RETROSPECTION

Student Research Papers on Memory and the American Civil War

Volume 1 | Spring 2015

With gratitude to Dora Richardson

American Studies Program
Georgetown University
One hundred fifty years ago, Americans went to war with themselves. *Retrospection* strives to understand how specific aspects of the Civil War have been depicted in the collective memory of Americans, using contemporary and historical accounts, literature, images, and other cultural manifestations as points of reflection.
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LETTER FROM THE EDITORS:

This project, entitled Retrospection, is a compilation of final papers from our spring 2013 American Civilizations II class. This is a core course for American Studies majors taught by Professor Erika Seamon. The assignment offered students an opportunity to research something specific from the Civil War era and locate its meaning in American memory. In this investigative process of American culture and psyche, students utilized D.C. resources and frequented museums, memorials, libraries, and battlefields. The results of this research were wide-ranging and profound, as students individually and collectively learned about Civil War photography, railroads, prose, and more.

As students of American Studies, we are encouraged to delve deeply into new questions, to challenge our assumptions, and to share our ideas with others. We are excited to create this new forum to share student work in order to spark dialogue within the American Studies community.

We want to thank Professor Seamon for encouraging us to pursue this project, Colva Weissenstein for her behind the scenes help, and our classmates for contributing their papers to this publication. We also want to thank the larger Georgetown American Studies community for their continued interest in the work we are doing here on the Hilltop.

Thank you, and happy reading,

Alison Ku (COL '15) and Mary Zost (COL '15)
Co-Editors
LETTER FROM PROFESSOR SEAMON:

Retrospection: Student Research Papers on Memory and the American Civil War originated from a paper prompt for the spring 2013 American Civilizations II class with sophomores. In the prompt, I asked students to write articles for a hypothetical newspaper column dedicated to how specific aspects of the Civil War have been depicted in American memory. I modeled the assignment on Disunion, an online column in the Opinion pages of the New York Times.

Students were encouraged to pursue their interests. They began by establishing two ‘bookends’ to frame their projects: first, a historical bookend – an event, person, item, idea, or text from the war period that they researched and analyzed in relation to a memory bookend – an event, person, item, idea, or text that emerged since the war, that evokes the memory of the historical bookend. By putting the two into conversation, students began asking important questions tied to the nature of memory, its utility, and its limitations. Throughout the semester, I was repeatedly impressed with the curiosity and diligence students displayed as they explored their research questions. I am not surprised that many of their papers proved to be quite edifying.

This volume commemorates the sesquicentennial of the American Civil War as well as the great work of the American Studies students at Georgetown. Alison Ku and Mary Zost have done a masterful job of bringing this publication to fruition. They offer us a model for future publications of this kind.

On behalf of all of us in American Studies, I want to thank Ms. Dora Richardson for her long-time and continued support of Georgetown’s American Studies Program and its students. We dedicate this volume to her.

Sincerely,

Erika B. Seamon, Ph.D.
American Studies Program
Georgetown University
THE PAPERS
Santos Benavides and the Forgotten Men of Civil War Texas

Salvador Rosas

Colonel Santos Benavides was the highest-ranking Mexican-American soldier to fight for the Confederacy and one of the most important historical figures of the South during the Civil War. His contributions during the war included serving as one of the most successful military leaders of the Confederacy and as the sole defender of the Rio Grande region. Despite his influence in the region, Santos Benavides has been mostly forgotten in the American memory of the Civil War. The small number of scholars who have written about him, most of whom are local South-Texan historians, like Jerry Thompson, Charles Grear, and Alexander Mendoza, reflect Benavides’ absence in the memory of the Civil War. Even in his hometown of Laredo, Benavides is rarely remembered as a local hero for protecting their town and its history. All that remains in Laredo’s memory of Santos Benavides are two plaques—one dedicated solely to him, and the other to him and his brothers—and the elementary school named in his honor. For reasons which this article attempts to uncover, our memory, or lack thereof, of Confederate Colonel Santos Benavides reveals the long-lasting tensions among Texans in their struggle among the identities of ‘American,’ ‘Mexican,’ ‘Mexican American,’ ‘Texan,’ and ‘Tejano’ that came to the forefront during the Civil War.

Santos Benavides was born in Laredo on November 1, 1823, to Jose Jesus Benavides and Margarita Ramon, two wealthy and influential Spanish peninsulares.\(^1\) Benavides came from a family of prominent figures in Laredo and the overall Rio Grande region of Texas where he grew up. His great-great grandfather, Tomas Sanchez, settled the town of Laredo in 1755 by direct grant of the Spanish king at the time, King Fernando VI.\(^2\) Santos Benavides gained early influence in his home region partially due to his uncle Basilio Benavides, a local politician elected three times as the alcalde of Laredo under Mexican rule and eventual mayor and state representative after the annexation of Texas.\(^3\) Under his uncle’s influence, Santos Benavides earned his position as procurador in 1846.\(^4\) Benavides’ acquisition of his positions as mayor of Laredo in 1856 and Chief Justice of Webb County in 1859 was mostly attributed to his open support of the American Army during the Mexican American War.\(^5\) Benavides had chosen to fight for the American Army, or the “Yanquis,” partly because of his frustration with the Mexican government. His choice to fight with the “Yanquis” during the Mexican American War was also a way for him to protect his political and financial interests in his home region.

Benavides’ political views supported local and states’ rights for the Rio Grande area and Texas and were first formed through his involvement in the Federalist-Centralist wars that took place in the Rio Grande region from 1838 to 1840. He fought as a Mexican revolutionary with the Federalists in support of their cause for local autonomy and opposed the idea of a centralist Mexican government.\(^6\) Soon after, he once again showed his support for local autonomy in opposing the annexation of Laredo and the Rio Grande area, as called for by the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848, out of fear that it would compromise the independent regional character of northern Mexico.\(^7\) His political sentiment carried through
to his involvement in the Civil War as he chose to support the Confederates. The Confederacy’s secessionist cause aligned with his belief in championing states’ rights and preserving a local way of life. Furthermore, his politics were certainly in line with his financial interests, as the political relationships he had formed in the 1850s allowed him to benefit financially from the area. Since most of Benavides’ wealth came from his position as a prominent landowner in Laredo, these political relationships would ensure the protection of his land.

Along with his two brothers, Refugio and Cristobal, Benavides was a successful rancher and merchant, owning large amounts of land and businesses in Laredo. Benavides belonged to the aristocratic Tejanos who had retained most of their land and wealth even after the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. Siding with the Confederates would allow him to keep the land and wealth that he was able to attain up to this time. Benavides did not view the war as a larger conflict over slavery, but instead saw it as a means for defending his personal interests as well as those of his community. The Confederates saw him as a perfect resource to recruit other wealthy Tejanos to identify with the Southern cause. With his experience as a fighter, he was commissioned as a captain in the Thirty-third Texas Cavalry and assigned to the Rio Grande Military District in the spring of 1861. By April 1861, Benavides had recruited sixty-eight men to fight in what would later be known as the “Benavides Regiment” and set up headquarters at Fort McIntosh just outside of his home of Laredo. Benavides and his men were called upon by the Confederacy for purposes of border defense from Mexicans and defense against Indian raids and Union soldiers.

The men Benavides recruited were local Mexican-American Tejanos who had their own reasons for supporting Benavides and the Confederacy. Most of the men belonged to the same class of wealthy Mexican Americans in the Rio Grande region and had fought with Benavides against Indian groups in the area. During the 1850s, Benavides began to establish his reputation as a successful military leader, leading groups of local Texans to fight against Lipan and Comanche Indians who tried to raid their land. In reality, many of the trips to Mexico that Benavides and these men had taken in the past to protect against Indian raids typically resulted in them stealing Indian property. Among his men, who were truly frontiersmen, he earned respect as a fighter for his guerilla warfare tactics and, more importantly, as a leader of the men in this region. Just like Benavides, these men had local and financial interests influencing their involvement in the Civil War. For them, fighting for the Confederacy meant fighting for Benavides, to whom they felt a sense of loyalty, and in whom they confided to protect their land.

There is no certainty about the exact number of Mexican-Americans who served in the Civil War as many of the names and records of the soldiers cannot be found. This is mostly due to the fact that muster rolls and personnel records that held relevant data have either been lost, were never taken to begin with, or were destroyed. This is especially true for the soldiers who fought for frontier militia units in the Rio Grande area. Many of the soldiers were illiterate, which complicated the process of record keeping. However, it is known that the total number of Mexican-American individuals in the war was upwards of 4,000 men. Many more Tejanos in the area decided to stay neutral in the battle. An estimated 2,550 Mexican-Texans served under the Confederate Army compared to 958 Mexican-Texans who fought for the Union. The Confederates realized the importance of rallying support from the Mexican Americans in South Texas and understood the crucial role they would have in the potential success of the army as they made up a majority of the population in the region and were familiar with the land. Benavides was promised brigadier generalship if he could recruit enough men to fight for the Confederacy. Despite the fact that the majority of the Mexican-Texans fought for the Confederacy, Benavides was never able to recruit enough men and would never earn brigadier generalship. Benavides and his men may not have been large in number, but they were strong in force by following Benavides’ strategies, which led them to be successful in
battle.

In May 1861, Benavides and his men fought their first battle at the Second Battle of Carrizo against Juan Cortina. The battle against Juan Cortina is significant because of the Texan identities that both men represented. While Benavides represented the wealthier merchant class of Tejanos, Cortina, known as the “Robin Hood of South Texas,” represented the poor vaqueros and campesinos, the generally illiterate Mexicans and Mexican-Americans on either side of the border. These men had experienced poverty, exploitation, and suppression by both Americans and the Mexican government. The fact that Benavides and his men were fighting against other Mexicans and Mexican-Americans reveals the battle between identities that the Civil War presented for these groups. With the help of his uncle, Basilio, and his brother, Refugio, Benavides drove Cortina and seventy men into Mexico with only forty of his own men, none of whom were injured.\(^3\)

Benavides and Cortina fought on opposite sides, but they shared an identity in their Mexican descent. Their respective soldiers chose to support different sides of the conflict according to their economic interests and class. For both Benavides’ and Cortina’s men, this was a battle over local issues of land and capital. Furthermore, Benavides and his family supported a caste system similar to slavery that divided society into two groups: elite aristocrats and subservient workers. Benavides supported slavery in Texas even though he did not personally own slaves, since slave ownership had been outlawed from the area. A newspaper in Corpus Christi, the Ranchero, reported that Santos Benavides had organized several trips to Mexico to capture escaped black slaves. Due to the limited amount of information, this is the known extent of his involvement with slavery and was seen simply as part of his support for the Confederacy and their states’ rights principles. However, Benavides did not consider the conflict along the Rio Grande a matter of slavery or race.

This conflict was not between blacks and whites, or Anglos and Mexicans. Benavides did not even consider the conflict to be between classes, although there was a clear distinction between the two. Instead, he saw it as a conflict between those supporting an established economic order in the area and those wanting to change it. The Mexicans and Mexican-Americans fighting for Cortina were not “pro-Union”; they were “pro-Cortina,” fighting to end poverty for the men they represented versus the established gentry that Benavides and his men represented. The local identities of individuals influenced with whom they chose to identify on a larger scale. Their choice to identify with Cortina or Benavides, Texans or Mexicans, wealthy or poor, Union or Confederate, would determine for whom each man would fight.

The tensions between the soldiers in Texas became more complicated when Benavides’ Tejano soldiers faced prejudice from the Confederacy. His men were being singled out by the Confederacy for unfair treatment and were asked to re-enlist for three years despite the fact that they had not been paid for more than seven months. They refused to re-enlist for the three-year duration. However, out of loyalty to Benavides, they decided to re-enlist for one more year. Jon “Rip” Ford, a popular Texas Ranger and leader for the Texas Confederates, gave Benavides permission to cross the Rio Grande, as long as he kept peaceful relations with Mexico. Benavides disregarded these instructions and took matters into his own hands by confronting the alcalde of Nuevo Laredo when one of his men was killed, an example of how Benavides was just as loyal to his men as they were to him. He and his men defeated Octaviano Zapata and his Zapatistas in Mexico, a group who had conducted several prior raids in South Texas.

Benavides’ reputation as a military leader earned him a promotion to the title of Colonel, the highest rank to be held by a Mexican-American in the Confederacy. By this time the Confederacy realized how imperative it was for them to have the support of Benavides and his regiment in the Rio Grande area. Benavides and the Tejano population he represented were “the Confederacy on the Rio Grande,” as they were the sole defenders of the area during 1863-1864. His greatest
contributions to the war would come during this time. The Union had occupied Brownsville, Texas and posed a danger to the cotton trade between Texas and Mexico. Benavides used his revolutionary ties to expedite the transport of Confederate cotton to the neutral Mexican port of Matamoros. In doing so, he was able to keep the cotton trade open, which was crucial for the Southwest. His success in protecting the cotton trade was followed by a victory at the Battle of Laredo where he successfully defended his hometown against Union forces. Not only was he defending his hometown, but he was also protecting 5,000 bales of Confederate cotton that they were keeping in San Augustin Plaza, the place where the Benavides brothers share a plaque today. The Benavides Regiment, with only forty-two men, was able to defeat Edmund Davis’ Union force of 200 men. At the end of the three-hour battle, the Benavides Regiment was victorious over Davis and did not suffer a single fatality. More importantly for the Confederacy, he had successfully saved the 5,000 bales of cotton from the hands of the Union soldiers.

Benavides, who was already ill, soon became too ill to continue his duties as Colonel. His brother Refugio took command temporarily, thus ending Benavides’ involvement in the Civil War. Eventually, he would go back to his life as a merchant and rancher in Laredo. He continued to pursue his lifelong career as a local politician serving in the Texas legislature and remained involved in other matters of local politics. Benavides would never earn the status of Brigadier General previously promised to him because he did not recruit enough men. Benavides died at his home in his beloved Laredo, Texas in 1891. Unlike many other Civil War figures whose legacy outlived their lives, Benavides rarely lives on in our memory of the war. Benavides represents a complex set of identities, which makes it difficult for people looking back at the history of the Civil War to identify with him and recognize him as a hero.

In 1971, soon after the creation of the United Independent School District in Laredo, an elementary school was named after Benavides. The teachers of Colonel Santos Benavides Elementary, which enrolls over 2,000 students in Laredo, rarely teach their students about the school’s namesake. Nor do any of the other schools in the area for that matter. According to Blanca Ibarra, the social studies curriculum coordinator for United Independent School District, Colonel Benavides is often times left out because he is not included in the material outline by the state standards: the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills standards, also known as TEKS. TEKS does not mention Benavides at all in any of the elementary, middle, or high school level standards. The history that Benavides lived through occurred near the playgrounds of these schools, yet this important part of their local history is not being taught.

Laredo’s first attempt to memorialize Benavides was by honoring him and his brothers with a plaque in the historic San Augustin Plaza in the center of the town. The plaque was erected in 1976 as an “Official Texas Historical Marker,” the result of a state-wide historic awareness project, by the Webb County Historical Commission. The Commission was attempting to rediscover historic American figures that contributed to the development and cultural history of Laredo. The plaque, titled “Benavides Brothers,” includes a brief description of the brothers’ influence in Laredo, and a section dedicated to their involvement in the Civil War. According to Margarita Araiza of the Webb County Heritage Foundation, the plaque’s location was chosen because of its centrality to the town of Laredo and the traffic that the area attracts, as well as its proximity to the Benavides home, which still exists today and faces San Augustin Plaza where the plaque stands.

In 1994, a second plaque was dedicated just to Benavides for his individual contributions to Laredo. The plaque was a part of the Sesquicentennial Celebration of Texas Statehood with Benavides chosen to represent Laredo. The plaque is located at Calvary Catholic Cemetery where Benavides himself is buried. The location makes the plaque hardly visible to the majority of the residents and visitors of Laredo. Margarita Araiza also informed me that when a plaque is dedicated to an individual, there is
usually an unveiling ceremony. The unveiling ceremony is likely the most attention given a plaque. However, there is no record of attendance for an unveiling ceremony. In my contact with residents of Laredo, Margarita Araiza, Blanca Ibarra, and historian Jerry Thompson, they all seem to agree that Colonel Benavides is known only by those who have sought out his history or have made it a point to learn about the local history of the area. To those people, Benavides is seen as a hero for his leadership in protecting the town of Laredo. According to Araiza, Ibarra, and Thompson, someone in the mainstream population of Laredo might glance at the plaque in San Augustin Plaza once or twice, never caring to even read it.

Benavides’ contributions to the Confederate Army during the Civil War and his successes as a military leader are remarkable and undeniable, but sadly are not remembered. This is partly because the cause which he represented as a wealthy merchant is one to which most of the citizens of Laredo cannot relate. Furthermore, Benavides’ position as a wealthy merchant is partly ignored because it has been overshadowed by the larger story of the Civil War. Benavides represents an ongoing struggle between identities that brings up complicated issues. Benavides never quite fit the mold of the white American southerner, nor did he fit the mold of a traditional Mexican-American. The people of Laredo and South Texas have constantly struggled to find their identity. But like many other South Texans, Benavides can be linked to several different identities. Jerry Thompson stated that “[Benavides] would live his life under five flags: those of the Republic of Mexico, the Republic of the Rio Grande, the Republic of Texas, the United States and the Confederacy.” Ultimately, he chose to identify with his family and his home in Laredo, a place and an identity for which he fought his whole life to protect. Now it is up to the people of Laredo and those of us who can appreciate the history and the struggle for identity that Colonel Benavides represents to bring his memory back to life.
APPENDICES:

Appendix 1:

“Benavides Brothers” Texas Historical Marker in San Augustin Plaza, Laredo, TX

Marker Text:
"Members of a prominent Laredo family, the three Benavides brothers were the descendants of Tomas Sanchez, who founded the city in 1755. Santos (1823-1891) and Refugio Benavides (b. 1824) and their half-brother Cristobal (1839-1904) were best known for their service in the Confederate army during the Civil War (1861-1865). Santos commanded a regiment in the 33rd Texas Cavalry and rose to the rank of colonel, the highest rank achieved by a Mexican-American in the Confederate army. Both Refugio and Cristobal earned the rank of captain. Stationed along the Texas-Mexican border, the brothers encountered both bandits and Union forces. In May 1862, they defeated a large raiding party led by Juan Cortina at Carrizo (now Zapata). In March 1864, although their troops were badly outnumbered, they defended Laredo against an army of Texas unionists. Their victory helped ensure continuation of the vital Confederate cotton trade between Texas and Mexico. The Benavides brothers also distinguished themselves as political, commercial, and social leaders in Laredo. Santos and Cristobal operated one of the city’s most prosperous mercantile companies. Santos also served in the state legislature, 1879-1884. [1976]"

Appendix 2:

“Santos Benavides” Texas Historical Marker in Calvary Catholic Cemetery, Laredo, TX

Marker Text:
“Santos Benavides, son of Jose Jesus and Marguerita Benavides and great-great grandson of Laredo founder Tomas Sanchez, was born in Laredo on November 1, 1823. He married Augustina Villareal in 1842. Benavides, appointed procurador (administrative agent) of Laredo in 1843, openly cooperated with the forces of Mirabeau B. Lamar which occupied Laredo during the Mexican War (1846-48) in an effort to pacify the region. He was elected mayor of Laredo in 1856 and 1857 and chief justice of Webb County in 1859. During the Civil War Benavides raised a company of cavalry at Laredo which defeated Juan Cortina in the Battle of Carrizo in 1863. He became a colonel in command of his own regiment known as Benavides’ Regiment. On March 19, 1863, his regiment successfully defended Laredo with only 12 men against a Union force of more than 200 men. During the late 1860s and 1870s Benavides engaged in mercantile and ranching activities with his brother Cristobal. He served in the Texas Legislature during the 1880s and in 1884 was appointed Texas Commissioner to the world’s Cotton Exposition. Benavides helped found the Guarache party, a faction of Laredo’s Democratic Party. He died in Laredo on November 9, 1891. Sesquicentennial of Texas Statehood 1845-1995"
From the grandiose entrance to the graves of the Arlington National Cemetery, visitors can clearly see the outline of an imposing Greek-style mansion that is perched on top of an ascending slope. Overlooking the capital in its entirety from its elevated position, this house brings to mind the idea of John Winthrop’s “city upon a hill,” evoking images of Thomas Jefferson’s Monticello and George Washington’s Mount Vernon. Considering the prominent location, one might guess that the house once belonged to a former president or an honored war hero. However, the National Park Service’s map of the cemetery does not mention the house under “Places of Interest,” nor does it associate it with the list of “Historical Figures.” The building merely receives a label in small lettering of “Arlington House” with no indication of what Arlington House signifies or celebrates. One must embark on the fifteen-minute walk up the steep hill in order to learn that Arlington House is the memorial for Robert E. Lee, commander of the Confederate army.

Since the Civil War, Lee has become universally respected across regional boundaries as a man of honor and noble character. The very existence of a national memorial in his honor signifies just how important Lee is considered to be in America’s heritage. Still, opinions of Lee remain somewhat dubious. Lee’s memorial is a central component of one of the most famous cemeteries in the country, yet his name does not even appear on the map. Despite all of his admirable virtues, Lee is inextricably linked to the Confederacy, which, for many, is tied to the institution of slavery. Many Neo-Confederates and Southern sympathizers consider Lee to be the ultimate figure of the South, and they are able convince themselves that he was entirely opposed to slavery. Although Robert E. Lee’s beliefs regarding slavery are extremely complicated and vague, these Confederate romantics choose to embrace the view of Lee being completely opposed to slavery, while ignoring any evidence to the contrary, in order to demonstrate their conviction that the South was not centered on the institution. History does not provide a clear answer to the question of Lee’s opinion on slavery. Various letters, testimonies, and newspaper articles all contain different messages concerning Lee’s affiliation with slavery; some messages overlap one another, while others are entirely contradictory.

Before analyzing these primary sources that reveal different stories about Lee and his connection to slavery, it is important to know the basic facts regarding Lee’s contact with slavery. Lee never bought or sold slaves, but he did enter the world of slave ownership upon inheriting slaves from his father-in-law, George Washington Parke Custis. The Custis family came from a long line of American military leaders; many members of the family had fought in the revolution and have served as generals in the U.S. army since then. President George Washington was Custis’ step-grandfather and raised Custis in Mt. Vernon after his natural father died. In her will, Martha Washington left all of her slaves to her grandson Custis. When Custis built Arlington
House in 1802, he hoped to create a home that would keep the Washington legacy alive. Custis’ close ties to the commander of the revolutionary army are an important reminder that many of the country’s founders maintained a strong connection to slavery.

When Custis died in 1857, he left Lee as the effective master of the Arlington estate. Custis had been inefficient as a slave owner. He poorly managed most of the large estates that he had inherited and failed to make much of a profit. It turned out that Lee was much better suited for the job. Upon inheriting Arlington House, he reorganized slave labor, cleaned the grounds and hired a new overseer to accelerate production. Lee even supervised crop planting himself. Though it is obvious that Lee embraced his new role as estate owner, there is much debate over whether Lee embraced the role of slave owner.

General historical consensus holds that Arlington slaves were treated well by Custis prior to Lee’s ownership. A few slaves, such as Custis’ carriage driver and his wife’s housekeeper, maintained very close relationships with members of the family. However, there always remained the traditional racial hierarchy that characterized the South. Custis stipulated in his will that his slaves be freed within five years of his death. Lee adhered to this; he decided not to free the slaves immediately in 1857 due to the poor financial state of affairs that Custis left, but all slaves were officially freed on December 29, 1862, within the five-year requirement.

While Lee’s direct connections with slavery are easy to determine, his personal thoughts on the topic are difficult to sort out. One of the most illuminating documents pertaining to the issue is a letter that Lee wrote to his wife. Written on December 27, 1856, this letter is perhaps as close as one can get to Lee’s core beliefs regarding the institution of slavery. Lee writes, “In this enlightened age, there are few I believe, but what will acknowledge, that slavery as an institution, is a moral & political evil in any Country.” This sentence by itself might suggest that Lee was completely opposed to slavery, and many Neo-Confederates today have taken the liberty to interpret it as such. However, reading just a few lines further reveals a drastically different idea: “I think it however a greater evil to the white man than to the black race, & while my feelings are strongly enlisted in behalf of the latter, my sympathies are more strong for the former.” This statement destroys the clear image previously established of Lee as primarily opposed to the institution of slavery. Yet it also fails to allow historians to conclude that he is entirely pro-slavery. The ambiguous language could support any number of interpretations. However, Lee’s attitude does seem to lack understanding for the brutality of the slave condition: “The blacks are immeasurably better off here than in Africa, morally, socially & physically. The painful discipline they are undergoing, is necessary for their instruction as a race, & I hope will prepare & lead them to better things.” But it is evident in this passage that, despite his denial of the harsh realities of slavery, Lee still expresses a genuine concern for the future well being of slaves. His letter also conveys a mild desire for slavery to come to an eventual end, but this desire is accompanied by a disdain for the mission of abolitionists and a fear of sudden change:

These people must be aware that their object is both unlawful and foreign to them... and that this institution, for which they are irresponsible and non-accountable, can only be changed by them through the agency of a civil and servile war... [Slaves’] emancipation will sooner result from the mild and melting influences of Christianity than from the storm and tempest of fiery controversy.

Lee was clearly not a staunch advocate of slavery, but he also did not think that the North had any business involving itself with an institution that it did not understand. Lee was more comfortable waiting for the abolition of slavery to develop slowly rather than actively fight for freedom. Interestingly, this passage also intuitively anticipates the conflict that would occur in less than six years due to this regional polarization. At the time of this letter in 1856, Lee was still in the U.S. Cavalry and had no idea that he would soon be fighting
against the very army that he was currently serving. However, these few lines suggest that thoughts of internal conflict were not far from Lee’s mind in the years leading up to the Civil War.

It is also important to consider the recipient of this letter: Mary Anna Custis Lee, Lee’s wife. Why did Lee choose Mary as the recipient of such controversial and personal thoughts? Aside from being Lee’s wife, Mary was also a staunch advocate of gradual emancipation. Growing up, Mary was extremely influenced by the work of her mother, Molly Custis. Molly was highly involved with the American Colonization Movement, and she educated slaves herself. Following her mother’s example, Mary taught the slave women of Arlington how to sew, read, and write. While Mary’s strong sentiments pertaining to slavery may have been the reason that Lee opened up on the topic in the first place, they also could have influenced the tone of the letter; in other words, there is a possibility that Lee curbed his thoughts with his wife’s response in mind.

During the war, the issue of Lee’s treatment of his slaves became a hot topic in both the North and the South. In 1866, scandal erupted when the National Anti-Slavery Standard published testimony of a runaway slave of Lee’s, Wesley Norris. In 1857, many of the Arlington slaves, including Norris and his sister, believed that they were to be freed immediately upon Custis’ death. When they were not freed, large numbers of slaves ran away. In the testimony, Norris describes the events that occurred after he and his sister were caught and returned to Arlington:

We were immediately taken before Gen. Lee, who demanded the reason why we ran away; we frankly told him that we considered ourselves free; he then told us he would teach us a lesson we never would forget; he then ordered us to the barn, where, in his presence, we were tied firmly to posts by a Mr. Gwin, our overseer, who was ordered by Gen. Lee to strip us to the waist and give us fifty lashes each... Norris’ account closely resembled letters that had been published in the New York Tribune seven years earlier. These letters, submitted anonymously, contained scathing descriptions of Lee’s brutal beating of three runaway slaves, including one woman.

Southern publications vehemently denied these reports, upholding that their noble commander was not capable of such cruel behavior. In 1863, the Daily Picayune addressed the controversy that the New York Tribune had raised across the North with the publication of the anonymous letters: “Whether or not General Robert E. Lee is habitually cruel to his slaves is a question that is much agitated at Boston, at present.” Determined to redeem Lee’s image, the New Orleans newspaper denied any cruelty on Lee’s part: “There may be minds ungenerous enough to wish it true, but there breathes not an army officer or a civilian who ever knew that refined and polished gentleman, that dignified and thoughtful Christian, but would pronounce it both blasphemous and absurd.” Interestingly, by the end of the war, Northern opinion of Lee seemed to have improved. The New York Herald published an article entitled “Views of Robert E. Lee,” which featured an extensive interview with Lee. The journalist was extremely flattering of Lee, commending him as a “frank, generous man.” The slavery controversy is firmly settled in the final paragraph; Lee confirms that, contrary to certain allegations, he has freed all of his slaves. The North’s capacity to forgive Lee’s role as a slaveholder so quickly is astounding, as Northern publications were clearly eager to criticize Lee just a few years earlier.

Lee’s ties to slavery have not been forgotten. Many historians and scholars have since studied the topic in depth in order to attempt to understand the true character of Lee, with all of his complications and contradictions. However, not everyone is willing to look at all sides of the story. Today, some Neo-Confederates hold up Lee and his beliefs as irrefutable proof that the South’s goal in war was not about slavery. The internet is filled with a plethora of websites, blogs and message boards pertaining to the topic of Lee’s relation to slavery; some are blatantly biased, while others offer valid discussion. One of the
Behind Gelina’s descriptions of Lee’s letter is his assertion that Lee’s decision to free his slaves is listed among other virtues, though the writer fails to mention that Lee was required by law to free them. The writer accuses governmental schools (or “indoctrination centers”) and mainstream media of slandering Lee’s memory and asks readers to retain the respectable, pure image of Lee in their minds. In this case, the writer uses Lee’s decision to free his slaves to validate Lee as an honorable figure, in contradiction with the writer’s denigration of Lincoln and King and their contributions to the lives of African-Americans.

Other blogs, such as “By His Grace For His Glory,” are not as easy to dismiss. On March 13, 2008, blogger Richard D. Gelina published an entry titled “Robert E. Lee on Slavery.” Gelina starts off by self-identifying as a Southerner: “not because of my geographic location, but because of the cause for which the Confederate States of America fought—the right of the individual states to govern themselves according to the various rights granted them in the United States Constitution.” He argues that the North has been misrepresenting history since it won the war by painting the South as a nation bent on slavery when it was (allegedly) in the process of discarding slavery. Gelina explains, “All those who learned their history from history books have trouble wrapping their minds around the absolute fact that by the time the War began, the South had overwhelmingly rejected the institution of slavery.” Lee’s letter to his wife is quoted as proof that the Civil War was not fought over slavery. To the average reader, his argument is both convincing and sound. Gelina reminds readers that he is not just stating his own thoughts; he has reliable sources. Gelina writes, “Don’t take my opinions as fact... take primary documents.” However, Gelina fails to explain the full content of Lee’s letter to his wife. He instead places a quote at the end of his blog entry with no explanation or context. This results in an incomplete depiction of Lee’s true feelings on slavery.

Many Southern sympathizers have published books expounding their views on the true Confederate cause. One such book, The South was Right! by James Ronald Kennedy and Walter Donald Kennedy, contains several factual errors pertaining to Lee and his relation to slavery. For example, Lee is included in a list of notable Southern leaders who were not slave owners. This list is set forth in order to dispel the “Yankee myth” that “the South fought the war to preserve slavery.” Unfortunately, this list dispels nothing, as Lee was clearly a slave owner for the five-year period following Custis’ death. The Kennedys also claim that Lee “wished the quick abolition of slavery.” Consideration of Lee’s letter to his wife reveals that Lee believed slavery should run its course without violent interruptions, and abolition would eventually come. In the case of The South Was Right!, the Kennedys seem to have been so overeager to justify their Southern cause that they did not ensure that the facts were correct.

J. Steven Wilkins’ Call of Duty: the Sterling Nobility of Robert E. Lee is not as flagrantly incorrect. Though Wilkins admits that Lee did live around slavery his entire life, he stresses that Lee was a supporter of gradual emancipation, and he also “willingly” released his slaves prior to the war’s start. The use of the word “willingly” is questionable: Lee had no choice but to follow the stipulations of his father-in-law’s will. He could have released his slaves immediately if he had wanted. Wilkins quotes Lee’s letter to his wife in its entirety, acknowledging the lines that follow Lee’s association of slavery with evil. He admits that Lee was probably unaware of the brutal mistreatment of slaves, but he makes no reference to Norris’ testimony or the New York Tribune letters that accuse Lee of performing this mistreatment himself. While Wilkins recognizes Lee’s involvement with slavery, he also emphasizes that Lee was not alone in his general acceptance of the institution; he was more a victim of his time than an actively malevolent person. Wilkins begins the chapter...
on slavery with a quote of Lee’s: “If the slaves were mine, I would surrender them without struggle, to avert this war.” He clearly wants to convey that Lee did not fight for slavery, which is likely a true statement. Wilkins does a much better job than The Kennedys of fairly assessing Lee’s involvement with the institution, but he still ignores vital sources that offer alternative views of Lee.

The controversy over Lee’s opinion on slavery highlights the great debate that continues to this day about what the Civil War was truly about: slavery or states’ rights. Neo-Confederates view Lee as the ultimate hero – a dignified, chivalrous man with a “sterling nobility.” Therefore, Lee’s opposition to slavery is crucial to the advancement of their version of history. Gelina sums up the sentiment well in his blog post: “The simple and compelling fact in my mind is that if the Commanding Officer of the Confederate forces did not see slavery as the motivating issue of the War, it was not fought over slavery.” By picking and choosing certain parts of Lee’s past, as well as certain sentence fragments of his letters, many Neo-Confederates and Southern sympathizers are able to believe that Lee was entirely opposed to slavery, and they use this as justification of the Southern cause. History would be much easier for everyone—Neo-Confederates, regular Americans, National Park Service brochure creators—if Lee had left behind clear signs of a disdain for the cause of slavery. However, that is not the case. Contradictory and controversial pieces of evidence exist, and it is important that they be analyzed and included in our memory of Lee.
When Alexander Gardner immigrated to the United States in 1856, he hoped to join a utopian community in Iowa. Upon his arrival in New York, he discovered that his family and friends had been killed when consumption ravaged the community—a foreboding sign of the death that would become a defining feature of his career as a photographer. He was left with the choice of staying in America or returning to Scotland. Deciding to remain in America, he soon found employment with photographer Matthew Brady, and together, as the nation plunged into civil war, Gardner and Brady pioneered the role of a war photographer and created one of the most impressive collections of war photography in American history.

When the war ended, Gardner curated a selection of his photographs, creating a two-volume work titled *Sketch Book of the Civil War*. In the years after the tumultuous Civil War, Alexander Gardner’s *Photographic Sketch Book of the Civil War* was regarded as an exploration of an objective visual truth, but almost 150 years later, it has transformed into a vehicle of transcendent personal and emotional truth.

At the outbreak of the Civil War, both Gardner and Brady saw the commercial potential for photography in the war, embedding themselves early on into the Army of the Potomac. Through his connections with Allan Pinkerton, a fellow Scotsman and the head of what would eventually become the Secret Service, Gardner provided himself, Brady, and the studio with unparalleled access to the military. Gardner, through his friendship with Pinkerton, eventually became chief photographer of the U.S. Topographical Engineers and worked with the Secret Service photographing maps, landscapes, railway lines, and bridges for the Union Army. In exchange, Gardner was given free reign of the Union military camps and fields.

It was the photographs taken after the Battle of Antietam, though, that pushed the potential of war photography as a vehicle to “bring home the terrible reality and earnestness of war” into the spotlight. On “America’s Bloodiest Day” Gardner began photographing dead soldiers around the battlefield and other landmarks such as General McClellan’s headquarters; Gardner, along with his partners, took seventy photographs of Antietam between September 18 and 22. Brady chose to exhibit these photographs of dead soldiers in an exhibit at his gallery, entitled “Dead at Antietam.” The exhibit and the photographs were a huge hit; the *New York Times* praised the reality portrayed in the photographs and the “terrible fascination” surrounding the photos that drew the public into viewing such graphic and bloody images. The photographs, many of which were taken by Gardner, had brought the reality of death in war beyond the frontlines, yet at the same time, immortalized the fallen soldiers and “[gave] them perpetuity for ever.”

The success of Brady’s show underscored the potential of images of fallen soldiers.

By 1862, Gardner had left Brady and started his own studio, bringing photographers like Timothy O’Sullivan, who had also worked for Brady, along with him. Much of Gardner’s work had previously been attributed to Brady since Brady was able to attribute his name to all the work produced in his studio.”After the Battle of Gettysburg, Gardner and his men were the first photographers at the scene,
arriving on July 5, 1863 only two days after the battle concluded, before all the fallen Union and Confederate soldiers were buried. They were the only photographers able to capture images of the dead soldiers at Gettysburg.\[^8\]

Throughout the war, Gardner continued to travel, photographing battlefields, camp scenes, and prominent figures such as President Abraham Lincoln.\[^9\] By the end of the war, Gardner wanted to create a compilation of his work as a war photographer, producing a two-volume work titled, “Gardner’s Photographic Sketch Book of the Civil War” [Appendix 1], which contained one hundred selected photos, including his famous Gettysburg images.\[^3\] Alongside each photograph, Gardner wrote narrative descriptions explaining the context of the scene or creating dramatic stories about the soldiers or battles. Since the book was so costly to produce—each set of books featured a leather-bound cover and contained hand-mounted albumen prints—only about 200 books were published. They were very expensive to purchase, costing about $650, or the equivalent of about $2,000 in 2010.\[^4\] Because of its enormous price tag, and perhaps because it was published so shortly after the war, when people were in no hurry to relive the gruesome conflict, Gardner’s Sketch Book did not succeed commercially.\[^5\] There was no critical reception, no reviews were printed about his grand work, and the Sketch Book and Gardner faded out of American memory.\[^6\] By the time of his death in 1882, Gardner was no longer an acclaimed hero of American war photography. In fact, his work as a photographer during the war warranted only in a single sentence in his obituary: “During the war he followed the armies as a photographer; and probably took more scenes of the war than any other photographer.”\[^7\]

Though Gardner’s Sketch Book was a commercial flop, his images have endured. While his photographs may have been mostly forgotten in the direct aftermath of the war, Gardner’s photographs drew revived popularity by the beginning of the twentieth century. A book notice published in the November 7, 1907, edition of the National Tribune announced the publication of a new book showcasing selected works by Gardner and Brady: War Photographs Taken on the Battlefield, published by Edward Eaton.\[^8\] Though the photographs were described as “surprisingly good” given the infancy of photography at the time, the article does not laud the artistic vision of the photographs, but instead, the accuracy and the reality of the photographs: “Good, bad or indifferent, they have a lifelike quality and reality that no pictures made from fancy or description can ever possibly attain...There is something in the attitude of the men, in the look of the tents, the grounds and the surroundings which a painter can never catch.”\[^9\] Ultimately, what set Civil War photography apart was the reality that it captured, the truthfulness behind the images. By publishing Brady and Gardner’s photographs, Eaton “planned for a great campaign for the enlightenment of the present generation regarding the true scenes and incidents of and the actors in the civil conflict as depicted by actual photographs.”\[^10\] By 1959, almost one hundred years after the Civil War, Dover Publications reprinted a complete edition of Gardner’s two-volume Sketch Book of the Civil War, bringing Gardner’s seminal work back into the public consciousness. Since only sixty-seven original sets of Gardner’s Sketch Book still existed, accessibility to the fragile books and the valuable prints they contained was quite limited. Dover’s reprint of the Sketch Book provided the public with an easily accessible and affordable view into Gardner’s Civil War.\[^9\]

Along with the renewed interest in Gardner’s photography came the thorough study of his images. William Frassanito, in particular, conducted intense research on Gardner’s images at Antietam and Gettysburg. In the introduction to the Sketch Book, Gardner writes, “Verbal representations of such places, or scenes, may or may not have the merit of accuracy; but photographic presentments of them will be accepted by posterity with an undoubting face.”\[^9\] Yet, Frassanito’s research resulted in the discovery of various discrepancies in Gardner’s photographs, leading Frassanito to conclude that Gardner had staged or manipulated the subjects of his photographs, revealing that perhaps Gardner’s
images did not entirely possess “the merit of accuracy” he so strongly advanced.\footnote{33}

Frassanito’s conclusions primarily concern two of Gardner’s most famous photographs taken after the Battle of Gettysburg: “Harvest of Death” and “Home of the Rebel Sharpshooter.” “Harvest of Death” \cite{2} presents a fallen group of Confederate Soldiers, stripped of their shoes, lying strewn across a field; the photograph vividly and graphically presents the carnage of battle and the reality of war. In fact, Frassanito claims that the soldiers strewn about in “A Harvest of Death” are the same soldiers that Gardner claims are Union soldiers in his photograph, “Field Where General Reynolds Fell” \cite{3}.\footnote{34} Of “Field Where General Reynolds Fell,” Frassanito writes that he is “fairly certain” that all of the soldiers are Union soldiers. He continues, “Not only are they described as such by one of the captions but their uniforms are distinctly Northern as well.”\footnote{35} The soldiers’ missing shoes indicate that these presumably Union soldiers were beyond Confederate lines, where supply shortages motivated Southern soldiers to steal needed goods, like shoes, from the fallen enemy. A crumpled article of clothing beside one of the dead soldiers serves as further evidence, since the clothing bears a clear diamond-patch, a symbol worn exclusively by the soldiers of the Union Third Corps who fought at Gettysburg.\footnote{36}

Frassanito concludes that the subjects of “A Harvest of Death” were not Confederate soldiers as Gardner claims, but actually the same group of soldiers as in “Field Where General Reynolds Fell,” with the view shifted 135 degrees clockwise.\footnote{37} The most obvious clue is the same rumpled article of clothing that bore the diamond patch: that same article of clothing appears in “A Harvest of Death,” as well. The placement of hands and feet also seems to confirm that these two groups of soldiers were indeed the same group of Union troops.\footnote{38} In his Sketch Book, though, Gardner includes both photos and describes them as depicting completely different groups of men.

Another photograph that did not escape Frassanito’s discerning eye is “Home of the Rebel Sharpshooter” \cite{4}. As Gardner and his men arrived at Gettysburg, they reportedly encountered this young soldier, either a member of the 1st Texas or 17th Georgia Infantry, on the southern slope of Devil’s Den. Gardner and his men spent approximately half an hour shooting this young fallen soldier, hoping to achieve a “sentimental composition.”\footnote{39} Gardner titled one of the resulting images, “A Sharpshooter’s Last Sleep” \cite{5}, though his position on the hill suggests that he was most likely a regular infantryman rather than a sharpshooter.\footnote{40} When Gardner and his photographers moved around the battlefield, they stumbled upon a scene rife with photographic potential: a stone wall constructed for a Confederate sharpshooter. The only problem was that there were no bodies to be found. Frassanito claims that, in a “flash of creative excitement, the cameramen chose to improvise,” laying the young soldier’s body on a blanket and carrying him some forty yards to this new scene.\footnote{41} Placing the young boy against the wall, Gardner finished composing his new scene by adding a rifle—one of Gardner’s props that appears in many of his photographs—and placing a sack by the soldier’s head, a detail he would exploit in his narrative description of the scene.\footnote{42} Gardner and his team’s staging of the photograph paid off, as “Home of the Rebel Sharpshooter” became one of Gardner’s most famous images of the Civil War.\footnote{43}

Both “A Harvest of Death” and “Home of the Rebel Sharpshooter” appear in Gardner’s Sketch Book, accompanied by long narratives that propose some apparently false reality. Although Frassanito’s intense study of the images has exposed Gardner’s manipulations of the images of the battlefields, Elizabeth Young, a historian who has analyzed Gardner’s narratives in the Sketch Book, asserts that “to the extent these most famous of Civil War photographs are now known for being inauthentic, it is not their image that make them so: it is their words.”\footnote{44} With his descriptions of the images, Gardner makes no attempt to inform the viewer that his photographs have been manipulated; instead, his narratives only enhance the inauthenticity of his scenes. In the text accompanying “Home of the Rebel Sharpshooter,” Gardner writes,
The artist, in passing over the scene of the previous days’ engagements, found in a lonely place the covert of a rebel sharpshooter, and photographed the scene presented here. He leads the reader to believe that the scene photographed was undisturbed, totally removing the fact that he and his team manufactured the entire situation.

In “A Harvest of Death,” the men are described as “rebels” who “paid with life the price of their treason” and will be buried in “nameless graves, far from home and kindred.” Adjectives like “devilish,” “wicked” and “savage” permeate the description. Conversely, the Union soldiers pictured in “Field Where General Reynolds Fell” are described as “our own men” with “calm” expressions or “smiles.” Their faces appeared “as though cut in marble,” evoking images of Classical sculptures of Greek heroes; the soldiers seem capable of cheating death: “a spectator could hardly help thinking they were about to rise to continue the fight.” Gardner writes such vastly different descriptions for the very same group of men. Gardner’s warning in his preface that “verbal representations of such places, or scenes, may not have the merit of accuracy” ironically rings true in his own accompanying narratives.

Since Gardner’s images and his narratives of the war have been exposed as inauthentic representations, it may be surprising that his photographs are still so widely accepted and praised. His Photographic Sketch Book of the Civil War is still considered a seminal work in photographic history. Photographic historian Anne E. Peterson asserts that it is “arguably the most important American photographically illustrated book, and its images and those from which they were selected [Gardner’s collection of some 3,000 negatives] contain the visual record by which we have formed our view of the Civil War.”

Young asserts that when Gardner writes that his photographs “will be accepted by posterity with an undoubting face,” he actually emphasizes “the future reception of photographs as true rather than on their inherent veracity.” Thus, perhaps Gardner was not as concerned about accurately depicting the Civil War, and instead was focused on creating and portraying a version of his own truth that could transcend time and still be relevant in the future. After sifting through his 3,000 negatives of the war to create his Sketch Book, “Gardner sets up the volume to come as his own partial and selective interpretation.” His volume becomes true to its name; it’s not a detailed, fact-obsessed analysis of the war, but rather just a sketch of his own impressions of the war. The Sketch Book “ask[s] the simple question ‘What is war?’”

The images and impact of the Sketch Book, then, parallel Gardner’s own experience of the war. There is a certain element of belatedness surrounding Gardner’s images and the Sketch Book. Hurrying from his studio in Washington, D.C. upon hearing about a battle, Gardner and his team would often arrive after the battles were over, left to take pictures of dead soldiers landscapes of the battlefields, or notable landmarks. Having arrived after the action had taken place, Gardner’s photographs were an exercise in reconstruction, piecing together different elements to recreate the scene of the battle or the mood of the camp. Anthony W. Lee, an art historian who studied Gardner’s Sketch Book, remarks, “War could not be viewed except retroactively, as a memory so surpassingly vivid but also so distant and distancing. One had to maintain a sense of one’s own lateness in coming to it.” Gardner’s own experience of “lateness” and of reconstruction is reflected in the very subjects of his photographs, but it also gave him the opportunity to understand how to project a vision of what he wanted to portray about the war for the future. Perhaps that is why he was so concerned about the future reception of his photographs; since he so clearly understood the effect of tardiness on the production of his photographs of the war, he was quick to recognize the need to secure an image that withstood any subsequent lateness and
Regardless of whatever truth the camera captured as the shutter closed, what mattered most was what endured.

The stress that Gardner placed on photography as a vehicle of truth for posterity proved to be a mark on Gardner’s own foresight. There was no real critical reception of his work upon its initial release; just as Gardner arrived late to the battlefields, the audience arrived late to his photographs. The modern-day viewers’ attempt to understand Gardner’s photographs mimics Gardner’s own effort to comprehend the situations of battle and war. They try to glean what is important or what is conveyed through Gardner’s photographs, but are only able to experience them retroactively. Removed from the reality of the Civil War, the public’s only understanding of the war arrives through the images, stories, and records that are left for them; in Gardner’s Photographic Sketchbook of the Civil War, the viewer is presented with Gardner’s effort to piece together the war and to create his own understanding of truth and history through only one hundred of his thousands of images. Thus, while Gardner’s images and narratives may not be completely accurate, and though they may have been manipulates or staged, they serve the purpose of capturing a vital truth of war.

One can clearly see that Gardner attempted to convey an emotional truth beyond just what his images capture through his written narratives. While “Home of the Rebel Sharpshooter” and “A Harvest of Death” are both images that are not what they claim to be, Gardner uses them to advance some greater truth about the destruction and realities of war that transcends the actual events of Gettysburg. In “A Harvest of Death,” Gardner presents a field strewn with dead soldiers that extends into the background; the horsemen in the background appear as Grim Reapers presiding over the scene. The battle is described as “devilish!” and as a “wicked strife”; bodies are “shattered” and the “sunless” air is filled with “shadowy vapors.” There is no glorification of battle and war in Gardner’s description, only feelings of devastation, loss, and loneliness. In fact, Gardner ends his description with a warning against war: “Such a picture conveys a useful moral: It shows the blank horror and reality of war, in opposition to its pageantry. Here are the dreadful details! Let them aid in preventing such another calamity falling upon the nation.” In “Field Where General Reynolds Fell,” Gardner’s writing evokes sentiments of sacrifice and unbelievable loss. When he writes, “a spectator could hardly help thinking [the soldiers] were about to rise to continue the fight,” Gardner captures a sense of disbelief and shock surrounding the massive and sudden loss of war.

Gardner explores the emotional complexity of war in “Home of the Rebel Sharpshooter” as well, capturing the uncertainty of pain, suffering and death that plagues war:

There was no means of judging how long he had lived after receiving his wound, but the disordered clothing shows that his sufferings must have been intense. Was he delirious with agony, or did death come slowly to his relief, while memories of home grew dearer as the field of carnage faded before him? What visions, of loved ones far away, may have hovered above his stony pillow! What familiar voices may he not have heard, like whispers beneath the roar of battle, as his eyes grew heavy in their long, last sleep?

Gardner’s exclamations pull the viewer into conversation with the piece and with the soldier, creating an emotional bond that overcomes the distance created by space and time. The viewer enters into dialogue with the photograph. Furthermore, despite the fact that this soldier was not actually a Confederate sharpshooter, the uncertainty of death and suffering and the longing for family, underscored by the use of “home” in the title, are ideas that can be applied to any soldier in war. The truth Gardner conveys in “Home of the Rebel Sharpshooter” is not confined by the reality of the image, but rather expresses the shared experience of all soldiers, regardless of rank, position, or geography.

Gardner’s emphasis on conveying emotion is also evident in “Sharpshooter’s Last
Sleep.” Gardner and his team spent about half an hour photographing one soldier as he lay strewn on the field, revealing the effort and care Gardner took in creating a “sentimental composition” for his photograph. The title evokes not violent death but peaceful slumber, proposing that, through death, the sharpshooter has escaped the calamity and destruction of war. Yet, there is still a sense of profound loss when Gardner writes:

How many men are bleaching to-day in out of the way places no one can tell. Now and then the visitor to a battle-field finds the bones of some man shot as this one was, but there are hundreds that will never be known of, and will moulder into nothingness among the rocks.

Again, the emotion that Gardner conveys through his photographs reflects the universal war experience. It is plausible that his emotional portrayal of the war is effective because it involves the viewer. Feelings of uncertainty, struggles over the loss of identity, and moments of peacefulness are all characteristic of every human experience. Thus, Gardner portrays an experience to which any viewer can relate, ensuring the significance and relevance of his photographs in posterity.

Though Gardner emigrated from Scotland in hopes of joining a utopian community in Iowa, he instead found himself in a country on the cusp of complete chaos. Producing the first photographic compilation of its kind, Gardner created the Sketch Book of the Civil War as his own record and interpretation of the war. Though it was largely ignored during his own time, his images have endured and have helped shape the American consciousness surrounding the Civil War. While Gardner’s photographs have undergone intense scrutiny and have been revealed as staged and manipulated, they have prevailed because of their ability to transcend time and communicate an essential emotional truth about both the Civil War and the human experience. Despite its inauthenticity, the Sketch Book is a raw and unfiltered presentation of the Civil War.
APPENDICES:

Appendix 1:

The Title Page of Alexander Gardner’s *Photographic Sketch Book of the War*, Volume 1, published 1866.


Appendix 2:


Full text published in Gardner’s *Sketch Book*:

“Slowly, over the misty fields of Gettysburg -- as all reluctant to expose their ghastly horrors to the light -- came the sunless morn, after the retreat by Lee’s broken army. Through the shadowy vapors, it was, indeed, a “harvest of death” that was presented; hundreds and thousands of torn Union and rebel soldiers -- although many of the former were already interred -- strewed the now quiet fighting ground, soaked by the rain, which for two days had drenched the country with its fitful showers.

A battle has been often the subject of elaborate description; but it can be described in one simple word, devilish! and the distorted dead recall the ancient legends of men torn in pieces by the savage wantonness of fiends. Swept down without preparation, the shattered bodies fall in all conceivable positions. The rebels represented in the photograph are without shoes. These were always removed from the feet of the dead on account of the pressing need of the survivors. The pockets turned inside out also show that appropriation did not cease with the coverings of the feet. Around is scattered the litter of the battle-field, accouterments, ammunition, rags, cups and canteens, crackers, haversacks, &,c., and letters that may tell the name of the owner, although the majority will surely be buried unknown by strangers, and in a strange land. Killed in the frantic efforts to break the steady lines of an army of patriots, whose heroism only excelled theirs in motive, they paid with life the price of their treason, and when the wicked strife was finished, found nameless graves, far from home and kindred.

Such a picture conveys a useful moral: It shows the blank horror and reality of war, in opposition to its pageantry. Here are the dreadful details! Let them aid in preventing such another calamity falling upon the nation.”
Appendix 3:


Full text published in Gardner’s Sketch Book:

“About nine o’clock on the morning of the 1st of July, 1863, the Federal cavalry, under General Buford, met the Confederates two miles beyond Gettysburg, on the road to Chambersburg. The rebel infantry was preceded by a small body of their cavalry, which dispersed the militia wherever met with, and which, charging into our cavalry, was captured, not a man escaping. The Confederates immediately threw a division of infantry into line, and advanced upon our cavalry, which dismounted, and by slowly falling back from one stone wall to another, impeded the progress of the enemy very materially. The cavalry had just taken up the last available line of defence beyond Gettysburg, when, eleven o’clock, General Reynolds arrived with the 1st corps on a double-quick. The enemy then halted for a short time, re-formed their lines, and prepared to charge, which was met by a severe fire from the advance of our infantry, which went into line as rapidly as the regiments could be brought up. General Reynolds, appreciating the importance of holding the Seminary Ridge, rode out into the field, and directed the posting of the troops, and while engaged in this work, received a shot in the neck, falling lifeless to the earth. His remains were brought off the field under a withering fire, which lasted until night, our troops, overwhelmed by numbers, slowly falling back, and finally taking a position on Cemetery Ridge, which was next day occupied by the rest of our army, and became the battle-ground of the succeeding days.

The dead shown in the photograph were our own men. The picture represents only a single spot on the long line of killed, which after the fight extended across the fields. Some of the dead presented an aspect which showed that they had suffered severely just previous to dissolution, but these were few in number compared with those who wore a calm and resigned expression, as though they had passed away in the act of prayer. Others had a smile on their faces, and looked as if they were in the act of speaking. Some lay stretched on their backs, as if friendly hands had prepared them for burial. Some were still resting on one knee, their hands grasping their muskets. In some instances the cartridge remained between the teeth, or the musket was held in one hand, and the other was uplifted as though to ward a blow, or appealing to heaven. The faces of all were pale, as though cut in marble, and as the wind swept across the battle-field it waved the hair, and gave the bodies such an appearance of life that a spectator could hardly help thinking they were about to rise to continue the fight.”
Appendix 4:


Full text published in Gardner’s *Sketch Book*:

“On the Fourth of July, 1863, Lee’s shattered army withdrew from Gettysburg, and started on its retreat from Pennsylvania to the Potomac. From Culp’s Hill, on our right, to the forests that stretched away from Round Top, on the left, the fields were thickly strewn with Confederate dead and wounded, dismounted guns, wrecked caissons, and the debris of a broken army. The artist, in passing over the scene of the previous days’ engagements, found in a lonely place the covert of a rebel sharpshooter, and photographed the scene presented here. The Confederate soldier had built up between two huge rocks, a stone wall, from the crevices of which he had directed his shots, and, in comparative security, picked off our officers. The side of the rock on the left shows, by the little white spots, how our sharpshooters and infantry had endeavored to dislodge him. The trees in the vicinity were splintered, and their branches cut off, while the front of the wall looked as if just recovering from an attack of geological small-pox. The sharpshooter had evidently been wounded in the head by a fragment of shell which had exploded over him, and had laid down upon his blanket to await death. There was no means of judging how long he had lived after receiving his wound, but the disordered clothing shows that his sufferings must have been intense. Was he delirious with agony, or did death come slowly to his relief, while memories of home grew dearer as the field of carnage faded before him? What visions, of loved ones far away, may have hovered above his stony pillow! What familiar voices may he not have heard, like whispers beneath the roar of battle, as his eyes grew heavy in their long, last sleep!

On the nineteenth of November, the artist attended the consecration of the Gettysburg Cemetery, and again visited the ‘Sharpshooter’s Home.’ The musket, rusted by many storms, still leaned against the rock, and the skeleton of the soldier lay undisturbed within the mouldering uniform, as did the cold form of the dead four months before. None of those who went up and down the fields to bury the fallen, had found him. “Missing,” was all that could have been known of him at home, and some mother may yet be patiently watching for the return of her boy, whose bones lie bleaching, unrecognized and alone, between the rocks at Gettysburg.”
Appendix 5:


Full text published in Gardner’s \textit{Sketch Book}:

“A burial party, searching for dead on the borders of the Gettysburg battle-field, found, in a secluded spot, a sharpshooter lying as he fell when struck by the bullet. His cap and gun were evidently thrown behind him by the violence of the shock, and the blanket, partly shown, indicates that he had selected this as a permanent position from which to annoy the enemy. How many skeletons of such men are bleaching to-day in out of the way places no one can tell. Now and then the visitor to a battle-field finds the bones of some man shot as this one was, but there are hundreds that will never be known of, and will moulder into nothingness among the rocks. There were several regiments of Sharpshooters employed on both sides during the war, and many distinguished officers lost their lives at the hands of the riflemen. The first regiment was composed of men selected from each of the Loyal States, who brought their own rifles, and could snuff a candle at a hundred yards. Some of the regiments tried almost every variety of arms, but generally found the Western rifle most effective. The men were seldom used in line, but were taken to the front and allowed to choose their own positions. Some climbed into bushy trees, and lashed themselves to the branches to avoid falling if wounded. Others secreted themselves behind logs and rocks, and not a few dug little pits, into which they crept, lying close to the ground and rendering it almost impossible for an enemy to hit them. Occasionally a Federal and Confederate Sharpshooter would be brought face to face, when each would resort to every artifice to kill the other. Hats would be elevated upon sticks, and powder flashed on a piece of paper, to draw the opponent’s fire, not always with success, however, and sometimes many hours would elapse before either party could get a favorable shot. When the armies were entrenched, as at Vicksburg and Richmond, the sharpshooters frequently secreted themselves so as to defy discovery, and picked off officers without the Confederate riflemen being able to return the fire.”
Divided by 3 1/2 Inches: Railroad Gauges in the American Civil War

Harvey Hinman

America remembers the Civil War not only through thousands of memorials, battlefields, and monuments, but also through folksongs, paintings, and even infrastructure. Railroads are one such source, as few things were affected as much by the Civil War as the railroads of the South. When southerners set out to build a rail network in the early 19th century, they did so at an equal pace with the North. Their tracks were imbued with their ambitions to create an American economic system led by the South. However, the Civil War brought a decisive end to these ambitions. Today, this narrative is told by the miles of steel that stretch across our country. Through the standard gauge that spaces every railroad, we can recall the strength and goals of the antebellum South and its defeat. In other words, using railroad tracks as a historical source illuminates the story of the economic destruction of the South by the hands of the North in the Civil War.

George Stephenson was one of the first people to utilize the steam locomotive on a railroad in 1825 in England, and in 1826 John Stevens demonstrated the feasibility of such technology for an American audience. Construction soon began on the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad (B&O), which opened in 1830 and traveled through Maryland, Virginia, and West Virginia. The B&O Railroad was built to accommodate British locomotives, which dictated that the gauge stand at 4 feet 8 1/2 inches. This gauge, measured by the width between the inside edges of the two rails, most likely derived from coal tramways and English wagon roads. Small railways, most only a few miles in length, could be built quickly and relatively inexpensively and were soon found across the North. As most small railways could never be profitable, they had little impact on the transportation of the region, save the fact that they adopted the 4 foot 8 1/2 inch gauge. This set the groundwork for a northern rail network based on the gauge Stephenson and the B&O Railroad first used.

The second major railway company in the United States was the South Carolina Canal and Rail Road Company. By 1833 they had completed the 136-mile Charleston and Hamburg Line, which was, at the time, the longest steam railroad in the world. Instead of simply adopting the standard English gauge, the chief engineer Horatio Allen recommended the use of a five-foot gauge based on an engineering report he conducted. In the same way that short, fragmented railroads began to populate the North, numerous short railways were built in the South. For the most part, however, these railroads conformed to the 5 foot gauge of the Charleston and Hamburg Line.

As railways became more profitable and more commonplace across the country, the North and the South maintained their different standards. There were no regulations or official standards in place, but the incentives for a new railway to adopt the gauge of its neighbor were strong, since not doing so would create a break in gauge where cargo and passengers would usually have to be moved from one train to another. While this led to most railroads adopting either the 4 foot 8 1/2 inch gauge in the North or the 5 foot gauge in the South, there were many other gauges, ranging from under 3 feet to 6 feet. Most often, these railroad...
companies knowingly chose an unusual gauge to create a monopoly over a market. These railroads, like the Portland-Montreal Line, often saw a brief period of success before they were bypassed by another rail with a more standard gauge. Even still, the vast majority of northern railways relied upon the 4 foot 8 1/2 inch gauge, while the southern railroads primarily used the 5 foot gauge, dividing the two regions by just a few inches.

Based on his engineering report, Horatio Allen recommended the gauge of the Charleston and Hamburg Line, but perhaps there was a larger reason why the southern railroads adopted the five-foot gauge. Aaron Marrs argues, “railroad boosters had a grander vision than simply the southern interior.” Instead of considering only a short-term vision, southern railroad boosters acknowledged that long-distance transport over a standard gauge would eventually become necessary. They did not, however, want to conform to their competitor’s gauges, but hoped to control these long-distance routes on their own terms. In this way, the 5 foot gauge can be seen as representative of the economic ambitions of the South in the antebellum period.

These hopes were not at all unfounded. As the “birthplace of railroad transportation in the United States,” two of the first three major railroad companies were southern, and the third ran through border states. In 1835, 42 percent of the total mileage of railroads in the United States lay in the South, and in 1850, 30 percent lay in the South. While these may not seem like astounding numbers, the South contained “scarcely 10 percent of the country’s white population and 5 percent of its industrial capacity.” With this in mind, the South’s preeminence in railroads is evident, and southern ambitions of controlling the entire rail network of the nation were not unreasonable. Even while the North began to catch up to the South as the war neared, the South maintained a much higher per-capita rail mileage than the North.

With the first railroads, Horatio Allen and other southern railroad boosters knew that their economic ambitions could be realized if they could control the markets of the West. South Carolina railroad boosters knew that by building a railroad to the Tennessee River, they could get corn and meat at a much cheaper rate than from the North. More than that, citizens of Charleston believed that controlling access to the grain markets of the West with railroads of the 5 foot gauge would allow them to export freely-produced grain alongside slave-produced cotton and rice. The integration of these two markets would protect southern slavery and serve to actualize the South’s economic ambitions of North American dominance.

Rail routes to the West and to states like Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois would also serve to “create bonds to the South that might keep these states out of the rabid antislavery camp.” Thus, in addition to being imbued with economic and ideological meaning for the southerners, the five-foot gauge was also highly political. Like southern hopes of controlling the entire rail network of the United States, these ambitions for dominance over the West were not farfetched. In the middle of the 19th century, the fight for the West between the North and South was far from decided. In 1858, for example, the Pennsylvania Railroad told its stockholders that “competition for trade of the West is vigorous, and the Stake is immense.”

The South’s interest in economic and political dominance through their railroads was not only a notion for corporate executives. The South did not have the same access to large capital that the North had, and laying tracks and building locomotives were very capital heavy endeavors. To raise money for construction, therefore, southern rail companies sold bonds, accepted state aid, and relied upon people along the lines to buy shares of the company. In order to sell shares of their company to the state governments, farmers, mill owners, and others, the rail companies paid frequent dividends. More than that, however, they made elaborate arguments about the importance of railroads. In the end, railroads may have relied heavily upon state support, but the large number of individuals who subscribed to railroad stock and approved the state legislature demonstrates that while debate over the support of the railroad existed, the southern public was largely behind the effort to make southern railroads preeminent.
The Civil War had two major implications for American railroads: first, it demonstrated that a national standard would be necessary in the postwar era, and second, it dictated that the new national rail network would be controlled by the North. In 1860, various gauges were still intermixed with the most prevalent gauges in both the North and South. This became hugely problematic as the war called for efficient movement of thousands of men and supplies. When Lee’s army desperately needed more supplies in the final months of the war, they did not receive them due to barriers the different gauges inadvertently created (even though North Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi all reported food surpluses). These gauge barriers, along with a multitude of problems relating to the inability of the government to regulate railroad companies, posed the same issue with regards to the transportation of soldiers. These large-scale problems in both the North and South made it clear that one standard gauge was needed.

The Union’s victory in the Civil War was devastating to the South. What was even more detrimental to the South, however, were the wounds of the war, which stretched beyond the battlefield to nearly every aspect of southern society. The destroyed railroad tracks of the South tell the story of crushed southern ambition and economic ruin. Perhaps the best example of this is the destruction in Georgia by General Sherman’s army. Sherman estimated his army caused $100,000,000 worth of damage, $20,000,000 of which helped the Union cause, while the remainder was “simply waste and destruction.”

Rails were either heated over a fire and twisted around trees or left as “mere streaks of rust” across the entire South. The destruction was so thorough that one historian remarked “that probably upon no complete [rail]road in the South did the iron rest intact during the war.” It is estimated that only one-third of the railroads that the South had in 1861 survived the war in some capacity. Rolling stocks and depots had been similarly destroyed, and those resources that had been left untouched were completely worn out from overuse. While the southern railroads recovered relatively quickly after the war, they did not do so on their own terms. In 1890, northern influence was dominant in ¾ of the 58 southern rail companies and in 88 percent of the total rail mileage concerned. The Civil War denied the southerners a chance to realize their economic goals, as northern interests almost completely took over one of the South’s most valued industries.

With the Civil War came the government’s decision to stand behind a transcontinental railroad. The original Pacific Railroad Act, signed in 1862, left the choice of gauge up to President Lincoln. After consulting with his cabinet and various engineers, Lincoln decided to build the railroad using a five-foot gauge. Railroad interests in the East and Midwest refused to accept this gauge, as they had already conformed to the 4 foot 8 ¾ inch gauge, and used their power to prompt Congress to address the gauge issue. In early 1863, Senator James Harlan from Iowa introduced a bill establishing the gauge of the Pacific Railroad at 4 feet 8 ½ inches, and it passed easily, overruling the president’s decision. This marked a symbolic closing of the West to the South, as northern interests would now control any trade with the far West.

While it was clear that American railroads would never be controlled from the South after the Civil War, southern railroads did not change their gauge immediately. Instead, it took two decades of economic growth in the North, along with their growing willingness to conform to the 4 foot 8 ½ inch standard gauge, before the southern tracks were converted. Until then, the South remained “shut off from the rest of the country by this lack of uniformity.” In 1886, the economic pressure on southern railroads to standardize their tracks was too great, and railroad companies from ten southern states came together and planned a mass standardization. After much preparation, on June 1, 1886, the approximately 15,000 miles of southern track at the five-foot gauge were moved three inches closer together. It is interesting to note that in 1886, the Commercial and Financial Chronicle, a New York publication, stressed the importance, autonomy, and economic opportunity of this action for the South. The authors note that this free choice of
the railroad owners was simply a response to a changing economic environment. The authors, however, ignore the significance of this action in the economic rivalry between the North and South.\textsuperscript{39} Converting the gauge of southern railroads to the northern standard marked a decisive economic victory for the North over the South.

Today, the standard gauge across America is 4 foot 8 ½ inches.\textsuperscript{40} The memory of the South’s economic ambition, its trials, and ultimate destruction has been etched into the infrastructure of our country in the form of this gauge. Unnoticed by most who ride Amtrak and use products shipped by rail, the narratives of this physical memory are unique from others often heard in the discussion of the Civil War. While many events seem to have predicted the Civil War and its outcome, our railroad tracks remind us that as southerners sought to expand their rail networks North and West, their fate was far from sealed. The early success and hope southerners had seen in the railroads, however, was lost in the crushing defeat by the North. The shift from a 5 foot gauge to a 4 foot 8 ½ inch gauge, therefore, marked an economic and cultural defeat in the aftermath of a military one.
Politics and Poetry: George Moses Horton and the Rise of African American Expression during the Civil War

Mary Zost

In the years preceding the American Civil War, African-American slaves – subjugated physically and mentally in the institution of slavery – lacked a cohesive, unified, and distinctly African-American identity. Marginalization in political, social, and cultural realms rendered slaves and their attempts to attain a unique African-American voice largely ineffectual. However, George Moses Horton and his poetry, the first articulation against bondage in verse composed by an American slave, provided lyrical fodder for the creation of a politically-charged African-American identity that would be fostered in the educational efforts of Reconstruction. Horton’s poetry, infused with subtle political diction and an overarching desire for liberty, aided in the cultivation and expression of a conscious African-American identity. Though Horton’s historical position as the first American slave to protest his bondage in verse may be marginalized if not entirely forgotten in our current time, poetry and its implications in the creation of black identity are paralleled in the modern day movement of conscious hip-hop.

In her introduction to The Black Bard of North Carolina: George Moses Horton and His Poetry, editor Joan R. Sherman posits, “[Horton’s] achievements as a man and a poet were extraordinary: Horton was the first American slave to protest his bondage in verse; the first African American to publish a book in the South; [and] the only slave to earn a significant income by selling his poems.” Bound in the institution of slavery for 68 years, George Moses Horton, through his poetry and three published volumes – The Hope of Liberty, The Poetical Works, and Native Genius – articulated an escape from the physical, mental, and political subjugation of slavery. He wrote of the slave’s plight for liberty as early as 1820, 40 years before the Civil War. Horton, born a slave in 1797 in North Carolina, worked planting corn and wheat for his slave master William Horton. Despite his bondage, Horton spent whatever leisure time he was afforded at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, where he demonstrated adeptness in verse. He wrote and sold acrostic love poems to students, but his more serious poetic efforts – those specifically concerning his bondage and the situation of slavery – yielded more widespread recognition beyond the confines of the university. Sherman explains, “During the 1830s, Horton unknowingly contributed to the abolition movement when his verse circulated in the North.” Horton’s verse was published in a number of publications, including the Raleigh Register, the Lancaster Gazette, and The Emancipator, though the profits from such publications were never sufficient to secure his freedom. Horton eventually became a free man after the culmination of the Civil War, but his later life remains largely undocumented. He is believed to have died in 1883 at the age of 86 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, leaving the legacy of his poetry and protest in his volumes, publications, and the collective African-American mind.

Merle Richmond, a scholar and critic of Horton’s poetry, posits that Horton, by “uttering the first black poetic outcry against
slavery...is historically an important figure in the tradition...of resistance to oppression, of refusal to acquiesce in a state of inferiority. Thus Horton’s antislavery verse lacks the overtly political, militant criticism of government, religious institutions, and laws characteristic of other African-American verse of the century. Horton manages to combine raw emotion and antislavery rhetoric to create verse that asserts a unique African-American political identity appealing to both conservative southern and more radical northern audiences. His political rhetoric is subtle yet powerful, questioning the legitimacy of the institution of slavery and implicitly calling for slave participation and action to ensure its disestablishment. It was Horton’s articulation of such an African-American political identity in verse that provided fodder for increased African-American unification, education, and expression after the Civil War and throughout Reconstruction.

One of Horton’s most prominent antislavery poems, “On Liberty and Slavery” [Appendix 1], published in the Lancaster Gazette in 1828, The Emancipator in 1857, and in Horton’s published volume Hope of Liberty in 1829, details his desire for personal liberty in the midst of racial oppression. In the poem, Horton utilizes the first person pronoun “I” to chronicle his personal desire to escape from bondage, and the collective pronoun “we” to speak more universally to his fellow slaves and those promoting the abolitionist cause. Horton’s lines “Alas! and am I born for this, to wear this slavish chain? Deprived of all created bliss, through hardship, toil and pain!” question the commonly held belief that black individuals were ‘born’ into the institution of slavery and demonstrate an inner struggle between the black person and the “created bliss” of the white race. Horton explicitly questions his bondage in “Slavery” and “The Slave’s Complaint,” stating, “Is it because my skin is black that thou should’st be so dull and slack, and scorn to set me free?” and “Must I dwell in Slavery’s night, And all pleasures take its flight...Forever?” Horton questions his inferiority based on his black skin, and laments his lack of pleasures due to such forced inferiority. Horton’s assertion of an active and unique African American political identity in verse is most evident in a line from “On Liberty and Slavery,” in which he asserts: “Alas! and must I still complain—Deprived of liberty.” Though the verse is structured in an interrogative form syntactically—with “must” preceding “I”—Horton’s choice to punctuate with a period makes the statement declaratory rather than interrogative. Thus, through his diction and punctuation, Horton highlights the importance of challenging slavery and the necessity of African-American complaint—which requires political organization—in achieving liberty. Horton and the black collective “must” still complain, unsatisfied with their subjugation and eager to achieve liberty. Horton’s verse, charged with such rhetoric, necessitates a collective African-American challenge of the institution of slavery through increased political participation. Riddled with antislavery diction and critique, it is no wonder “On Liberty and Slavery” was published three times and was included in Lydia Maria Child’s The Freedmen’s Book, a compilation of works by abolitionists and prominent African-American thinkers intended to provide critical, educational information for recently-freed slaves after the Civil War. Though “Horton wrote 11 poems concerned entirely with slavery and freedom, [and] another dozen mentioned bondslave, confinement, and liberty,” “On Liberty and Slavery” arguably remains one of the most prominent and influential among them, precisely because of its political connotations.

In the introduction to Lydia Maria Child’s The Freedmen’s Book, James M. McPherson, a historian at Princeton University, asserts, “In one area—education—the Civil War generation made a lasting contribution to racial progress. During and after the war, abolitionists, philanthropists, and churches in the north, aided by the Freedmen’s Bureaus, established dozens of freedmen’s education societies.” According to McPherson, Child’s book, published in 1865 for use as a textbook in freedmen’s schools, “was a part of the beginnings of Negro education, and helps us understand the nature of that great social movement.” Child’s volume includes the works of Frederick Douglass, William Lloyd...
Garrison, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and other abolitionists and African American writers. George Moses Horton’s inclusion in the volume is significant not merely due to his position as “the first American slave to protest his bondage in verse,” but because his included work, “On Liberty and Slavery,” helps form the canon of works that informed Reconstruction-era African-American memory of the Civil War and slavery.\textsuperscript{23} Child, a white abolitionist, introduces Horton’s work in a three-page chapter entitled “The Slave Poet,” where she posits that Horton, a slave of Chatham Country, North Carolina, “early manifested remarkable intelligence.”\textsuperscript{24} She emphasizes, “[Horton] did not know how to write; so when he had arranged his thoughts in rhyme, he spoke them aloud to others, who wrote them down for him.”\textsuperscript{25} Child’s inclusion of such a statement, especially in a volume intended for the instruction of recently emancipated slaves, highlights the necessity of black literacy and black initiative in the struggle against the institution of slavery and racial inequality. Though Child’s initial three-page inclusion of Horton may appear insufficient, her volume further references two of Horton’s other poems—“Praise of Creation” and “Spring”—demonstrating Horton’s adaptability and breadth as a poet and black thinker.\textsuperscript{26} However, it is Child’s inclusion of Horton’s poem “On Liberty and Slavery,” previously discussed in this article, that is particularly significant, its verse pregnant with the assertion of a politically charged African-American voice in the wake of slavery.

It should be noted that the declaratory punctuation of the line “Alas! and must I still complain—Deprived of liberty” present in the 1997 publication of The Black Bard of North Carolina is not shared by Child’s 1865 publication of Horton’s poem in The Freedmen’s Book.\textsuperscript{27} Instead, Child’s transcription of Horton’s line reads interrogatively: “Alas! and must I still complain—Deprived of liberty?”\textsuperscript{28} Despite this contradictory punctuation (Joan B. Sherman, editor of The Black Bard of North Carolina insists “spelling and punctuation in the poems reproduced in this volume are Horton’s”), Horton’s verse still retains its call to questioning and the need for African-American participation in achieving liberty and abolishing slavery.\textsuperscript{29} The verse, analyzed with its interrogative punctuation, laments the duration of slavery and oppression, as Horton rhetorically asks both himself and the reader how long he “must complain” until he is free of bondage. Thus, both versions of Horton’s “On Liberty and Slavery,” despite their varied punctuation, share a political message fraught with emotional lamentation and the desire for liberty, demonstrating an attention to lyrical language and its role in organizing resistance to oppression.

Horton’s poem and its inclusion in an instructional freedmen’s volume demonstrate the emergence of a politically-charged African American voice in the period after the Civil War. Child, unaware if Horton was still alive at the time of her book’s publication (he was; Horton lived until 1883) writes, “I hope it will comfort [Horton’s] poor, bruised heart to know that some of his verses are preserved, and published for the benefit of those who have been his companions in Slavery.”\textsuperscript{30} Similarly, Sherman, at the culmination of her introduction, concludes, “It was this struggle to burst his chains and gain liberty, learning, and respect from the white community that galvanized Horton’s art. At the end of his life he was pleased to be called ‘Poet.”’\textsuperscript{31} Horton’s poetry informed collective African-American memory of the Civil War and slavery during the period of Reconstruction, intimately and inextricably linking the lyrical structure of poetry and its role in the emergence of an African-American voice.

Today, the recognition of George Moses Horton’s poetry and its influence on the articulation of a politically active African-American identity during and after the Civil War has arguably dwindled and been marginalized, if not completely disregarded. American memory favors what it considers to be more prominent African American thinkers, like Frederick Douglass, and forgets Horton, “the first American slave to protest his bondage in verse.”\textsuperscript{32} Critics of Horton and his work also argue that his “bondage was ‘not so bad’ as the poems imply” and that “the condition of servitude was easily borne...life was hardly
more confined than for any man free to act but held to the exigencies of providing for himself and others.”

No matter the veracity of such statements, it is evident Horton conveyed abolitionist sentiment and contributed meaningfully to the development of African-American identity through his works. Specifically, Horton’s work as a poet provided unique lyrical expression to the plight of the slave. This lyrical expression and call to political participation in the midst of struggle is remembered and paralleled in some modern day rap. Though Horton cannot be credited as the harbinger of rap and its capacity for political expression, the widespread presence of rap in American society today demonstrates that Horton’s lyrical mode of communicating struggle in verse was as pertinent in shaping an African-American political identity during and after the Civil War as it is today.

Rachel E. Sullivan, a sociologist at the University of Connecticut, examines the demographics of black and white listeners of rap music in her article “Rap and Race: It’s Got a Nice Beat, but What About the Message?” – published in the Journal of Black Studies in 2003. Sullivan begins her study of black and white adolescent understandings of rap music by discussing common conceptions concerning rap and its cultural background. She states, “From the start, the public viewed hip-hop culture and rap music through a racist lens. Rappers and rap fans were often portrayed as menacing Black adolescents, and rap music was vilified as violent and misogynistic.” Such acerbic critique parallels criticism of Horton’s poetry, which argued that Horton’s situation as a slave was not “overly tragic or oppressive,” so his poems must be insincere and unfeeling at best. Despite such superficial critiques of the rap industry, Sullivan, quoting Rutgers University scholar Tricia Rose, posits, “Rap’s poetic voice is deeply political in content and spirit.” In fact, “During the 1980s, genres of rap became more noticeable, and many rappers turned to more overtly political themes. They addressed gang violence, police brutality, and other politically charged issues, such as poverty and racism.” From the late 1980s to the early 1990s, the rap industry witnessed an upsurge of “more politically oriented rap,” characterizing “a period that some refer to as the golden era of rap.” Sullivan insists that rap music and hip-hop culture are not merely political in the sense of resisting oppression, but that “they may also have broad-reaching implications for identity development and maintenance.” She argues, “Although many may see music as a passing phase, it is often a source of information about one’s group...and it can also be a (re)affirmation of one’s identity. This could be particularly true for young African Americans, who are less likely to have their experiences reflected in the dominant culture.” Just as George Moses Horton helped articulate the experiences of slaves in the dominant culture of the white South, rap music articulates the struggle of the black minority against systematic oppression by an ‘other.’ Horton’s poetry and its inclusion in Child’s The Freedmen’s Book were precisely, in Sullivan’s words, “a source of information about one’s group...and an affirmation of [the black individual’s] identity.” The themes of struggle and the formation of an African-American identity are shared both by George Horton’s poetry and modern rap, specifically in a movement termed “conscious hip-hop.”

Conscious hip-hop, a musical preference in rap that emphasizes social and political issues pertinent in today’s society, includes rappers Mos Def, Lupe Fiasco, Kendrick Lamar, and numerous others. New York Times columnist Jon Caramanica discusses the renewed presence of political rappers and socially-conscious hip-hop expression in his 2011 article “Social-Minded Hip-Hop Is Making a Comeback,” stating, “Message-driven hip-hop has begun to find a home again, not just on the fringes, but near the center of the genre.” In a prominent example of such message-driven hip-hop, conscious hip-hop rapper Lupe Fiasco incited political drama during his performance at the StartUp RockOn concert in celebration of Barack Obama’s re-election in January 2013, where he was reportedly escorted offstage by the Secret Service for the anti-Obama rhetoric in his song “Words I Never Said” [Appendix 2]. Though there is continuing debate over the reason Lupe was escorted offstage, his rap lyrics unapologetically assert a black, political voice and complaint, declaring, “Keep you at the bottom, but tease...
you with the upper crust...you never keeping up enough,” lamenting black oppression and focusing attention on black subjugation. Lupe’s rap reaches the pinnacle of political complaint in the lyrics “Limbaugh is a racist, Glenn Beck is a racist, Gaza Strip was getting bombed, Obama didn’t say s–t.” Just like George Moses Horton, Lupe Fiasco criticizes the political system in verse, calling for awareness, change, and African-American collectivization to articulate a shared African-American struggle and voice.

Though the political grievances and obstacles have largely shifted from Horton’s time to our current historical period, the role and importance of verse in developing an African-American voice have not changed. Poetry and verse exist in a literary, political, and cultural space, facilitating discussions of race and identity in profound and, as Horton’s work attests, historically significant ways. If American memory fails to remember Horton’s poetry as profoundly impactful work, conscious hip-hop lyrically honors the memory of “The Slave Poet” every time it blares through radio speakers, turning three-minute tracks into prolonged discussions of identity, sure to ring in people’s ears even after the stereo fades.
APPENDICES:

Appendix 1:

“On Liberty and Slavery”

Alas! and am I born for this,
To wear this slavish chain?
Deprived of all created bliss,
Through hardship, toil, and pain!

How long have I in bondage lain,
And languished to be free!
Alas! and must I still complain –
Deprived of liberty.

Oh, Heaven! and is there no relief
This side the silent grave –
To soothe the pain – to quell the grief
And anguish of a slave?

Come, Liberty, thou cheerful sound,
Roll through my ravished ears!
Come, let my grief in joys be drowned,
And drive away my fears.

Say unto foul oppression, Cease:
Ye tyrants rage no more,
And let the joyful trump of peace,
Now bid the vassal soar.

Soar on the pinions of that dove
Which long has cooed for thee,
And breathed her notes from Afric’s grove,
The sound of Liberty.

Oh, Liberty! thou golden prize,
So often sought by blood –
We crave thy sacred sun to rise,
The gift of nature’s God!

Bid Slavery hide her haggard face,
And barbarism fly:
I scorn to see the sad disgrace
In which enslaved I lie.

Dear Liberty! upon thy breast,
I languish to respire;
And like the Swan upon her nest,
I’d to thy smiles retire.

Oh, blest asylum – heavenly balm!
Unto thy boughs I flee –
And in thy shades the storm shall calm,
With songs of Liberty!
Appendix 2:

“Words I Never Said”

It’s so loud inside my head
With words that I should have said.
As I drown in my regrets,
I can’t take back the words I never said.
I can’t take back the words I never said.

I really think the war on terror is a bunch of bullshit,
Just a poor excuse for you to use up all your bullets.
How much money does it take to really make a full clip?
9/11, building 7, did they really pull it?
Uh, And a bunch of other cover ups

Your child’s future was the first to go with budget cuts
If you think that hurts, then wait, here comes the uppercut
The school was garbage in the first place, that’s on the up and up.
Keep you at the bottom but tease you with the upper crust
You get it, then they move it, so you never keeping up enough.
If you turn on TV all you see’s a bunch of “what the fucks”

Dude is dating so and so blabbering bout such and such
And that ain’t Jersey Shore, homie that’s the news
And these the same people that supposed to be telling us the truth
Limbaugh is a racist, Glenn Beck is a racist
Gaza strip was getting bombed, Obama didn’t say shit
That’s why I ain’t vote for him, next one either
I’m a part of the problem, my problem is I’m peaceful
And I believe in the people, yeah.

(Chorus)

Now you can say it ain’t our fault if we never heard it
But if we know better, then we probably deserve it
Jihad is not a holy war, where’s that in the worship?
Murdering is not Islam, and you are not observant
And you are not a Muslim
Israel don’t take my side cause look how far you’ve pushed them
Walk with me into the ghetto, this where all the kush went

Complain about the liquor store but what you drinking liquor for?
Complain about the ghoom, but when’d you pick a broom up?
Just listening to Pac ain’t gon’ make it stop
And these the same people that supposed to be telling us the truth

If you don’t become an actor, you’ll never be a factor
Pills with million side effects, take ‘em when the pain’s felt
Wash them down with diet soda, killin’ off your brain cells
Crooked banks around the world would gladly give a loan today
So if you ever miss a payment, they can take your home away.

(Chorus)

I think that all the silence is worse than all the violence
Fear is such a weak emotion, that’s why I despise it
We scared of almost everything, afraid to even tell the truth
So scared of what you think of me, I’m scared of even telling you
Sometimes I’m like the only person I feel safe to tell it to
I’m locked inside a cell in me, I know that there’s a jail in you
Consider this your bailing out, so take a breath, inhale a few
My screams is finally getting free, my thoughts is finally yelling through.

(Chorus)
Santo Benavides and the Forgotten Men of Civil War Texas:


2 “Santos Benavides.”

3 Jerry Thompson, Vaqueros in Blue and Grey (Austin: State House Press, 2000). 12 Alcado is a Spanish word equivalent to mayor.

4 Ibid. Procurador is a Spanish word equivalent to administrator.


6 Thompson, Vaqueros, 12.

7 Thompson, “A Stand Along the Border,” 28.


9 Thompson, “A Stand Along the Border,” 28.

10 Thompson, Vaqueros, 44.

11 Grear and Mendoza, Texans and War, 44-45.

12 Ibid.

13 Thompson, Vaqueros, 11-12.

14 Grear and Mendoza, Texans and War, 44-45.

15 Ibid.


17 Grear and Mendoza, Texans and War, 55.

18 Ibid.

19 Ibid.


21 Ibid.

22 Ibid.

23 Ibid.

24 Grear and Mendoza, Texans and War, 55.

25 Ibid.

26 Lawrence T. Jones and Jerry Thompson, Civil War and Revolution on the Rio Grande Frontier (Austin: Texas Historical Association, 2004), 67.

27 Thompson, “A Stand Along the Border,” 33.

28 Thompson, Vaqueros, 22-23.

29 Ibid. Vaqueros and campesinos are Spanish words for cowboys or ranchers and farmers, respectively.

30 Ibid., 17-23.


32 Ibid.

33 Ibid.


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24. Lee and Young, 35-36.


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11. Ibid., 79.
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28. Ibid., ii.
29. Ibid., 33.
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31. Ibid., 606.
33. Ibid., 606.
34. Ibid.
35. Ibid., 616.
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37. Ibid.
42. Ibid.