or *Glory*, to drive interest in these events. More recent generations have also raised questions regarding the honoring of Confederate soldiers and the use of Confederate emblems. Cameron McWhirter of the *Wall Street Journal* reports, “Data from the National Park Service shows that its five major Civil War battlefield parks drew 3.1 million visitors in 2018, down from about 10.2 million in 1970. Gettysburg, the best-known battle site, had about 950,000 visitors last year; that was 14% of its draw in 1970 and the fewest visitors since 1959.” As public debate surrounding the commemoration of the Confederacy becomes more heated, it causes discomfort to see people waving Confederate flags or cheering on Confederate generals. This in turn suggests that Civil War reenactment involves more than a hobby or playing soldier; its rise and decline is bound by the desire to commemorate or condemn the South. The uncomfortableness of Civil War reenacting comes into relief when discussing the demographics of participants, for race and gender play major factors into both the composition and meaning of reenacting. Given that the roots of reenactment lay with the memorialization and celebration of Confederate soldiers, white men dominate the reenactment community. Since the historical subjects represented are, by a large margin, white men, there is little surprise that the majority of reenactors are men.⁷¹

⁷¹ Mariana Voloso, “Gettysburg Anniversary Committee doesn't plan on hosting civil war reenactment in 2020,” *Evening Sun*, September 4, 2019, accessed November 6, 2019, <https://www.eveningsun.com/story/news/2019/09/04/gettysburg-civil-war-reenactment-wont-returning-157th-year/2208244001/>; Cameron McWhirter, “Civil War Battlefields Lose Ground

The deeper issue of Civil War reenactment and its portrayal of the Confederate cause creates tension between reenactors and black audiences. There are African American Civil War reenactors and units such as the 5th US Colored Troops Company G, the 2nd Infantry Regiment USCT, and the 54th Massachusetts. Similar to their white counterparts, black reenactment units strive to authentically portray soldiers of the Civil War. Their distinction becomes more apparent in what they intend to honor about their historical subjects. The Confederacy fought to leave the United States in order to preserve their political and economic power through enslaved Africans. Union soldiers, particularly at the beginning of the war, fought mainly to preserve the Union and reestablish the authority of the Constitution over the South. While in the latter years of the war the destruction of slavery increasingly became a war aim, it was primarily motivated as a means to harm the Southern economy and hasten the end of the conflict. The formation of black Union regiments did not start until the Emancipation Proclamation went into effect on January 1, 1863. Those African Americans joined to destroy slavery and bring freedom to the millions of people still in bondage. Therefore, African American reenactors are honoring the efforts of those who sought to end slavery and thus are reenacting a cause that they personally benefit from. In contrast, white reenactors, particularly Southerners, are honoring soldiers who ultimately lost the war and are thereby honoring their efforts despite the ultimate results.⁷²

as Tourist Draws,” *Wall Street Journal*, May 25, 2019, accessed November 7, 2019, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/civil-war-battlefields-lose-ground-as-tourist-draws-11558776600>

⁷² 5th United States Colored Troops Company G, “American Civil War Reenacting Unit,” 5thusct.net, accessed November 8, 2019, <http://www.5thusct.net/>; 2nd Infantry Regiment United States Colored Troops Living History Association, “About Us,” the2ndusctlha.org,

The discrepancy between the historical causes of the war and the legacy perpetuated by reenactors comes into focus when discussing the issue of race, slavery, and honoring the Confederacy. Modern Civil War reenactment was born in the 1960s in the wake of the 100th anniversary of the war and in the midst of the African American civil rights movement. Just as black Americans were challenging Jim Crow legislation and fighting to end racial segregation, the reenactment hobby sprung up to commemorate and honor the memory of the Civil War, including the Confederates who fought to keep blacks enslaved. The legacy of the Lost Cause myth, combined with the challenges to white supremacy brought out by the civil rights movement, motivated some white Southerners to reinforce their beliefs in the righteousness of the Confederate cause. The connection between reenactment and white supremacy has been brought increasing to light by contemporary black journalists like Wilbert L. Cooper, who visited a reenactment site with Abdullah Saeed, a Muslim American, and Martina de Alba, a Spanish immigrant. On assignment from *Vice* magazine, they interacted with Civil War reenactors to provide an inside look as to their racial undertones. In his report Cooper notes:

Every time there was a lull in the action, I heard people saying off-the-wall shit—that slavery wasn't that bad for blacks, that enslaved blacks weren't brutalized, that enslaved blacks loved the Confederacy so much they fought for it in the South's "integrated" military... When I heard this last bit, I knew we had to get out of there. The producers had wanted us to spend the night at the reenactment camp, but there

accessed November 8, 2019, <http://www.the2ndusctha.org/> ; 54th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry Regiment Company B, “About Us,” 54thmass.org, accessed November 8, 2019, <http://www.54thmass.org/our-organization/> .

was no way I was sleeping in a place where people legitimately believed that a large number of enslaved blacks willfully supported their own bondage.⁷³

In order to romanticize the South, reenactors must fit their historical subjects into ideologically palatable forms. Thus, they rationalize that slavery was not as harsh as reported and that enslaved blacks willingly enlisted to fight for the Confederacy. The last section, about black Confederate soldiers, has become one of the most pernicious myths still circulating throughout public circles. Historian Kevin M. Levin reports that in order to cope with defeat, Southerners painted a rosy picture of grateful slaves, cheerfully supporting their white masters during the war. While it is true that black slaves did assist the Confederate Army, it was mostly as manual laborers and attendants. There was a desperate movement at the end of the war to enlist slaves into the army, but the Confederacy collapsed before this could become as substantial reality. Andrea Tinning places the clash between Civil War memory into full view, reporting that Billy “Hollywood” Groves, a black civil rights activist from East Texas, argued that the Confederacy was a rebellion with the objective of preserving slavery, a sentiment echoed by Levin. In response, Marshall Davis, speaking for the Sons of Confederate Veterans, claims that “The War Between the States was a battle of who gets to run the South: the South or Washington, D.C.” Davis’ response moves the conversation away from the ethically problematic stance of defending slavery, to a morally acceptable issue of fighting against government intrusion. While not reenactors themselves, both Groves and Davis are members of organizations that have interest in

⁷³ Wilbert L. Cooper, “What I Learned as a Black Man Traveling Through the Terrifying Heart of America,” *Vice*, August 14, 2016, accessed November 11, 2019, https://www.vice.com/en_au/article/qbn8gw/wilbert-cooper-vice-does-america-trump.

the meaning of the Civil War. Their conflicting views echo the greater clash of interpretations surrounding Civil War reenacting. The author, Tinning, then refers to Texas' Ordinance of Secession, which clearly identified its chief complaint against the Union as being the government's demand for the "abolition of negro slavery." Thus, Davis is not wrong when he says that Texas was fighting against Northern control, but ignores that which Texas wanted to preserve and the United States wanted to limit (and eventually abolish).⁷⁴

The refusal of reenactors to address this glaring issue calls into question their credential as objective educators. While it is true that most Confederate soldiers did not own slaves and that most Union soldiers did not believe in racial equality, to ignore the fundamental controversy seriously undermines the authenticity of reenactors. Their response tends to accuse those opposing them of narrow-mindedness and an unwillingness to consider their side. Perhaps reflecting the essential conservatism of many reenactors, South Carolina State Senator Glenn McConnell responded to a NAACP protest of a South Carolina ball by saying, "And you don't have to like something, just tolerate it. Political correctness is almost now the new narrow-mindedness." White Southerners –and many reenactors-- are seeking to connect with and celebrate what they see as their culture, heritage, and legacy, which in turn creates a

⁷⁴ Kevin M. Levin, *Searching for Black Confederates: The Civil War's Most Persistent Myth* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2019), 6; John Coski, "Myths & Misunderstandings: Black Confederates," *The American Civil War Museum*, accessed November 11, 2019, <https://acwm.org/blog/myths-misunderstandings-black-confederates> ; Andrea Tinning, "Civil War Battle Rises Again in East Texas," *Reporting Texas*, May 6, 2019, accessed November 11, 2019, <https://reportingtexas.com/civil-war-battle-rises-again-in-east-texas/> .

defensiveness against those criticizing Civil War memorials. Reenactors' defenses of the Confederacy have caused them, in the minds of critics, to become associated with Southern racism and neo-Confederate attitudes. While such attitudes are not an explicit aim of reenacting, it remains an underlying problem requiring the disassociation of the reenactor with the historical subject, something difficult given the methodology of reenactors.⁷⁵

The racial dynamic of Civil War reenacting is only one of several issues surrounding its sociological demographic. Gender and the attitudes towards the participation of women and the harboring of sexist attitudes is another troubling problem. Given that the vast majority of Civil War soldiers were men, the typical Civil War reenactor is also a man. Reenactment units frequently provide spaces for women to participate in era-normal functions such as cooking, cleaning, medical care, and attending balls [but not prostitutes]. As described by one hobbyist in "How to Get Started as a Lady Civil War Reenactor," once a person locates a unit with civilian reenactors, then they must create their costume. The general advice is learning how to hand-sew (lest you be a farb!) a hoop skirt. Another, Civilwarlady.net, provides handsewn skirts, ballgowns, and accessories for women wanting to partake in remembrances for Civil War events. The Gettysburg Remembrance Tea, held on November 23, 2019, combined military and civilian dress into one living history program. These sites exemplify the role women play in reenactment companies: allowed to participate, but according to the conventions of the 1860s. For those seeking authenticity this is entirely reasonable, for part of the charm of reenactment is to clothe

⁷⁵ Melissa Block, "150 Years Later, America's Civil War Still Divides," npr.org, April 8, 2011, accessed November 11, 2019, <https://www.npr.org/2011/04/08/135219146/150-years-later-americas-civil-war-still-divides>

oneself in the life and times of a historical subject. The social role of women during that time was largely domestic, and so one would expect to find female reenactors directed at these activities.⁷⁶

There were, however, many women during the Civil War who went beyond domestic duties and fought alongside men. Typically, they would cut their hair, don men's clothing, and pass themselves off with an alias. The number of women fighting as soldiers is open to debate, but the general estimates are at least four hundred with some speculating up to a thousand. Some reenactors who portray these women have themselves stirred up controversy. One of the most important was Lauren Cook Wike, who in 1989 was barred from Antietam National Park for reenacting as a male soldier. She eventually sued the Park for discrimination, and in winning set the precedent for women reactors. J.R. Hardman, a reenactress (her term) and filmmaker, has been a Civil War enthusiast from her youth and had also taken it upon herself to reenact as a soldier. She too has met with skepticism, even being labelled an anachronism, by those believing her presence to be a result of political correctness rather than historical accuracy.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Sarah Lynn, "How to Get Started as a Lady Civil War Reenactor," hobbylark.com, October 20, 2019, accessed November 12, 2019, <https://hobbylark.com/fandoms/How-to-Get-Started-as-a-Lady-Civil-War-Reenactor> ; Joy Melcher, "Welcome to CivilWarLady.net," civilwarlady.net, accessed November 12, 2019, <https://www.civilwarlady.net/> .

⁷⁷ DeAnne Blanton, and Lauren Cook Wike, *They Fought Like Demons: Women Soldiers in the American Civil War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2002), 6-7; J.R. Hardman, "On the Problem of Bathrooms," reenactress.com, July 30, 2015, accessed November 13, 2019, <https://www.reenactress.com/blog/tag/bathrooms> ; Linton Weeks, "The Battles Of A

Part of the discomfort displayed towards Wike and Hardman stem from the role of Civil War reenactment as a masculine preserve. In *The Gentlemen and the Roughs: Violence, Honor, and Manhood in the Union Army*, Lorien Foote identifies masculinity as one of the great motivators for soldiers during the Civil War, in terms of both performing masculinity and defining it in public and private settings. Masculinity was divided on class lines; officers drawn from more well-to-do families often maintained a sense of emotional restraint and sensibility, whereas the “roughs” (lower-class soldiers) used violence and common suffering to bond with each other. Participation in the war was not only motivated by a masculine sense of honor but helped define and solidify what it was to be a man, with resulting differences often arising from class consciousness.⁷⁸

Civil War reenactment provides an opportunity to indulge in idealized masculinity by creating a local society bound by a sense of shared struggle, honor, and suffering. As historian Stephen J. Hunt recounts, when asked in a survey of the American Civil War Society about their motives for reenacting, the Union contingent provided these responses

“To preserve the Union of course”; “I’m a patriot . . .”; “I believe that constitutional government is worth fighting for”; “to free the slaves . . . Those who enslave others can’t be free themselves”; and “for me, it’s all about fighting for justice and what democracy is all about.”

Civil War Re-Enactress,” npr.org, June 9, 2015, accessed November 13, 2019,

<https://www.npr.org/sections/npr-history-dept/2015/06/09/412209979/the-battles-of-a-civil-war-re-enactress> ; J. R. Hardman, “Is Being Female an Anachronism?,” *reenactress.com*, September 15, 2017, accessed November 13, 2019, <https://www.reenactress.com/blog/anachronism>

⁷⁸ Lorien Foote, *The Gentlemen and the Roughs: Violence, Honor, and Manhood in the Union Army* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 4-6.

The Confederate replies were typified by such statements as:

“to fight the invading faceless, blue (Union) hordes”; “for our freedoms, to fight against others telling us what to do”; “to protect our way of life, our homes, our women, our sweethearts”; “I don’t want to wear the same uniform as everyone else . . . I like the individual dress of the South”; and “the attraction of being a Rebel was overwhelming for me.”

By representing Civil War soldiers, reenactors are able to participate in, and express their desires to protect, defend, and honor their homes. They get to shape their participation in military terms of fighting and suffering. Their search for authenticity goes beyond representing the past into a search for an authentic sense of purpose and effort. Reenactors seek to share in the honor and memorialization shown to Civil War soldiers.⁷⁹

The different types of reenactment events present a final dynamic. While mock battles are the most well-known form, the representation of history can take multiple shapes depending on the desires and circumstance of the reenactors. Reenactments can be categorized into four groups: public events, living history, tactical battles, and total immersion. The first two are typically open to onlookers. Public events are scripted, mock battles that seek to represent a historical conflict. They are often held on anniversaries of major Civil War battles on their original locations. Living histories do not usually have battles attached, but instead the reenactors

⁷⁹ Stephen J. Hunt, “But We’re Men Aren’t We!: Living History as a Site of Masculine Identity Construction,” *Men and Masculinities* 10, no 4 (September 2007): 472-474.

Interestingly, the American Civil War Society is the largest reenactment group *in the United Kingdom*, thus their members do not have direct cultural or familial connections to the soldiers they portray. It would seem that they are picking up tropes and themes emanating from American reenactment units and media representations of the Civil War. It demonstrates how these modes of cultural transmission can influence beyond their geographical points of origin.

seek to portray life in the 1860s. These include balls, memorials, and encampments, in which they act more as demonstrations of a bygone age. The latter two are normally closed to the public, designed instead for the general edification of the reenactors themselves. Tactical battles feature mock battles with no scripted events, which allow for improvised tactics to see who would win. They are less about historical accuracy and more about the fun of outmaneuvering the other side. Total immersions involve include not only battles but also contain camping, marching, and living in the countryside, thus allowing the reenactors to completely experience the lives of Civil War soldiers by enduring the physical and mental hardships they faced. These last two types of reenactment are normally reserved for progressive reenactors, the most hardcore of participants.⁸⁰

The multiple forms of reenactment demonstrate the dual nature of reenacting. On the one hand is the public education aspect, meant to allow reenactors to share their passion for history with everybody. They usually involve the less strict members of the community (farbs and mainstream) since they have limited, scripted events. The latter types are for the reenactors to experience a “period rush,” the ultimate goal of reenactment, when the reenactors experience a mingling of the past and present. The person feels that they are really experiencing the Civil War with its thrills and fears. Reenactment correspondent Hastings Hensel describes it as: “that

⁸⁰“Reenactment Terms,” Civil War Reenactments and their Role in Commemoration, [fyecreenactments.wordpress.com](https://fyecreenactments.wordpress.com/reenactmentterms/), accessed November 15, 2019, <https://fyecreenactments.wordpress.com/reenactmentterms/>; “Reenactor’s Kit for Men,” Battle of Leatherwood, [battleofleatherwood.com](http://www.battleofleatherwood.com/mens.html), accessed November 15, 2019, <http://www.battleofleatherwood.com/mens.html> .

moment of temporal vertigo when the present blurs into the past, or what some Civil War reenactors calls 'seeing the elephant'—requires the perfect blend of preparation and unpredictability.” Thus, the experience of reenacting moves beyond a social education and becomes a point of contact with the past. The exhilaration felt during these activities can only be achieved through hardcore dedication to authenticity, which in turn allows the reenactor to assume a different persona and live a different life.⁸¹

While Civil War reenactors style themselves as living historians, their activities extend far beyond mere education. Their dedication to creating an authentic experience is motivated by more than public demonstration. The direct experience of historical situations, battles, marches, and encampments allows the reenactor to live another life. They can experience a sort of high by creating the sensation of danger, something which they may not encounter in their daily life. The desire for a period rush can mask larger social issues surrounding reenactment. The political and social causes of the Civil War, slavery and secession, are often muted in the minds of reenactors. This is not surprising since the goal is to forget political issues and immerse themselves in the moment. Yet when linked to their purported aim of education this becomes a problem since they omit crucial elements of the Civil War narrative. Controversies over slavery had long reverberated throughout the United prior to the Civil War, and consumed political, social, and economic events leading to Lincoln’s election. Therefore, to claim that slavery was not important, or was a secondary issue, fails to address the foundational conflict of the Civil War. Even the idea of state’s rights was formulated to oppose the interference with slavery, and to

⁸¹ Hastings Hensel, “Seeing the Elephant,” *South Carolina Living*, April 1, 2014, accessed November 15, 2019, <https://scliving.coop/sc-life/sc-life-features/seeing-the-elephant/>

defend opposition to racial equality after the war. It is therefore contradictory to claim authenticity and yet fail to address overarching social and political controversies that motivated secession.

The discrepancy is due to how reenactors perceive authenticity and what they ultimately hope to achieve. The modern-day sutlers that have arisen over the decades and the social hierarchy surrounding reenacting are driven by a material sense of reality. By looking and talking like soldiers, reenactors strive to embody the essence of their historical subjects. This involves selecting which aspects of the Civil War to portray and which to obscure. Whether the decision is made consciously or not they are, nevertheless, seeking to achieve a sensation of bridging the past and present. The bridge goes both ways, not only by bringing the Civil War soldier into the present but finding desirable moral and experiential phenomenon within their subjects. This causes controversy when faced with undesirable ethical and political realities of the people they hope to emulate.

CONCLUSION

Civil War reenactment is far more than an amusing hobby. It is an interplay between historical memory, education, nostalgia, and social commentary. It brings past events and peoples into the present while transporting the audience and participants into history. Reenactment fundamentally involves acting and stagecraft, therefore it always includes a level of interpretation. Moreover, historical authenticity cannot be brought about through mere imitation but by positing the complex realities that historical subjects found themselves. Thus, Civil War reenactors, in their search for authenticity, are transmitters of cultural interpretations of the Civil War and not a transparent window. Rather than neutral educators who use material instruments to inform their audiences, reenactors are heirs and transmitters of interpretations that obscure many of the war's painful realities.

The foundation for modern Civil War reenacting came from the Lost Cause mythos. In the decades following the Civil War, communities in the South established memorials to honor soldiers who had fought and died in the war. Asserting that the South had been overwhelmed by Northern advantages in numbers, these commemorations served to justify and glorify the Confederate cause by dismissing the central controversy of slavery and claiming that the issue was one of freedom from federal tyranny and state's rights. As the decades continued, the memorials acquired an increasingly ritualistic and festive quality. They transmitted the notion of Southern heroism to subsequent generations fueling an admiration and identification between communities and the Confederacy. Soldiers and leaders of the Confederacy became heroes, models of courage and resilience even in the face of impossible odds. This created a sense of moral righteousness in the South which was continually disseminated through commemoration and oratory.

In the late 19th and early 20th century war memorials moved from local communal affairs to larger reunions at historical battlefields. Having former enemies meet and reconcile their differences served to honor the dead and heal the scars of the war. Attitude towards the war shifted from defending the South against Northern aggression, to two honest, yet differing sides that had taken their misunderstanding to tragic extremes. The idea of reconciliation also further diminished the role of slavery in starting the war since there was a growing sense of moral ambiguity for the two causes. For many white Southerners, slavery was regrettable, but not that bad, and served to mask the real issues of state's rights and constitutional supremacy. They could argue that the North, with its unbridled capitalism and expansion of national power, was equally at fault. Both sides could be honored and celebrated for representing two distinct yet complementary sides of one larger nation. But reuniting the two former antagonists meant obscuring the role slavery played in fracturing the country. The subsequent memorials were less about remembering the causes of the war as they were about constructing a new interpretation of the war that blamed neither side.

The contemporary hobby of reenacting came about from black powder shooting clubs during the rise in Civil War enthusiasm during the 1960s. The heroism and nostalgia publicly proclaimed during the war's centennial mixed with enthusiasm for using period relevant weapons led reenactors to combine honoring and memorializing Civil War soldiers with material culture. The weapons, clothing, and mannerisms of the war became a conduit by which reenactors could channel events of the past into the present. While reenactments and other forms of commemoration came into conflict with the African American civil rights movement, reenactors sought to insulate themselves from the surrounding political and social controversies. The moral ambiguity introduced earlier allowed the hobby to separate, at least in the minds of

practitioners, the motivations of reenactors with those of their historical subjects. The reenactors aspire to honor the efforts and heroism of being soldiers without embracing the larger causes for which they fought.⁸²

This lionization of Civil War soldiers was enhanced in the 1980s and 1990s through television and cinema. Ken Burns' documentary *The Civil War*, as well as films such as *Gettysburg*, *Glory*, and *Gods and Generals* brought the Civil War back to popular consciousness in a way that framed the dramatic and tragic nature of the war. Mass media served to reestablish the Civil War in the American conscience, renewing interest in the people who fought. At the same time their dramatic use of music, oratory, and period replication further glamorized and romanticized the fighting. They created a consumable version of the reconciliation narrative, allowing people from across the United States to appreciate the war without feelings of recrimination. This media, when combined with the renewed commemoration of the war in the 1960s and the growth of hobbyists, encouraged an increasing number of reenacting units. The increase in popularity also drove the growth of sutlers to supply them with authentic goods, providing a fertile bed for the hobby to grow.

The combination of a reconciliation narrative and increasing growth established a sense of purpose and culture surrounding reenacting. The enthusiasm spawned by participating in the costume and actions of soldiers motivates reenactors to teach and spread that enjoyment. Many embrace the notion of serving as living historians, whereby reenactors transcend personal experience to a social mission of edification. Their enthusiasm for authenticity establishes an air of authority which advances their interpretation of the Civil War the minds of observers. They

⁸² Horowitz, *Confederates in the Attic*, 185.

provide access to historical subjects for the general public. Reenactors thus have taken upon themselves the vocation of historical teachers, which lends itself to relaying the messages the reenactors themselves want to send.

Two distinct problems have emerged from the practice of reenacting. First, the reconciliation narrative divests either side (but predominantly the South) of any moral responsibility for the war. Second, reenactors only display those aspects of 1860s culture that fit with an idealized view of the war. Collectively, these issues have serious consequences, for the reconciliation view focuses on the idea that both sides were morally right for different reasons. Slavery was an unfortunate reality, but served to mask deeper social, cultural, and economic divisions. Thus, the South was driven by inevitable forces to secede and both sides fought for noble, just, and morally equivalent ideals. Given that reenactors tend to portray common soldiers, and slaves tended to be owned by wealthy landowners, they can distance their hobby from moral criticism by claiming that their enthusiasm is not directed towards the continuation of slavery, but the extraordinary struggle of the ordinary man.

Civil War reenactors anchor their drive for authenticity and historical accuracy on material aspects of the war. They can spend thousands of dollars on reproductions of weapons, uniforms, tents, eating utensils, writing implements, and all manner of equipment. History therefore means looking the part, embodying the historical subject to a degree that the past seemingly manifests in the present. Not only do they spend money, but they devote their free time to drilling, traveling, giving presentations, and creating their characters down to the pattern of sewing and manners of speech. Investment of time and energy in this manner is both caused by and reinforces a personal dedication to the hobby.

But enthusiasm for authenticity has also obscured numerous aspects of Civil War from the pursuit of reenactment. Certain subjects either cannot be re-created for practical or moral reasons, while others are avoided due to a selection bias amongst reenactors. The first and most obvious of these is the death and violence involved in war. Reenactors only use blank cartridges in scripted battles where the action is halted if there are any injuries. The contrast between “seeing the elephant” of real combat and the period rush felt by reenactors cannot be compared. Hobbyists are in no immediate danger of death and dismemberment and so the actual portrayal of courage they aim for is impossible. Other more embarrassing realities such as prostitution, pornography, and venereal disease also are not to be found in reenacting camps. Legally and practically these would be difficult to accurately portray for a public audience, but also since they run counter to certain myths of 19th century morality that reenactors want to portray. The purpose of public celebrations, memorials, and reenactments since the 1860s has been to glorify the Civil War, particularly in the South. Introducing the notion that the men engaged in sexual impropriety would add an unpalatable human dimension to people who are held up as ideals. This is an avenue in which the drive for authenticity runs counter to the mission to honor the soldiers. Certain virtues such as bravery, sacrifice, and camaraderie are positive messages to carry on through reenacting, whereas desertion, promiscuity, and licentiousness, while equally authentic, are aspects of which reenactors either are ignorant or wish to be forgotten.

The most profound clash between historical memory and representation is with slavery. Where the previous issues can be dismissed for practical or legal reasons, the issue of slavery as the foundational cause of the Civil War cannot. Slavery, its expansion, and propriety engulfed the United States for 40 years leading up to the war. While reenactors acknowledge the existence of slavery, they tend to focus on the private soldier and contend that their characters had little

influence or interest in the larger political issues of the day. This allows the memory of Civil War soldiers to remain untarnished and admirable despite the causes for which they fought.

Reenactors tend to downplay this reality, but this leads to problems as attitudes towards the Confederacy shift in the United States.

During the 1960s and the civil rights movement, African Americans challenged the memorializing and glorifying of a cause that sought to deny them every kind of liberty. By contrast, the rise of reenacting units preserved interest in the Civil War and maintained the idea of moral equivalency between the North and South. The production of movies and documentaries in the late 1980s and 1990s fueled the hobby by dramatizing and generating sympathy for the conflict. In the early decades of the 21st century, however, growing discomfort with Civil War (particularly Confederate) memorial statues have awakened the public's consciousness regarding Southern heroes. This critique has spilled over to criticizing Civil War reenacting due to its use of the Confederate flag and glorification of Confederate leaders. This shift in public attitude has reduced participation in the hobby, and the controversy reveals the inherent dissonance within the reenacting community between the history they wish to present and the gaps that they ignore.⁸³

Websites for reenacting units provide a useful window into how they view themselves and how they wish to be viewed by the general public. Given the free access of the internet, anyone interested in the hobby can contact reenactors, join units, and buy the equipment necessary to participate. For their part, reenactors hold themselves up as participating in an entertaining and socially useful activity that educates as well as edifies. To avoid controversy,

⁸³ McPherson, *The War that Forged A Nation*, 7-8.

they generally deny any connection between themselves and those who might promote racial or political hostility. By doing so, they shy away from those elements of history that are uncomfortable or inappropriate for general audiences. This raises the question of why they personally participate even as they avoid elements of that history they proclaim to love.

Admittedly, websites represent the unit as a whole, but not the thought, feelings, and motivations of the individuals involved. Books such as *Confederates in the Attic* by Tony Horowitz, along with accounts by reenactors or scholars, are better at directly interviewing and discovering the cultural attitudes that connect people to the Civil War. Horowitz's tour of the South helps to fill this gap by highlighting the deep connection between the struggle and suffering of the soldiers and the lives of poor whites in the former Confederate lands. Glorifying the former gives solace and purpose to the latter. The sense of struggling against a vast power, inevitably doomed, yet defiant of the dominant, permeates those who venerate the Confederacy. Nostalgia for the past acts as a shield to preserve a sense of regional distinctness and identity. It maintains the feelings of reverence for Civil War leaders and inspires neo-Confederates to hold fast to what they see as their cultural heritage. Such sentiment acts as a foundation of defiance and idealism that preserve "traditional" values in the face of demographic and social changes.⁸⁴

Such nostalgia divides the living historian and the academic historian. While the latter attempts to use primary sources to peer into the complex and diverse realities of the past, the former rely on simplified, romantic feelings to convey their desires in the guise of knowledge. Svetlana Boym addresses this phenomenon in *The Future of Nostalgia*, which defines nostalgia as "a sentiment of loss and displacement, but it is also a romance with one's own fantasy." The

⁸⁴ Horowitz, *Confederates in the Attic*, 234, 290-291.

combination of the “period rush” sought by reenactors and the nostalgia for the old South marks an effort by reenactors, Southerners and Confederate sympathizers in particular, to lose themselves in a time and place that never existed. There are those that still see themselves as defending the South’s culture against aggression from:

‘A corrupt Yankee nation’ . . . ‘The South represents the only remaining stumbling block to the imposition of an American police state’ . . . This state, he added, would plunge American into a ‘New World Order’ marked by a ‘Godless’ and ‘mongrelized’ multiculturalism.

Nostalgia for the Confederacy combined with renewed opposition to Civil War memorials has sparked a deeper emotional bond between the reenactor and their historical subjects. Nostalgia provides “a mourning for the impossibility of mythical return, for the loss of an enchanted world with clear borders and values.” Although it is impossible to determine if all Civil War reenactors hold to such beliefs or desire a return to a 19th century society, it is reasonable to conclude that reenacting fosters and encourages such feelings due to the sense of excitement and value that reenactors experience from their activities.⁸⁵

Civil War reenacting’s roots in memorializing Civil War soldiers means that it sprung from looking at the war through the lens of virtue. Implicitly, this fosters the notion that the South was fundamentally just in its characteristics and it is the duty of contemporary Southerners to uphold the values that they fought and suffered for. The mythic South is a place of gentlemen heroes, dutiful ladies, and dastardly Yankees. Reenacting allows the contemporary man to enter into a fantasy world and play the part of the noble warrior. The fact that the South lost the war

⁸⁵ Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), xiii, 8; Horowitz, *Confederates in the Attic*, 112.

and was subjected to Reconstruction only adds to the tragic nature of the Civil War which seemingly pits the warm, virtuous South versus the cold, industrial North. Most units uphold the reconciliatory notion that both sides had honorable goals, but above all else they tend to hold that South did not fight for slavery and thus retains its nobility.

While few reenactment units explicitly claim to honor the South, there are those who admit so on their sites. The Palmetto Partisan Rangers quite directly refer to themselves as

An unreconstructed, Christian, confederate reenacting group whose purpose is to honour our confederate ancestors and the cause which they gave so much. While we at times will portray yankees in order to show how vile and cruel they were to the Southern People, we have nothing but contempt and disdain for the Federal Army of 1861 to 1865 and the war crimes it committed. We do recognize that there were and are still some good Christian Northern People, and they will be welcome to join our group. Many came to the South and fought for liberty and freedom with our ancestors. If you have this mindset, you will be welcome to ride with us. If you do not, you would be better off in another unit. Carpetbaggers and Scalawags need not apply.

In so doing, they hold on to the notion that to be reconstructed means to abandon the good character of the Confederacy. Reconstruction for them was not about establishing equal rights or constitutional protection but suppressing the South. Consistent with the Lost Cause mythos, the Palmetto Partisan Rangers use reenacting as a means of championing that cause. Likewise, the 1st Stuart Horse Artillery and the 19th Tennessee Volunteer Infantry units unabashedly present themselves as defenders and promoters of Southern heritage. They seek to embody and therefore preserve the perceived character of the Old South in the face of forces that would otherwise

disparage their ancestors. Reenacting can therefore serve as a vehicle for promoting cultural and political aims under the guise of education.⁸⁶

The units that do promote their historical subjects as fighting for the end of slavery and the preservation of the Union are, perhaps unsurprisingly, those who reenact African American regiments. Units such as the 6th Regiment United States Colored Troops, the NY 26th USCT, and the 2nd Infantry USCT refer to the Civil War as a fight for freedom. Their representation memorializes those who fought to destroy the institution that deprived them of political rights for over 300 years. Just as there are African American military units, there are the Female Re-Enactors of Distinction: African American Ladies of the Civil War, an auxiliary society of African American Women working with the African American Civil War Memorial and Museum in Washington, D.C. For these reenactors the war is also a part of their culture and heritage. As one reenactor, Malanna Carey, put it: “The reason I put in time and money to be a re-enactor is that, I believe that adults and children in the United States - and elsewhere - should know about the history of black people.” The Civil War fundamentally changed the role African Americans played in U.S. society, providing them the opportunity to prove themselves in combat and risking their lives for the well-being of the country.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ Palmetto Partisan Rangers, Accessed December 10, 2019, <https://palmettopartisanrangersorg.webs.com/>; 1st Stuart Horse Artillery, accessed December 10, 2019, <http://www.1stsha.com/>; 19th Tennessee Volunteer Infantry Regiment Company C, accessed December 10, 2019, <http://www.19tnrsa.com/>.

⁸⁷ 6th Regiment United States Colored Troops, “About,” facebook.com, accessed December 10, 2019, https://www.facebook.com/pg/6usct/about/?ref=page_internal; New York

The contrast between the goals of Southern and African American reenactors mirrors the continuing cultural division in the United States over the meaning of the Civil War. Some Southerners continue to defend the idea that the Confederacy fought for constitutional values such as limited government and states' rights, whereas African Americans emphasize the issue of slavery and black freedom as the ultimate result of the war. The former sees the South's struggle as a tragic attempt to reassert freedom, while the latter portray the conflict as a triumph of liberty over tyranny. Despite attempts to reconcile the northern and southern sections of the United States, there remains controversy over the meaning and importance of the Civil War. While noted academics such as James McPherson can demonstrate that the war led to the establishment of positive liberty in which the government began to play an active role in providing the means for people to live out their rights, reenactors and their units continue to adhere to their own

Regiment United States Colored Troops Reenactors- 20th, 26th, 31st, "About," facebook.com, accessed December 10, 2019, https://www.facebook.com/pg/New-York-Regiment-United-States-Colored-Troops-Reenactors-20th-26th-31st-604617856233679/about/?ref=page_internal ; 2nd Infantry Regiment United States Colored Troops Living History Association, "About Us," the2ndusctlha.org, accessed December 10, 2019, <http://www.the2ndusctlha.org/> ; Female RE-Enactors of Distinction: African American Ladies of the Civil War, "Auxiliary Organization of the African American Civil War Museum," afroamcivilwar.org, accessed December 10, 2019, <https://www.afroamcivilwar.org/programs/39.html?task=view> ; Jerry Brown, "Re-enactors Celebrate African-American Contribution to US Civil War," VOA.com, accessed December 10, 2019, <https://www.voanews.com/usa/re-enactors-celebrate-african-american-contribution-us-civil-war> .

interpretations either that South was honorable and the Northerners were oppressors, or that neither side was at fault. Living historians bring out a material and personal side that cannot be easily reconciled with scholarly objectivity, since they deal with personal identity and culture rather than an attempt at disinterest. Reenactors cannot aim at neutrality because personal interest, identity, and passion motivate them to take up the hobby in the first place. Such an investment of time and money requires an investment of self; to disprove the convictions of reenactors would be to disavow their very heritage and individuality.⁸⁸

Civil War reenacting connects the contemporary world with idealized Victorian world. It not only commemorates those who fought in the past but transforms and impacts the present. The reenactors are never a translucent medium, but they add their interpretations and obscure uncomfortable topics according to the pre-conceived expectation they have of their historical subjects. The impact of the Lost Cause mythos established a precedent whereby Confederate dead were commemorated through public spectacle and display. Reenacting continues this tradition and continues to bear its ideological continuity despite also reconciling the efforts of Union soldiers. Thus, while presenting itself as a fun hobby that educates as well as entertains, it reflects historical perspectives on the war that do not correlate with modern academic scholarship on the subject. Reenactors have taken upon themselves the mantle of instructor to bear their interpretations to the general public with an air of authority wrapped in the drive for authenticity. They therefore reenact both the soldiers of the Civil War as well as the continuing division and controversy that has persisted following the War between the States.

⁸⁸ McPherson, *The War that Forged a Nation*, 12-13.

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