

The Myth of the Industrial North

The Economic Causes of the Civil War: What We
Think We Know and Why It Matters

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only a nominal duty is laid upon imports, no doubt the business of the chief Northern cities will be seriously injured thereby.

The difference is so great between the tariff of the Union and that of the Confederate States, that the entire Northwest must find it to their advantage to purchase their imported goods at New Orleans rather than at New York. In addition to this, the manufacturing interest of the country will suffer from the increased importations resulting from low duties. . . . The . . . [government] would be false to all its obligations, if this state of things were not provided against.

30. THE CLASH OF RIVAL ECONOMIES

When Charles A. and Mary R. Beard examined the background of the Civil War, they came to the conclusion that there had existed an "irrepressible conflict" between the static, agrarian, staple-producing South and the expanding, commercialized, industrializing North. The ultimate triumph of industry over agriculture—of North over South—they described as a "Second American Revolution." Here, in brief, is the Beards' interpretation, from *The Rise of American Civilization* (New York: 1927), II, pp. 3-10. Copyright 1933 by the Macmillan Company. Reprinted by permission of the publishers.

Had the economic systems of the North and the South remained static or changed slowly without effecting immense dislocations in the social structure, the balance of power might have been maintained indefinitely by repeating the compensatory tactics of 1787, 1820, 1833, and 1850; keeping in this manner the inherent antagonisms within the bounds of diplomacy. But nothing was stable in the economy of the United States or in the moral sentiments associated with its diversities.

Within each section of the country, the necessities of the productive system were generating portentous results. The periphery of the industrial vortex of the Northeast was daily enlarging, agriculture in the Northwest was being steadily supplemented by manufacturing, and the area of virgin soil open to exploitation by planters was diminishing with rhythmic regularity—shifting with mechanical precision the weights which statesmen had to adjust in their efforts to maintain the equilibrium of peace. Within each of the three sections also occurred an increasing intensity of social concentration as railways, the telegraph, and the press made travel and communication cheap and almost instantaneous, facilitating the centripetal process that was drawing

people of similar economic status and parallel opinions into coöperative activities. . . .

As the years passed, the planting leaders of Jefferson's agricultural party insisted with mounting fervor that the opposition, first of the Whigs and then of the Republicans, was at bottom an association of interests formed for the purpose of plundering productive management and labor on the land. And with steadfast insistence they declared that in the insatiable greed of their political foes lay the source of the disensions which were tearing the country asunder.

"There is not a pursuit in which man is engaged (agriculture excepted)," exclaimed Reuben Davis of Mississippi in 1860, "which is not demanding legislative aid to enable it to enlarge its profits and all at the expense of the primary pursuit of man—agriculture. . . . Those interests having a common purpose of plunder, have united and combined to use the government as the instrument of their operation and have thus virtually converted it into a consolidated empire. Now this combined host of interests stands arrayed against the agricultural states; and this is the reason of the conflict which like an earthquake is shaking our political fabric to its foundation." . . .

With challenging directness, [Jefferson] Davis [of Mississippi] turned upon his opponents in the Senate and charged them with using slavery as a blind to delude the unwary: "What do you propose, gentlemen of the Free-Soil party? Do you propose to better the condition of the slave? Not at all. What then do you propose? You say you are opposed to the expansion of slavery. . . . Is the slave to be benefited by it? Not at all. It is not humanity that influences you in the position which you now occupy before the country. . . . It is that you may have an opportunity of cheating us that you want to limit slave territory within circumscribed bounds. It is that you may have a majority in the Congress of the United States and convert the Government into an engine of northern aggrandizement. It is that your section may grow in power and prosperity upon treasures unjustly taken from the South. . . . You desire to weaken the political power of the southern states; and why? Because you want, by an unjust system of legislation, to promote the industry of the New England states, at the expense of the people of the South and their industry."

Such in the mind of Jefferson Davis, fated to be president of the Confederacy, was the real purpose of the party which sought to prohibit slavery in the territories; that party did not declare slavery to be a moral disease calling for the severe remedy of the surgeon; it merely sought to keep bondage out of the new states as they came into the

Union—with one fundamental aim in view, namely, to gain political ascendancy in the government of the United States and fasten upon the country an economic policy that meant the exploitation of the South for the benefit of northern capitalism.

But the planters were after all fighting against the census returns, as the phrase of the day ran current. The amazing growth of northern industries, the rapid extension of railways, the swift expansion of foreign trade to the ends of the earth, the attachment of the farming regions of the West to the centers of manufacture and finance through transportation and credit, the destruction of state consciousness by migration, the alien invasion, the erection of new commonwealths in the Valley of Democracy, the nationalistic drive of interstate commerce, the increase of population in the North, and the southward pressure of the capitalistic glacier all conspired to assure the ultimate triumph of what the orators were fond of calling "the free labor system." This was a dynamic thrust far too powerful for planters operating in a limited territory with incompetent labor on soil of diminishing fertility. Those who swept forward with it, exulting in the approaching triumph of machine industry, warned the planters of their ultimate subjection.

To statesmen of the invincible forces recorded in the census returns, the planting opposition was a huge, compact, and self-conscious economic association bent upon political objects—the possession of the government of the United States, the protection of its interests against adverse legislation, dominion over the territories, and enforcement of the national fugitive slave law throughout the length and breadth of the land. No phrase was more often on the lips of northern statesmen than "the slave power." The pages of the *Congressional Globe* bristled with references to "the slave system" and its influence over the government of the country. But it was left for William H. Seward of New York to describe it with a fullness of familiar knowledge that made his characterization a classic.

Seward knew from experience that a political party was no mere platonic society engaged in discussing abstractions. "A party," he said, "is in one sense a joint stock association, in which those who contribute most direct the action and management of the concern. The slaveholders contributing in an over-whelming proportion to the capital strength of the Democratic party, they necessarily dictate and prescribe its policy. . . . The slaveholding class has become the governing power in each of the slaveholding states, and it practically chooses thirty of the sixty-two members of the Senate, ninety of the two hundred and thirty-

three members of the House of Representatives, and one hundred and five of the two hundred and ninety-five electors of the President and Vice-President of the United States."

Becoming still more concrete, Seward accused the President [James Buchanan] of being "a confessed apologist of the slave-property class." Examining the composition of the Senate, he found the slave-owning group in possession of all the important committees. Peering into the House of Representatives he discovered no impregnable bulwark of freedom there. Nor did respect for judicial ermine compel him to spare the Supreme Court. . . .

Seward then analyzed the civil service of the national government and could descry not a single person among the thousands employed in the post office, the treasury, and other great departments who was "false to the slaveholding interest." Under the spoils system, the dominion of the slavocracy extended into all branches of the federal administration. "The customs-houses and the public lands pour forth two golden streams—one into the elections to procure votes for the slaveholding class; and the other into the treasury to be enjoyed by those whom it shall see fit to reward with places in the public service." . . .

Having described the gigantic operating structure of the slavocracy, Seward drew with equal power a picture of the opposing system founded on "free labor." He surveyed the course of economy in the North—the growth of industry, the spread of railways, the swelling tide of European immigration, and the westward roll of free farmers—rounding out the country, knitting it together, bringing "these antagonistic systems" continually into closer contact. Then he uttered those fateful words which startled conservative citizens from Maine to California—words of prophecy which proved to be brutally true—"the irrepressible conflict."

This inexorable clash, he said, was not "accidental, unnecessary, the work of interested or fanatical agitators and therefore ephemeral." No. "It is an irrepressible conflict between opposing and enduring forces." The hopes of those who sought peace by appealing to slave owners to reform themselves were as chaff in a storm. "How long and with what success have you waited already for that reformation? Did any property class ever so reform itself? Did the patricians in old Rome, the noblesse or clergy in France? The landholders in Ireland? The landed aristocracy in England? Does the slaveholding class even seek to beguile you with such a hope? Has it not become rapacious, arrogant, defiant?" All attempts at compromise were "vain and ephemeral." There was ac-

cordingly but one supreme task before the people of the United States—the task of confounding and over-throwing “by one decisive blow the betrayers of the Constitution and freedom forever.” . . .

Given an irrepressible conflict which could be symbolized in such unmistakable patterns by competent interpreters of opposing factions, a transfer of the issues from the forum to the field, from the conciliation of diplomacy to the decision of arms was bound to come. Each side obdurately bent upon its designs and convinced of its rectitude, by the fulfillment of its wishes precipitated events and effected distributions of power that culminated finally in the tragedy foretold by Seward.

31. THE CIVIL WAR AND THE CLASS STRUGGLE

Marxist historians have generally stressed an economic interpretation of the Civil War, but their analyses have been more schematic than that of the Beards. In this national crisis each class played its historic role; the inevitable result was the triumph of the capitalist class, aided by the workers, over the feudal planter class of the South. Algie M. Simons, in *Class Struggles in America* (Chicago: 1906), pp. 32-36, provides an example of this point of view.

By 1850 a class began to appear, national in scope, compact in organization, definite in its desires and destined soon to seize the reins of political power. This was the capitalist class; not to be sure the monopolized solidified plutocracy of today, but rather the little competitive bourgeoisie that already had overthrown the feudalism of Europe. This class had now reached into the Mississippi valley and turned the currents of trade so that the political and industrial affiliations of that locality began to be with New York and New England. This class found its political expression in the Republican party.

This party naturally arose in the upper Mississippi valley where the old political ties were weakest and the new industrial interests were keenest. The people of this locality felt no such close allegiance to the recently organized states in which they lived, as did the seaboard states. Whether employers, wage workers, or small farmers they all possessed the small capitalist mind, and all hoped, and with infinitely better reason than ever since, to become capitalists. They saw in the unsettled West the opportunity to carve out new cities, locate new industries, build yet longer lines of railroad—in short infinite opportunity to “rise”—the highest ideal of the bourgeois mind.

The Republican party exactly corresponded to these industrial interests. It exaggerated the importance of the national government, opposed further extension of slavery and supported all measures for more rapid settlement and exploitation of the West. . . . [In 1860] the Republican party placed in nomination the man, who, more than any other man, typified the best of the capitalist system,—Abraham Lincoln. The finest fruit of the Golden age of American capitalism, he stands as the embodiment of all that is good in that system. “Rising from the people” by virtue of a fierce “struggle for existence” under frontier conditions, where that struggle was freer and fairer than anywhere else in the entire history of capitalism, he incarnates the best of the best days of capitalism. As such he must stand as the greatest American until some higher social stage shall send forth its representative. . . .

Once that the capitalist class had wrested the national government from the chattel slave holders, there was nothing for them to do but to secede. The margin of profits in chattel slavery was already too narrow to permit its continuance in competition with wage slavery unless the chattel slave owners controlled the national government. The Civil war therefore was simply a contest to secure possession of the “big stick” of the national government. The northern capitalists wanted it to collect tariffs, build railroads, shoot down workers, protect trusts, and, in short, to further the interests of plutocracy. The southern chattel slave owner wanted it to secure free trade, to run down fugitive slaves, to conquer new territory for cotton fields, and to maintain the supremacy of King Cotton.

To say that the Republican party was organized, or the Civil war waged to abolish chattel slavery is but to repeat a tale invented almost a decade after the war was closed, as a means of glorifying the party of plutocracy and maintaining its supremacy. . . .

One direct cause of secession whose importance was carefully suppressed, but which undoubtedly played its part, although not a dominant one, is to be found in the debts owed by southern traders to the North. These debts amounted to something between two hundred and four hundred million dollars. One of the first acts of the seceding states was to promptly repudiate all these debts. This at once brought to the support of the southern confederacy a large number of the little traders who had no direct interest otherwise in the supremacy of the slave holding class. . . .

To the student of industrial history the outcome of the Civil war is plain from the beginning. In military conflict, wage slavery is incom-

And let that stone an altar be,
Whereon thanksgivings we may lay,
Where we in deep humility,
For faith and strength renewed may pray . . .

For never let the thought arise
That we are here on sufferance bare;
Outcasts, asylumed 'neath these skies,
And aliens without part or share.

This land is ours by right of birth,
This land is ours by right of toil;
We helped to turn its virgin earth,
Our sweat is in its fruitful soil.

Johnson claims the center of America's historical memory by right of birth and by right of labor. In the poem's middle he claims it by right of soldiering, of "blood" and devotion to the "flag": "We've bought a rightful sonship here, / And we have more than paid the price." As the poem reaches its hopeful ending, Johnson celebrates the abolitionist tradition as America's national destiny and rejects any shame for blacks in the legacies of slavery.⁷² Like the freedpeople in Charleston who marched around the planters' Race Course and created Memorial Day in 1865, demonstrating their freedom as the true meaning of the Civil War, at the fiftieth anniversary of emancipation Johnson converted that same meaning into the war's core memory. The assertion and coexistence of this emancipationist memory with all the forces arrayed against it in 1913 demonstrate just how vital it remained. And yet it also testified to how divided Civil War memory had become in fifty years and the extent to which blacks had become alienated from the national community's remembrance of its most defining event.

Epilogue

Only fools forget the causes of war.

—ALBION W. TOURGÉE, *An Appeal to Caesar*, 1884

THE SEMICENTENNIAL of the Civil War stimulated a flood of memories and commemorative activities. In the years that brought Americans to the eve of World War I, the press was full of retrospective consciousness about the Civil War; newspapers and magazines ran special features and series about leaders and battles, and avidly reported reunions and exhibitions. In the spring of 1911, the *New York Times* urged its readers to "avoid needless celebration" of Civil War anniversaries. "All the battles of the civil war were won by American soldiers," declared the *Times*. "All the heroes of that war were Americans." These sentiments did not stop the paper, however, from running many lengthy commemorative sections on one fifty-year anniversary after another, from Fort Sumter in 1911 through to Appomattox and Lincoln's assassination in 1915.¹

Understandably, the dominant mode of memory was reconciliation. In admiring the "love feast" between soldiers of both sections about to occur at Manassas in 1911 on the fiftieth anniversary of the first battle of Bull Run, the *Nation* acknowledged that the "Civil War day by day" features of many newspapers might annoy the South. But its editor felt confident that when remembrance emphasized "reconciliation rather than conflict," Americans on all sides would embrace their Civil War as a "triumph of brotherhood." Still, the occasional white writer in a Northern journal urged caution in probing issues such as race and slavery in relation to the war. In a 1912 essay in the *Atlantic Monthly*, "The Slave Plantation in Retrospect," Winthrop Daniels

warned that "despite the lapse of almost half a century, the embers of the great conflict in which slavery perished are still hot, if one but deeply stir the ashes." From pulpits on Lincoln's birthday, Sunday, February 12, 1911, some rabbis and ministers in New York called their congregations to vigilance about the legacy of emancipation. Joseph Silverman reminded an interracial audience at Temple Emanu-El that "though the war is ended and the slaves are freed . . . , there are many white Americans carrying on a war as bitter and unjust as that carried on against the Negroes fifty years ago." And the Free Synagogue invited Reverdy Ransom, pastor of the Bethel AME Church, to address its congregation. Ransom celebrated black progress since emancipation, and then called on Jews and blacks to join as "co-partners" against the "veritable inferno" of racial prejudice that both groups faced in forgetful America.² The reunion at the semicentennial emerged triumphant, in great part because American culture had succeeded in keeping considerable distance between those who stirred and those who doused the embers of conflict.

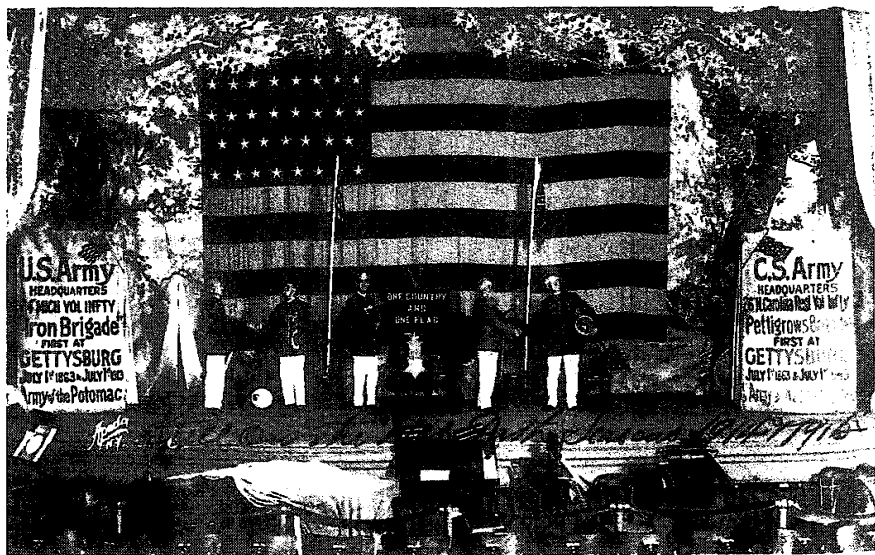
In January 1913, Dudley Miles, a French literature professor at Columbia University, published "The Civil War as Unifier," an essay that fashioned a master narrative of reunion. The Civil War's "true significance," wrote Miles, was the rapidity of sectional reconciliation afterward. Contrary to the aftermath of so many other civil wars and revolutions, the American conflict "deepened and spread the sense of nationality" across the land. Miles pointed to several "episodes" of public reconciliation during the fifty years since the war, from Mississippian L. Q. C. Lamar's eulogy of Massachusetts senator Charles Sumner in 1874 to Southern poet Sidney Lanier's nationalistic verses at the Philadelphia centennial celebration in 1876, from Grant's death and funeral in 1885 to Henry Grady's "New South" speech to the New England Society of New York in 1886. He stressed the new "scientific history" that had come of age by the 1890s and served the ends of reunion, and in Southern historical fiction, especially the North's embrace of it, he found the most influential bond of "love" between the former foes. The Spanish-American War of 1898, mutual grief over President McKinley's assassination in 1901, and the return of Confederate battle flags in 1905 all gave Miles confidence that "what makes our Civil War unique is this remarkable sequel . . . an unexampled obliteration of sectional animosities."³

In a Southern journal, Miles seemed to speak for the country itself as he declared a "very easy explanation" for such an outcome to fratricidal war. "Electricity . . . , industry . . . , and commerce" had knit the nation back to-

gether. The "torrent" of a "swifter age" had "swept away the bitter memories" in favor of trade and economic growth. Miles also stressed a special "restraint" and "political temper" in the American people that helped them forget the past and cement a new nation. In this vision, the Civil War was the good war, a necessary sacrifice, a noble mutual experience that in the long run solidified the nation. In a piece published on the fiftieth anniversary of black emancipation, Miles steadfastly avoided even mentioning slavery, except to acknowledge that the triumph of reunion had been made possible, in part, by the North's recognition of the South's need to overcome the "burden of a crushing social problem" in its own ways. These code words had become so common in American writing that in national memory, the Civil War was now the glorious fated event in which slavery and racial division were "removed," banished from the national story.⁴ In this collective victory narrative, the Civil War, followed by an interlude of bitterness and wrongheaded policy during Reconstruction, became the heroic crisis survived, a source of pride that Americans solve their problems and redeem themselves in unity. Much of the emancipationist vision of Civil War memory was so ill-fitted to this reunion narrative that during the semicentennial it simply had to coexist in isolation from national remembrance of an epic fight and an intersectional inheritance of reunion.

AT GETTYSBURG, July 1-4, 1913, an extraordinary festival of reconciliation provided the exclamation mark of the American reunion at its fiftieth anniversary. Behind the enormous tent city, President Wilson's flying appearance, and all the scenes of Blue-Gray fraternalism was a tremendous organizational effort. Public money paid for the transportation and care of the more than fifty thousand veterans who came to the Pennsylvania town as honored guests from every corner of the country. Some one hundred veterans arrived from California, ten of them Confederates. Vermont sent 669 men, four of them listed as Confederates. Nevada and Wyoming were the only states not accounted for at the reunion. The whole event was a logistical and financial triumph. Not only did a small army of souvenir salesmen flood the streets of the town of Gettysburg, but no fewer than forty-seven railroad companies operating in and through Pennsylvania alone were paid a total of \$142,282 for the transportation of veterans. One hundred and fifty-five reporters from the national and international press covered the event, which was headlined (along with stunning photographs) during the week of the reunion.⁵

Where Wilson came to declare the “quarrel forgotten,” the nation also witnessed a marvel of efficiency. The Great Camp, covering 280 acres and serving 688,000 meals prepared by 2,170 cooks, laborers, and bakers using 130,048 pounds of flour, warmed the hearts of even the most compulsive advocates of Taylorism, the popular theory of industrial and management efficiency. Frederick W. Taylor’s popular *Principles of Scientific Management* had just been published in 1911, and the Taylor Society had been founded in the same year as the Civil War centennial began. The forty-seven miles of “avenues” completed on the battlefield, lighted by five hundred electric arc lights, provided a perfect model of military mobilization and mass production. Some thirty-two automatic “bubbling ice water fountains” throughout the veterans’ quarters offered a delightful example of American technical prowess. Efficiency advocates warmly approved the extraordinary “preparedness” of the Red Cross and the army medical corps in their efforts to provide first-class hospital care for the veterans during the encampment. The average age of veterans at the event was seventy-four, and the Pennsylvania Commission’s report celebrated the fact that only nine of the old fellows died during the reunion, a statistic many times lower than the national average for a



Reconciliation was the theme of the day at the 1913 Gettysburg reunion of Union and Confederate veterans, as represented by this group of “Old Soldier Fiddlers” clapping hands on stage in preparation for a concert.

group of that age and number. Efficiency enthusiasts could marvel at the ninety modern latrines (men’s and women’s) constructed all over the encampment. The press was full of celebration of such efficiency. The *Philadelphia Inquirer* marveled at the “more painstaking care, more scientific preparation and a better discipline than has ever before been known on such an occasion . . . there never was anything better done in our history.”⁶ To many, the reunion seemed as much rooted in technological progress, the unity implied in electrification and mass organization, as in the Blue and Gray clasping hands.

The theme of the reunion from its earliest conception in 1909 was national harmony and patriotism—a “Peace Jubilee” as the planning commission announced. Fifty years after Pickett’s Charge (and the Emancipation Proclamation, which was utterly ignored during the week’s ceremonies), Frederick Douglass’s haunting question from 1875—“what will peace among the whites bring?”—received a full-throated answer. Only obscure references exist of the attendance of any black veterans at the 1913 reunion. In a travel memoir, New Jersey veteran Walter H. Blake compiled a reminiscence of his journey to Gettysburg for the event. Blake claimed that “there were colored men on both sides of the lines.” The Pennsylvania Commission “had made arrangements only for negroes from the Union side,” lamented the New Jersey veteran, “forgetful of the fact that there were many faithful slaves who fought against their own interests in their intense loyalty to their Southern masters.” The idea of the faithful slave had penetrated deep into the Northern imagination; Thomas Nelson Page still hovered above even Yankee remembrance.

Numerous black men worked as camp laborers, building the tent city and distributing mess kits and blankets. But nowhere in its published report does the Pennsylvania Commission indicate how many black veterans, if any, attended the reunion. By the commission’s rules, black GAR members with documented honorable discharges were eligible to participate. But research has turned up no evidence that any did attend. It may have been especially difficult for black veterans to respond to the reunion’s tone and purpose. One of Walter Blake’s anecdotes is what he calls a “very pretty little incident” in which “a giant of an old negro, Samuel Thompson,” was resting under a shade tree. Some Confederate veterans came up to shake hands with “the old ducky” and exchange greetings. It is not made clear whether Thompson was a veteran or not. Blake declares this incident another triumph for kindness and concludes without the slightest sense of irony: “no color line here.”⁸

The ceremonies at Gettysburg in 1913 represented a public avowal of the deeply laid mythology of the Civil War that had captured the popular imagination by the early twentieth century. The war was remembered primarily as a tragedy that forged greater unity, as a soldier's call to sacrifice in order to save a troubled, but essentially good, Union, not as the crisis of a nation in 1913 still deeply divided over slavery, race, competing definitions of labor, liberty, political economy, and the future of the West. Holmes's idea of the "soldiers' faith" prevailed at the Gettysburg reunion, as it had for more than two decades of Blue-Gray fraternalism. Devotion itself was the theme of the day, and among old soldiers, understandably so. They had come to see and feel the impulses of their youth. For most of the veterans, whether in their private tents, listening to brass bands or lone fiddles, or standing erect in front of news photographers, the four anniversary days were a transcendent experience.

The veterans, as well as the gazing crowds, had come to commemorate a glorious fight; and in the end, everyone was right, no one was wrong, and something so transforming as the Civil War had been rendered a mutual victory of the Blue and the Gray by what Virginia governor Mann called the "splendid movement of reconciliation."⁹ Behind the podiums and bunting,



The 1913 Gettysburg reunion, attended by some 53,000 white veterans, was a segregated affair where the issues of slavery, emancipation, and racial equality were absent and the only role for blacks was as laborers distributing blankets. (Record Group 25, Pennsylvania State Archives)

out beyond the throngs of beautiful, if old and thin, men, beyond the circle of the tent city and smells of campfires, was a society riven with racial strife. It was a white man's experience and a white nation that the veterans and the spectators came to celebrate in July 1913. Any discussion of the war's extended meanings in America's omnipresent "race problem" was simply out of place. Wilson's "righteous peace" was far more the theme than Lincoln's "rebirth of freedom." At this remarkable moment when Americans looked backward with deepening nostalgia and ahead with modern excitement and fear, Jim Crow, only half-hidden, stalked the dirt paths of the veterans' tent city at Gettysburg. He delivered supplies, cleaned the latrines, and may even have played the tunes at the nation's feast of national memory. Jim Crow stalked the streets and backroads of the larger nation as well, and he had recently arrived with a new mandate in the bureaucracies of the federal government. The Civil War had become the nation's inheritance of glory, Reconstruction the legacy of folly, and the race problem a matter of efficient schemes of segregation.

Reconciliation is, of course, a noble and essential human impulse. But it must be understood within historical time, and as similar to any other political process that results from contests of human wills. Press reports and editorials about the Gettysburg reunion indicate just how much a combination of white supremacist and reconciliationist memories had conquered all others by 1913. The issues of slavery and secession, rejoiced the *Washington Post*, were "no longer discussed argumentatively. They are scarcely mentioned at all, except in connection with the great war to which they led, and by which they were *disposed of for all time*." To the extent that slavery involved a "moral principle," argued the *Post*, "no particular part of the people was responsible unless, indeed, the burden of responsibility should be shouldered *by the North for its introduction*" (emphasis added). The *New York Times* hired Helen D. Longstreet (widow of Confederate general James Longstreet) to write daily columns about the Gettysburg reunion. She entertained *Times* readers with her dialogues with Southern veterans about the value of Confederate defeat and the beauty of "Old Glory." She also challenged readers to remember the sufferings of women during the Civil War and to consider an intersectional tribute to them as the theme of the next Blue-Gray reunion. The nation's historical memory, concluded the *Times*, had become so "balanced" that it could never again be "disturbed."¹⁰

The editors of the liberal magazine *Outlook* were overwhelmed by the spirit of nationalism at the Gettysburg reunion and declared it a reconcilia-

tion of "two conceptions of human right and human freedom." The war, said the *Outlook*, had been fought over differing notions of "idealism": "sovereignty of the state" versus "sovereignty of the nation." Demonstrating the degree to which slavery had vanished from understandings of Civil War causation in serious intellectual circles, the *Outlook* announced that "it was slavery that raised the question of State sovereignty; but it was not on behalf of slavery, but on behalf of State sovereignty and all that it implied, that these men fought." So normative was this viewpoint that the *Outlook's* special correspondent at the reunion, Herbert Francis Sherwood, could conclude that the veterans' "fraternity . . . showed that no longer need men preach a reunited land, for there were no separated people." Such was the state of historical consciousness in Jim Crow America. Slavery (and the whole black experience) had no place in the formulas by which most Americans found meanings in the Civil War. The *Outlook* was both accurate and oblivious in its interpretation of the reunion; thus it could conclude without blinking that "both sides" had fought for "the same ideal—the ideal of civil liberty."¹¹ This is, of course, the equality of motive in Civil War memory for which Southern advocates had pleaded for decades. In both romance and reality, the Lost Cause had become the desideratum of national reunion.

Reporters from every section of the country registered their sense of awe at the symbolism of the Gettysburg celebration. The *San Francisco Examiner* declared the "jubilee" to be the "supreme justification of war and battle." Now "we know that the great war had to be fought, that it is well that it was fought," announced the *Examiner*: "a necessary, useful, splendid sacrifice whereby the whole race of men has been unified." Such martial spirit and claims of ritual purging were answered (albeit by a minority voice) in the *Charleston News and Courier*. The newspaper in the city where secession began urged readers not to glorify the "battle itself," for it was a "frightful and abominable thing." If war "thrills us," declared the *News and Courier*, "we lose a vitally important part of the lesson." But the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* kept the discussion on a higher plane, allowing simultaneously for a recognition of Northern victory, Southern respect, and faith in American providential destiny:

Two civilizations met at Gettysburg and fought out the issue between them under the broad blue sky, in noble, honorable battle . . . In one . . . the family was the social unit—the family in the old Roman sense, possibly inclusive of hundreds of slaves. In the other,

the individual was the only social unit. Within half a century those two civilizations have become one. Individualism has triumphed. Yet . . . with a fuller recognition than ever before the war, of the charm and dignity and cultivation of what has yielded to the hand of Fate . . . The ways of Providence are inscrutable.¹²

This neatly packaged nostalgia from a Northern paper offered mystic honor to the Lost Cause of patriarchal "family" structure, combined with an uneasy celebration of the victory of individualism in the age of industrialization, all justified by God's design. In this reconciliationist vision, a homegrown beneficent Fate governed American memory. Such a depoliticized memory, cleansed of any lessons about the war's unresolved legacy of racial strife, had indeed fostered reconciliation among soldiers, politicians, businessmen, and scholars. But sectional peace had its costs.

Homilies about reunion, though altogether well meaning, masked as much as they revealed. Naturally, monuments and reunions had always combined remembrance with healing and, therefore, with forgetting. But racial justice took a different fork on the road to reunion. Not out of overt conspir-



At the culmination of a reenactment of Pickett's Charge on July 3, 1913, members of the Philadelphia Brigade Association and the Pickett's Division Association clasped hands across the stone wall they had fought over fifty years earlier. (Record Group 25, Pennsylvania State Archives)

acy, not by subterfuge alone, did white supremacist memory combine with reconciliation to dominate how most Americans viewed the war. This result emerged from the process of history itself, from all the ways that public and private memories evolve. Thus the Gettysburg reunion took place as a national ritual in which the ghost of slavery, the very questions of cause and consequence, might be exorcised once and for all—and an epic conflict among whites elevated into national mythology. That mythology was the product of fifty years of cultural evolution, of the growth and erosion of memories in response to events and social tensions. But it also grew in carefully cultivated soil, the harvest of human choices made by powerful leaders and ordinary folk. Collective memories are the source of group self-definition, but they are never solely the result of unthinking decisions.

Black newspapers of the era were wary, even resentful, of the celebration at Gettysburg in 1913. As segregation deepened and lynching persisted, many black opinion leaders observed history and memory wielded in such a way as to write blacks out of the story. "We are wondering," declared the *Baltimore Afro-American Ledger*, "whether Mr. Lincoln had the slightest idea in his mind that the time would ever come when the people of this country would come to the conclusion that by the 'People' he meant only white people." The *Afro-American* identified the stakes of this contest for America's national memory: "Today the South is in the saddle, and with the single exception of slavery, everything it fought for during the days of the Civil War, it has gained by repression of the Negro within its borders. And the North has quietly allowed it to have its own way." The *Afro-American* asserted the historic loyalty of blacks to the nation and pointed to President Wilson's recent forced segregation of federal workers. The "blood" of black soldiers and lynched citizens, it argued, was "crying from the ground" in the South, unheard and strangely unknown at the Blue-Gray reunion.¹³

These reactions in the black press are especially telling given the Wilson administration's increasingly aggressive program of racial segregation in federal agencies, enacted that summer of 1913. Federal departments in Washington were large employers of African Americans. On the day after Decoration Day, the official segregation of black clerks in the Post Office began. And on July 12, only a week after Wilson spoke at Gettysburg, orders were issued to create separate lavatories for blacks and whites working in the Treasury Department. These and other segregation policies, stemming in part from the many white Southerners who had come to Washington with the Wilson administration, caused deep resentment and protest among blacks, led largely

by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Such policies, and the sense of betrayal they caused among blacks, prompted Booker T. Washington, no friend of the NAACP, to declare that he had "never seen the colored people so discouraged and bitter" as they were in the summer of 1913. That summer, the NAACP launched a campaign against segregation practices in the federal government.¹⁴

By 1913 racism in America had become a cultural industry, and twisted history a commodity. A segregated society required a segregated historical memory and a national mythology that could blunt or contain the conflict at the root of that segregation. Most Americans embraced an unblinking celebration of reunion and accepted segregation as a natural condition of the races. Just such a celebration is what one finds in the *Atlanta Constitution's* coverage of the Gettysburg reunion. The *Constitution* declared that "as never before in its history the nation is united in demanding that justice and equal rights be given all of its citizens." No doubt these sentiments reflected genuinely held beliefs among white Southerners that Jim Crow meant "progress" and "reform." The *Constitution* gushed about the "drama" and "scale" of the symbolism at the Gettysburg reunion, even its "poetry and its fragrance." But most important was "the thing for which it stands—the world's mightiest republic purged of hate and unworthiness, seared clean of dross by the most fiery ordeal in any nation's history."¹⁵ Such were the fruits of America's segregated historical consciousness after fifty years. Racial legacies, conflict itself, the bitter consequences of Reconstruction's failure to make good on the promises of emancipation, and the war as America's second revolution in the meaning of liberty and equality had been *seared clean* from the nation's master narrative. But that clean narrative of a Civil War between two foes struggling nobly for equally honorable notions of liberty, of a sentimentalized plantation South to which Americans of the hectic industrial age could escape, of soldiers' devotion in epic proportions to causes that mattered not, could not rest uncontested forever across American culture.

~~THE CIVIL WAR'S fiftieth anniversary season left countless examples of Americans looking backward and forward. A young George S. Patton, a captain in the U.S. Army and the grandson of a Confederate officer in Lee's army, was part of the detachment of troops sent to Gettysburg to help "police" the 1913 reunion. The brash Patton loved to visit Gettysburg and confessed to a "strange fascination" for the place, as well as a desire to have been~~