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The Garrison War: Culture, Race, and the Problem of Military Occupation during the American Civil War Era

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ABSTRACT

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Focusing on nineteenth-century American military occupation, this dissertation critically engages the existing literature on Civil War soldiers. It departs from the traditional historiographical paradigm of “why they fought and endured”—based on motivation and the experience of active combat—and instead emphasizes how the soldiering experience was fragmented and fraught with disillusionment and confusion. The Civil War traditionally is interpreted as period-divide between the antebellum and post-bellum eras. Soldiers’ responses to the culture of military occupation, however, revealed striking continuity across time, space, and conflict in nineteenth-century America. By uniting three principal events—the Mexican-American War, Civil War, and post-bellum Reconstruction—the study interprets how nineteenth-century volunteer citizen-soldiers struggled to understand their roles as occupying forces. As occupation emerged as a fundamental staple of the American military tradition, its complexities challenged the cultural ideals that fueled the citizen-soldier model. The milieu of occupation thus contested American soldiers’ integrity, masculinity, and racial identity. The citizen-soldier tradition collided with an equally aggressive, and oftentimes incompatible, force: the garrison ethos. Volunteer soldiers confronted the principal tenets of military occupation—securing, holding, and guarding territory; enforcing government policies; regulating and defining the limits of civilian-combatants; policing cities and towns; and battling guerrillas—viewing them as trials against the citizen-soldier ideal, which they had intended to fulfill.
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Finally, one could not ask for a better adviser than John B. Boles. His unceasing dedication to his students, his constant energy, and his perceptive, expansive mind will forever amaze me. I will always cherish the encouragement and enthusiasm he has expressed for my career. I extend sincere thanks to all of these individuals for the time that they have dedicated to reading my work, challenging my assumptions, encouraging my endeavors, and believing in me. Their influence is seen on each page of this study.

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encouraging me to locate my potential, never settling for second-best. I have embraced his virtues of hard work, self-reliance, and individualism, for which I am forever grateful. I will always cherish our many trips to the East Coast to visit historical sites and Civil War battlefields, which largely inspired my quest to become a professional historian. My mom has offered constant care, comfort, calm, and love, always thinking of others before herself. Indeed, her selflessness is a testament to her character, which I daily strive to follow. My parents’ influence is on every page of this dissertation, in addition to every facet of my life, both of which I dedicate, with love, to them.
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**INTRODUCTION**

March 23: “I have naturally come to the conclusion that this war is one of the darndest humbugs that was ever invented. Let men march all day, twenty or twenty five miles and [then] probably have to stand picket all night without any sleep or rest. how long can any common man stand it. War is a very nice thing when you can set at home by the fire and talk about it.”

September 3: “Soldiers have to be careful what they Buy here for [the civilians] Poison most Evry thing they [sell] to them there is a great many got Poisoned. they Shoot the Pickets that is Stationed among here there was 2 shot here the other night.”

October 3: “The life of an infantryman is never safe. How do I know? Well I live it every day. I lost a good friend of mine just two days ago to an enemy sniper. The worst feeling in the world is having lost one of your own and not being able to fight back. The more I go on patrol, the more alert I tend to be, but regardless of the situation here . . . we are never safe. No matter the countermeasures we take to prevent any attacks. They seem to seep through the cracks. Every day a soldier is lost or wounded by enemy attacks. I for one would like to make it home to my family one day. Pray for us and keep us in your thoughts.”

October 27: to tell the story of [military occupation] is a hard one. it is fighting extreme boredom with the lingering thought in the forefront of your mind that any minute on this patrol could be my last endeavour, only highlighted by times of such extreme terror. . . . only backed by the past thoughts and experiences of really losing friends of yours and not feeling completely hopeless that it was all for nothing because all in all, you know the final outcome of this war. it is walking on that thin line between sanity and insanity.”

These writings, penned by four different United States soldiers, reveal a small fraction of the challenges of military occupation. And while they speak a unified language, articulating
similar fears and uncertainties, they are separated by nearly 150 years. The first two were written during the American Civil War by Sylvester Strong of Wisconsin, who occupied parts of Missouri in 1863, and Charles Henry Moulton, a volunteer soldier from Michigan, who served in the occupation of Baltimore in 1861.¹ Staff Sgt. Juan Campos from Texas, and Sgt. Ryan M. Wood of Oklahoma, both of whom died in attacks from IEDs, authored the final pair of words in 2006 from Iraq.²

The American military tradition is presently shaped, in large part, by the United States’ recent occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan. These contemporary military actions vividly illustrate the ways in which the United States continues to grapple with the culture of occupation. Sylvester Strong and Charles Moulton, Juan Campos and Ryan Wood, entered the army more than a century apart under wildly dissimilar circumstances and interpreted their incongruent missions in fundamentally different ways. Yet each pair was united by a sense of disillusionment, discouraged by a restrictive uncertainty about their respective environments. The occupations of the South between the 1860s and 1870s and Iraq during the 2000s could not be more disparate in their political dynamics, contrasting in their cultural dimensions, and divergent in their martial conduct. Soldiers in each conflict nevertheless echoed strikingly similar refrains, revealing that the problem of military occupation is not a dead artifact of the American past.

¹ Sylvester Strong to Dear Parents, March 23, 1863, item DL0959.25, Sylvester Strong Letters, John L. Nau III Civil War Collection, Houston, Texas; Charles Henry Moulton to Brother and Sister, September 3, 1861, Charles Henry Moulton Papers, 1835-1916, Michigan in the Civil War Military Collections, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan

As indicated by Strong, Moulton, Campos, and Wood, soldiers in all wars become disillusioned and sometimes even question the rationale of their service. This held true especially during the Era of the American Civil War in which thousands of participants witnessed indescribable levels of carnage and destruction, engaged in the brutal killing of a very familiar enemy, and endured inconceivable hardships. Recent scholarly consensus maintains that soldiers’ disillusionment emanated primarily from battlefield experience, the loss of personal freedom in the army, and/or distance from home and family. While these notions were certainly factors, they are not all-encompassing. Focusing specifically on the American soldier’s role as an instrument of wartime military occupation reveals additional causes for disillusionment, illustrating previously unconsidered relationships between the volunteer, his society, and national culture.3

This dissertation interprets the problem of nineteenth-century American military occupation through the eyes of the occupier, critically engaging the existing literature on Civil War soldiers. It departs from the traditional historiographical paradigm of “why they fought and endured”—based on motivation and the experience of active combat—and instead emphasizes how the soldiering experience was fragmented by disillusionment and fraught with confusion. The Civil War, moreover, is traditionally interpreted as a period-divide between the antebellum and postbellum eras. Soldiers’ responses to the culture of military occupation, however, revealed striking endurance across time, space, and conflict in nineteenth-century America. The study, therefore, unites three principal events—the Mexican-American War, Civil War, and postbellum

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Reconstruction—to interpret how volunteer citizen-soldiers struggled to negotiate the challenges and perplexities of the United States’ formative military occupations.

Too often, historians approach the Civil War through the lens of 1861 to 1865. While this approach has fostered a robust, informative, and exciting literature about the United States’ great national crucible, it sometimes overlooks the myriad antebellum factors that inspired such strong conversation and reaction during the war years. The outcomes and implications of this conflict are, on occasion, studied in isolation, apart from the very war that sparked such pronounced consequences. Scholars are now moving closer to an examination of the “Civil War era,” revealing how the seeds of antebellum America grew during the war and flowered throughout Reconstruction and beyond. “It may well be,” historian Mark E. Neely wrote recently, “that we can reach a better understanding of the Civil War by viewing it from a long-range chronological perspective.” A 2012 forum in the Journal of the Civil War Era similarly advised that “the Civil War and Reconstruction are becoming interpenetrated and inseparable,” reimagining the wartime and peacetime eras as a united period.4

The ethos of wartime military occupation in particular had deep roots that reached back much earlier than the opening salvos at Fort Sumter, and which became increasingly problematic after the formal handshakes at Appomattox. The uncertainties and ambiguities that Civil War soldiers ascribed to military occupation did not arise randomly in 1861. Rather, they were understood and expressed by United States troops during the Mexican-American War and, following the Civil War, were again reiterated strongly by soldiers during Reconstruction. Although variations existed in all three episodes, soldiers defined the limits and problems of

occupation by drawing on long-held understandings of the American military tradition, beliefs in the United States’ republican heritage, and contemporary assumptions about race, culture, and gender.

Prior to 1846, a national tradition of martial occupation did not exist; after 1877, it was fixed indefinitely both in the popular imagination and in formal policy. This study reveals the peculiar culture inherent within the United States’ first official wartime attempts to occupy peoples, to govern large swaths of territory, and to employ the army to reshape societies. When occupation emerged as a fundamental staple of American military practice, its complexities tested long-held cultural ideals that fueled the citizen-soldier model. White Americans during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries cherished their republican heritage, which guided each citizen’s relationship to the government in individual liberty and protection of natural rights. Free citizens, based on a civic virtue that was dedicated to upholding the republic’s unique values, were obligated to defend the nation during times of crisis. Their service would be quick and temporary; republican military duty was assumed to be neither professional nor bureaucratic.

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After the crisis was resolved, soldiers would shed their uniforms and discard their muskets, once again taking up the tools of their civilian trades and returning to private life.  

Although the citizen-soldier tradition flourished during the Mexican-American and Civil wars, it collided with an equally aggressive, and oftentimes incompatible, force: the garrison ethos. Volunteer soldiers confronted the principal tenets of military occupation—securing, holding, and guarding territory; enforcing government policies; regulating and defining the limits of civilian-combatants; policing cities and towns; and battling guerrillas—viewing them as a challenge to the citizen-soldier ideal, which they had intended to fulfill. Garrisons represented the geographic focal point of American occupations, functioning as the locus for the ideological and cultural challenges confronted by occupying soldiers. Whether established as large occupied cities or isolated, fortified outposts, the Union army in particular during the Civil War established more than one hundred garrisons throughout the Confederacy, which they used to concentrate occupation forces, launch raids and expeditions into the countryside, and establish a formidable presence in enemy territory.  

However, the common occupier viewed garrisons as static and constrained spaces that restricted individual freedom and martial purpose. Garrisons further reminded the northern

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citizen-soldier, as well as soldiers in Mexico and the Reconstruction South, of what he perceived to be his marginalized physical position within the broader wartime landscape. Soldiers who served both in and out of occupied zones considered garrison service less than honorable, fueling the garrison ethos’ negative association. The isolated nature of garrison service prompted soldiers to believe that they were far removed from the war’s major fronts, where important service was being rendered. Feeling restless at what seemed to be the fringes of the war effort, garrison soldiers continually questioned the validity of their service. The garrison ethos, through the specific ways in which it challenged the citizen-soldier ideal, forced United States volunteers into a critical consideration of how their position as military occupiers related to their republican citizen-soldier heritage and the nation at large.

In their occupations of the Confederate South during the Civil War especially, at least one-third of the soldiers in the Union armies at some point experienced the disquieting and unnatural qualities of the garrison ethos. Occupying troops struggled to navigate the racial and cultural dynamics of occupying “different” peoples; they feared, and often succumbed to, the corrupting influences within garrisoned communities; they became anxious at the thought of adopting irregular and violent tactics against civilians and non-uniformed enemy combatants; their peculiar actions pushed the United States government to address and enforce the “laws of war”; they worried about the bureaucratizing tendencies inherent within occupied zones; and, as republican citizens, they dreaded the symbolism of participating in a standing army. United States occupiers thus construed their occupation experiences as an affront to their honor, masculinity, courage, and racial identity.8

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As Union occupiers attempted to solve the contradictions of occupation duty and citizen-soldiering, a new class of occupying troops emerged. The mass enlistment of African American soldiers into the ranks of United States armies pushed white leaders, especially Abraham Lincoln, to define, along lines of race, who would serve as auxiliary forces. Lincoln fused the rhetoric of the garrison ethos into the language of emancipation, which intended to confine black troops to limited roles, often entailing the “dishonorable” duties of occupation. Black soldiers, however, used emancipation to their advantage and, as occupation forces, unbalanced traditional power dynamics in the South. African American occupiers challenged the status quo and impressed their martial authority on the very society guilty of enslaving them. The wartime and postbellum Confederacy came to be governed in large measure by black southerners-turned-soldiers who were homegrown, enlisted internally, and deployed to areas of their childhood. This stunning reality reflected the overwhelming impact of slavery’s destruction. Whereas the Emancipation Proclamation sought to resolve the presumed contradictions between military occupation and citizen-soldiering, the Civil War necessitated increased numbers of troops to garrison the South. Thus, white and black soldiers continued to serve together, navigating the varied dimensions and trials of biracial martial governance.

In the wake of Union victory, the garrison ethos operated as a powerful force in the dawning of Reconstruction. United States armies, composed of black and white soldiers, stood poised to enact a formidable military occupation of the defeated South, forever transforming the region’s ideology, economy, and racial character. Yet an equally potent stimulus permanently dislodged the garrisoning presence. Long-held fears about the army’s role in peacetime society, grounded in the republican tradition and mixed with a growing ambivalence about racial equality, directed the course of the postwar years. By 1876 and 1877, the garrison presence in the

South resembled only a skeleton of its former self. The evolution of “occupation” during the postwar period, therefore, reflected traditional American aversions to the military’s shaping of civil affairs, political dynamics, and social-economic conditions.⁹

This dissertation’s interpretative scope operates on a broad plane, addressing an evolving moment in the nineteenth-century American military tradition: negotiating the aftermath of invasion. Launching a grand foray into an enemy’s country and waging battle on distant fields were immensely complicated endeavors. However, it was an equally complex, largely unprecedented undertaking to govern and regulate territories and peoples long after the principal armies departed, leaving behind only a force of occupation. The static, stale environment of occupation, combined with the unexpected challenges of martial governance, shocked American occupiers, detaching them from their ideological focus on the war’s meaning. Relegated to garrisons or patrolling the countryside, soldiers came face to face with the corrupt underside of war. The ethos of occupation distracted soldiers from their duty, prompting illicit behavior outside the bounds of both military and civil decorum. Soldiers went so far as to create and profit from informal economies, fell prey to the temptations within occupied cities, and, in some cases, violently engaged civilian-enemies.

The problem of military occupation thus operated as a war within a war, defined by its own unique dynamics, culture, and disposition. In this way, an investigation into the challenges

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of soldiering within the garrison ethos answers a call put forth by historians Drew Gilpin Faust and Stephen Berry, both of whom worry that scholars have focused too much on the allure of war, revealed in the steadfastness, valor, sacrifice, and agency of its actors. While these narratives have proven accurate and immensely rewarding to professional understanding of the conflict, they also, as Berry has written, overlook “a war with fewer heroes and victims, more opportunists, unintended consequences, and mixed motives.” United States troops who occupied Mexico, the Confederacy, and the postwar South generally fit Berry’s and Faust’s template rather than the established scholarly consensus on the soldiering experience.

This dissertation, therefore, contributes to an emerging scholarly conversation that might be labeled “the occupation turn.” Over the past decade, historians have begun uniting the seemingly disparate literatures on occupation and the more conventional aspects of the Civil War era, painting a broad, cohesive portrait of the wartime and peacetime landscapes. Indeed, the experiences of soldiering in an army of occupation touch central scholarly themes: the merging of home front and battlefield; comparisons between regular combat and guerrilla warfare; the process of emancipation and the emergence of African American troops; persistent amalgamations between race, class, gender, and culture; the fate of regional and national race relations; contemporary understandings of republicanism and the role of government; the bureaucratization of the United States army; and introspection into why the North won and the South lost.


Historians have authored an extensive literature that addresses the complex nature of Civil War era military occupation on its own terms. Mark Grimsley’s *The Hard Hand of War: Union Military Policy Toward Southern Civilians, 1861-1865* (1995) and Stephen V. Ash’s *When the Yankees Came: Conflict and Chaos in the Occupied South, 1861-1865* (1995), filled substantial voids in the literature on issues pertaining to wartime interactions between northern soldiers and southerners. Grimsley and Ash concentrate on top-down military policy, the effects of occupation on southern civilians, and internal racial, political, and class-based upheavals that resulted from occupation. Both authors provide excellent and useable interpretations of the occupied South, yet their works are generally thin on how United States soldiers interpreted their unique experiences. A host of local treatments tested Grimsley’s and Ash’s interpretations, confirming a scholarly consensus that Union occupation policy followed a standard trajectory of conciliation to conquest, or “hard war” being directed at civilians. Most of these studies, though, address only tangentially the common occupation soldiers’ roles and the ways in which their experiences, and thus ideologies, differed from those northerners who served in the main Union armies.  


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Similar to the literature on military occupation, scholarly treatment of the Civil War era soldiering experience is growing rapidly, building on an established tradition of looking at the conflict through the eyes of the common soldier. Historians have long developed myriad interpretations to recreate the lives and experiences of the countless men who donned the northern blue and southern gray. In fact, scholars increasingly and effectively have utilized soldiers’ first-hand accounts as useful tools to investigate the period’s deep cauldron of social, cultural, and political values. Thus, the field has evolved to encompass much more than merely battles and generals and now underscores the centrality of race, masculinity, and especially national commitment. Although the past three decades have witnessed an impressive and unusually perceptive outpouring of scholarship on the Civil War soldiering experience, almost exclusive emphasis has been placed on those troops who served within the war’s principal campaigning armies. Historians have, therefore, crafted diverse explanations for soldier ideology, attitude, and motivation, all generally centered within the famous eastern and western theaters.


For major studies that have shaped the current field on Civil War soldiers, see Wiley, Life of Johnny Reb; Bell Irvin Wiley, The Life of Billy of Yank: The Common Soldier of the Union (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1952);
Most studies, however, rarely discuss the effect of war on the “other soldiers” who served behind the lines as garrison forces. Such soldiers accounted for a significant number of men, yet they remain at best a huge mystery and at worst a neglected footnote. In fact, historian Kenneth W. Noe recently acknowledged that many existing studies “clearly favored the men who enlisted at the beginning of the war and battled as long as they could in the so-called fighting regiments.” He thus called for a new focus on the war’s conscripts, deserters, late enlisters, and those who served in occupied garrisons.\(^\text{15}\)

It is somewhat remarkable that, in examining a war that increasingly stressed the necessity of long-term military occupation, historians have pushed such an experience to the periphery of their studies. The Union soldiering experience especially has been interpreted through the eyes and writings of those men who fought and campaigned with Grant in

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\(^{15}\) Noe, *Reluctant Rebels*, xii. There is, however, a growing exception to this scholarly trend, which emphasizes the importance of soldiering in the Trans-Mississippi theater and significance of guerrilla warfare. See Richard Lowe, *Walker’s Texas Division: Greyhounds of the Trans-Mississippi* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2004); and, Sutherland, *Savage Conflict*. 

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Mississippi and Virginia, with Sherman through Georgia and the Carolinas, or Thomas in Tennessee. These highly valuable investigations yield a stunning portrait of dedication and courage, combined with deep insight into the reasons for which the common man fought and endured life-altering hardship. Scholars certainly do not suggest uniformity within the soldiering experience, yet it seems that the current literature implicitly marginalizes those soldiers who did, quite literally, serve on the war’s geographic margins.

Thus it is imperative that soldiers, who indefinitely occupied the war-torn Confederacy, bookended by those who garrisoned Mexico in the 1840s as well as the Reconstruction South in the 1870s, are understood on their own terms. Occupation supplied a crucial dynamic to overall American strategy in which soldiers were assigned the tasks of garrisoning towns and cities, policing civilians, guarding railroads and turnpikes, enforcing government policies, and battling guerrillas. If the scholarly arena of military occupation is rescued to reposition and accommodate the thankless, and generally inglorious, duties of the occupiers, further insights into the complicated worldview of Union soldiers will be revealed.

The dissertation is structured within a general chronological framework yet explored through various thematic dimensions. It opens with the roots of the American citizen-soldiering tradition, culminating in the occupations of Mexico during the late 1840s. The study then surveys the policies, processes, and problems of martial governance encountered during the Civil War, buttressed by four chapters investigating a host of problems associated with the experience of military occupation: ideological and cultural challenges; emancipation and the emergence of African American soldiers; behavior and discipline; and the waging of irregular and counterinsurgency warfare. An additional chapter, departing from inquiries into the experiences of Union soldiers, presents a case-study of Confederate soldiers who were garrisoned on the
Texas coast. Their unusual circumstances present a vivid lens through which to contextualize continuity and change, while also problematizing the existing literature on Confederate nationalism and dedication. The dissertation concludes with the era of Reconstruction, explaining how postwar military occupation was undermined by long-held cultural, political, and racial assumptions. Finally, the project’s themes and interpretations are shaped by the writings of approximately 500 United States soldiers. Their personal letters and diaries offer an unblemished, genuine look into the fears, anxieties, and problems associated with nineteenth-century military occupation. In addition, government reports, the invaluable *Official Records*, newspapers, and, in rare instances, memoirs were also consulted to paint a comprehensive, analytical picture.¹⁶

A final note is necessary on terminology. This study employs phrases such as “garrison ethos” or “culture of occupation” to describe how an aspect of the Civil War era soldiering experience operated within a particular milieu. Terms such as “ethos” and “culture” are used interchangeably to describe a combination of ideas, anxieties, forces, and features experienced by soldiers connected with wartime and peacetime military occupation. Some elements of the occupation environment, which informed the garrison ethos, predated the Civil War, giving great weight to the ways in which soldiers responded to their circumstance. In other ways, the soldiers themselves contributed to the evolution of the garrison ethos. Thus, United States troops’ peculiar responses to war were shaped exclusively by the culture of occupation in which they served. They molded their wartime convictions according to the unusual tasks mandated by

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¹⁶ All Union soldiers cited throughout this study served in occupation and/or garrison capacities for at least three consecutive months, performing the duties of martial governance. Dyer’s *Compendium*, the soldiers’ writings, manuscript finding aids, and regimental histories provided the necessary information to determine the length of time spent on occupation duty. In many cases, occupation soldiers served much longer than three months. (Frederick H. Dyer, *A Compendium of the War of the Rebellion* (3 vols.; Des Moines: Dyer Publishing Co., 1908).
martial governance, eliciting rarely before explored dimensions of soldiering during the American Civil War Era.\textsuperscript{17}

\textsuperscript{17} For comparable explanations of such terms, see Phillips, \textit{Diehard Rebels}, 2; and Bledsoe, “Citizen-Officers,” 9-10.
CHAPTER ONE

A CONFLICT OF CULTURES: THE CITIZEN-SOLDIER IDEAL, MILITARY OCCUPATION, AND THE MEXICAN-AMERICAN WAR

Most nineteenth-century Americans believed that they lived in an exceptional nation in which the rule of law was supreme, individual freedom sacrosanct, and the privilege of self-determination implicit; governments were established to protect these cherished rights. The basis of American citizenship, from the founding to the Civil War, was secured by a dedication to, and fierce protection of these principles. Myriad contemporaries argued that the United States functioned as the exception to world history in which monarchs ruled by arbitrary fiat, relegating the common man to a life of baseless servitude to the state. If the young American republic failed, therefore, so too would the experiments in republican government and democratic political participation.¹

Republicanism operated in a mutually beneficial fashion in which a limited, non-intrusive government also protected individual liberty. White males, of course, enjoyed the greatest fruits of this tradition. And the system, in order to thrive, looked to these citizens for support and preservation. At the heart of this assumption stood the American citizen-soldier ideal, a marked departure from outmoded European professional armies, which many interpreted to be the essence of despotism and threat to personal and national liberty. In order to maintain the unique character of the early American republic, this reasoning held, private individuals would temporarily lay down the tools of their civilian trades, bear arms, and voluntarily defend the republic in times of national emergency. Once the crisis was resolved, the soldier, after performing his civic duty, would resume his civilian pursuits. The citizen-soldier ideal

condemned professional, permanent military service. Yet white males defined volunteer service to be crucial to sustaining the form of government that protected their individual freedom.²

This chapter traces the birth and evolution of the American citizen-soldier ideal, demonstrating how nineteenth-century contemporaries attached themselves intimately to its idealistic doctrines. Indeed, to understand soldiering in the early republic is to appreciate formative conceptions of citizenship, the common white male’s relationship to the government, and especially the expectations harbored by volunteers during wartime. In order to grasp Americans’ profound definition of the citizen-soldier heritage, however, it is also necessary to examine one of the first challenges to that tradition. On its surface, the escalating tension and ultimate war with Mexico during the late 1840s seemed to reflect the character of previous American conflicts. Although the United States retained a small professional army during the antebellum years, volunteers were called to help wage war against Mexico. Citizens, performing their civic duty, rushed to defend the nation’s flag and honor, hoping to earn glory and victory in the lands of the Montezumas.³

Yet beneath this veneer, the war against Mexico unveiled a new component to the American military tradition that collided with the citizen-soldier model. Military occupation, that is, the regulation of both peaceful and hostile civilians, all of whom comprised a presumed inferior race, and the acquisition and governance of territory, exposed volunteer soldiers to a kind of quasi-war that did not conform to their cultural imaginations. Soldiers accepted


battlefield death as a necessary component of their military service; death on behalf of the republic helped uphold the nation’s ideals. And many volunteers died in the grand battles of the war. But many others could not escape what they considered a troubling reality about the conflict.

The war against Mexico functioned as the United States’ first official war of occupation, eliciting striking commentary from its citizen-soldiers. The conflict, which lasted only two years (1846 to 1848), obligated the American army to garrison strategic locales throughout Mexico, including a nine-month occupation of the capitol city following the cessation of hostilities. Soldiers—oftentimes volunteers—were left behind the front lines of combat to enact the tasks of military governance, while the bulk of the army pushed ahead to fight the nation’s battles. The process and experience of military occupation directly altered the citizen-soldier spirit, instituting far-reaching and fundamental changes to the nation’s long-established military practice. Volunteers interpreted occupied garrisons to be centers of bureaucratic centralization used to regulate the behavior of civilian-enemies and limit the freedom of citizen-soldiers. Reared within a national context that preached individualism and personal autonomy, volunteers construed military life in general, and occupation duty in particular, as manifest affronts to their liberty. They believed, moreover, that such peculiar military service—garrison duty—isolated them from the ennobling events of the war, preventing any contribution to the national cause. Citizen-soldiers had volunteered their services to defend the nation, but they did not consider military occupation to reflect a national requirement. If anything, it was viewed as an unnecessary hindrance.  

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Volunteers who served during the Mexican-American War initiated a national conversation about the changing nature of American military practice, a debate that would continue deep into the Reconstruction years. Thus, the broad era of the American Civil War can also be considered the dawning age of American wars of occupation, inaugurating a tradition that persisted through the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries and continues to the present day. It is imperative to conceptualize military occupation as a continuum, rather than focusing independently on one of the three great conflicts that occurred between 1846 and 1877. The responses of citizen-soldiers, who played an integral role in the armies that occupied Mexico, the Confederacy, and the postbellum South, revealed striking continuity across time, space, and conflict in nineteenth-century America. A concentrated focus on the significance of military occupation, though, is not intended to minimize the profound importance of the more traditional modes of warfare waged during this period. Indeed, large volunteer armies campaigning across vast landscapes, waging war on distant, hallowed fields, assumed great import both to contemporaries and to present-day historians. Yet the story of nineteenth-century military occupation reveals a war within a war, a conflict fraught with its own unique dynamics, traits, and spirit.

Although the occupations of Mexico during the late 1840s produced dynamics similar to the occupations of the Civil War era—namely citizen-soldiers navigating the challenges of garrison duty and military governance of peoples and territories—exploits in the Lands of the Montezumas differed in a critical way from the United States’ occupations of the Confederacy and postwar South. Perceptions of their Mexican enemies as racial inferiors infused American occupiers with a sense that invasion and occupation justified brutal conduct and harsh governing policies toward civilians. Troops sensed that occupying foreign lands on behalf of the United
States and its Anglo-Saxon Protestant civilization vindicated their conduct. Indeed, within this worldview, citizen-soldiers did not exclusively consider military occupation as a challenge to their civic virtue. This understanding was greatly inverted during the Civil War when Union troops were called to occupy the lands of white citizens who shared a common language, religion, and heritage. The Mexican-American War demonstrated that occupying foreign “others” was much more palatable and warranted than subjugating white American citizens would be less than fifteen years later.5

The ethos of American republicanism, a set of shared values born long before but consolidated by the Revolution, and growing to fruition in the nineteenth century, supplied the ideological foundation for the citizen-soldier ideal. Americans venerated their republican heritage because it functioned as a marked antithesis to monarchy and oligarchy, the very systems against which the Revolutionary fathers fought. A fierce dedication to private property rights, independent citizenship in which the individual made calculated political decisions, and an aversion to venality formed the basis for this web of beliefs. Governments were viewed, ironically, both with suspicion and reverence because they possessed a dual capacity for corruption and also offered sources of protection for individual liberty. Thus, the citizen was supreme ruler in this form of government and society; republicanism underscored the privilege and duty of the citizen to govern oneself.6


In order to ensure the self-perpetuation of the republican system, citizens accepted the responsibilities of civic virtue—a conviction that they were not enslaved to the state but rather participated voluntarily in public life, and in some cases, defense of the nation for the public interest. The aversion to massive standing armies informed this ideological nexus. They were interpreted as the essence of involuntary servitude, corruption, and threat to liberty, always on the verge of destabilizing and overturning republican governments. Thus the citizen, because he governed himself and his society, assumed the responsibility to defend the nation in times of great crisis. Civic virtue lent itself to participation in public life, especially in militia service, which represented the essence of a free society’s defense of republicanism. Citizens certainly had a stake in preserving their way of life; the alternative, they feared, presented an existence of suppression and limitation of rights. The New York Herald perhaps best summarized the dynamics undergirding the citizen-soldier concept. “One of the highest tests of a good citizen,” an article in 1846 declared, “is the readiness or reluctance with which he yields his personal liberty . . . when at his country’s call, he leaves his private pursuit and enters the field to fulfill the highest obligation a citizen owes his country.”

As free citizens who believed in the concept of civic virtue, American republicans devoted themselves to volunteer military service. Permanent martial duty limited personal autonomy, stripping from an individual one of the central privileges of citizenship. In addition, republicanism looked askance at professional officers who were considered aristocratic and repressive. A man’s identity as citizen could remain firmly intact, however, if he entered into temporary militia service. Citizens-turned-soldiers, therefore, celebrated their voluntariness, understanding that they would return quickly to private life. Provisional service helped

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distinguish their relationship to the state because of the freedom granted to move in and out of
the army, while always retaining a civilian presence. Once in the military, beliefs about self-
government and personal independence also entered the ranks. Volunteers demanded, because
they were free men, the right to elect officers, to be treated as equals, and to preserve their
commitment to individualism. Strict discipline, a fundamental staple of any functioning military
force, was looked upon with great suspicion. Citizen-soldiers assumed that arbitrary regulation of
behavior threatened personal independence and liberty and hence was not to be endured by free
citizens.8

While citizens demanded and oftentimes set the parameters of volunteer military service,
the state responded in good faith, believing in the ability of citizens to perform adequate duty
during times of crisis. Washington’s faith in the citizen-soldier, strengthened by the democratic
impulses inspired by Jefferson and Jackson that swept the nation during the early-to-mid
nineteenth century, buttressed societal beliefs in self-government through voluntary defense.
Active military service, regardless of how temporary, allowed Americans direct participation in
warding off enemies of the state, threats to private property, or coercions against republican
institutions. Thus, the citizen-soldier played a crucial role in the security of the nation, much like
the idealized Minutemen during the Revolution. And whereas he dictated the right of self-
government in the ranks, he also demarcated the type of service that would be performed.
Emphases on temporariness were not taken lightly. Volunteers insisted that they be deployed to
the central areas of crisis, allowed to actively battle their nation’s enemies, interact minimally
with civilians, and be sent home immediately upon resolution of the emergency. Extraneous
duty, especially that which reflected any sort of military professionalization, governance, or

potentially long-term service, violated the contracts made between volunteer soldiers and the government.9

Ideas that formed the basis of the American citizen-soldier ideal blossomed into a martial culture that swept across the nation throughout antebellum years. Contemporaries celebrated their armed citizenry, who were always ready and willing defend the nation. Yet even during times of peace, Americans remained dedicated to a spirit of martial practice that eschewed professionalism but also invited independent corporatism. The militia tradition especially, manifested in volunteer companies, emerged as a means of demonstrating a commitment to democratic association and civic obligation, tempered by an understanding that such organizations were hardly permanent. Private citizens, who composed these social clubs, patterned their behavior in the molds of the colonial provincials, Minutemen at Lexington and Concord and Andrew Jackson’s backwoods brawlers at New Orleans. The martial culture of antebellum America coincided neatly with the era’s rising tide of political democracy, effectively creating a unique national identity. Indeed, many militiamen parlayed their amateur military records into positions of social standing, oftentimes becoming community political leaders. And militia participation served as an outlet of masculine expression, one of the hallmarks of early republican individualism.10


The American martial culture further established itself as citizens began to distinguish volunteer soldiers and militiamen as national symbols, embodied by George Washington, who, like Cincinnatus, put down his sword after the Revolutionary War and resumed his private life as a planter. And the Continental Army was interpreted during the Revolution as the fundamental vehicle by which to achieve independence. The people too would be responsible in securing the ideological aftermath of victory, but such tasks were moot in the event of military defeat. The tradition of reverence for volunteers flourished during the mid-nineteenth century as the nation continued to rely on citizen-soldiers to effect national defense. The United States as an ideological concept depended on such troops to perpetuate its ideals. This belief defined both the Mexican-American War and especially the Civil War as contemporaries looked to their citizen-armies to expand and consolidate the national character. On the eve of war with Mexico, President James K. Polk declared that permanent military establishments “are contrary to the genius of our free institutions”; the nation’s ideals must be secured, and expanded southward, he explained, “[by] our citizen soldiers.” And when Americans waged war against themselves more than a decade later, they looked to their citizen-armies as the embodiments and guarantors of their respective nation’s causes.11

In order for the citizen-soldier ideal to flourish, Americans needed a “negative” reference by which to compare. The establishment of the regular army during the early nineteenth century revealed the pragmatic necessities of frontier and coastal defenses, as well as the building of internal improvements and engineering projects. Yet contemporaries viewed this institution with great distrust and skepticism, resurrecting Revolutionary fears of European-style military

establishments. Dating long before the first British troops occupied the colonies, for example, American colonials were exposed to new republican ideas concerning the problems of standing armies that travelled freely across the Atlantic. *Cato’s Letters*, a blistering indictment of anti-republican tendencies, especially permanent military institutions, flooded the American mainland and met with great fanfare. The authors, John Trenchard and Thomas Gordon, warned that aristocratic governments employed professional armies to stem individual liberty and such armies could even threaten the existence of sitting administrations. These ideas, among many others, were firmly embedded in the American mind by 1765.\(^{12}\)

Revolutionary-era Americans crafted much of their ideological opposition to England based on their supposition that standing armies unbalanced the relationship between the citizen and government. Oftentimes, they argued, the latter superseded the former, always placing the individual in subordinate positions. Even if the citizenry were armed, this argument alleged, it simply would be incapable of dislodging the formidable martial presence of a standing (professional army). Americans looked not only to their own experience against the British but also utilized myriad instances from human history in which Turkish rulers, French kings, and Russian aristocrats used their military might to achieve suppressive and arbitrary political aims. These ideas informed the political climate of Boston, for instance, during the 1760s and 1770s, in which professional red-coated soldiers enforced presumably tyrannical laws that functioned against the will of the people. The perpetual military presence reminded Americans’ of their subservient status to the Crown. Troops occupied private homes and public dwellings, enforcing their will on the community. Indeed, on the eve of independence being declared, Samuel Adams

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spoke for many colonials when he wrote, “A Standing Army . . . is always dangerous to the Liberties of the People. Soldiers are apt to consider themselves as a Body distinct from the rest of the Citizens. . . . Such a power should be watched with a jealous Eye.”

Although always a firebrand, Adams underscored the beliefs of many mainstream Americans. Some during the war viewed the Continental Army with a degree of suspicion although grudgingly acknowledging its necessity to the patriot cause. Contemporaries grounded their concerns about Washington’s army not necessarily in the presence of war, but rather in disquietude about what that force would become during peacetime. Once Americans gained their victory over Great Britain in 1783, a national conversation arose about the postwar responsibilities and presence of the military. One of the great debates during the early national period was that of a standing army. Drawing on their previous experiences with the British Army, Americans believed that such institutions represented unchecked power, political instability, and arbitrary class distinctions between officers and enlisted men. Contemporaries argued that permanent military establishments threatened to corrupt society at large, and also invited corruption in the ranks, because soldiers felt detached from any moral obligations established by the civilized nation. Thus, it is no wonder why the new republic attached itself so dearly to the citizen-soldier ideal in which the individual citizen assumed paramount responsibility for the defense of liberty.

The Second and Third Amendments to the Constitution, which established the citizen’s right to keep and bear arms, and which outlawed unconsented quartering of soldiers in private

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homes, further reflected American aversions to permanent armies. Yet almost as soon as the new
republic inaugurated itself under Constitution, arguments in favor of a more formidable military
force emerged among those who feared the United States’ precariously and defenseless position in
the world. Alexander Hamilton, through famous tracts in *The Federalist*, penned extensive
defenses of a national army that was needed to protect the frontiers and serve as a deterrent to
foreign enemies. Many other observers, though, wary of Hamilton’s thirst for national power,
remained convinced that a “well regulated militia,” populated by the common people, and
trained in the practice of arms, offered the most ideal means of defense. Hamilton’s vision
slowly gained traction over the next two decades as the army established itself as a small but
permanent institution. It endured during that period, despite great political wrangling,
demobilization, and constant scrutiny. Yet, it survived. By 1815 the United States army was
recognized as a fixed organization in the developing federal system. Americans accepted this
reality, although grudgingly and with great skepticism; they never retreated from their fears that
the army could involve itself in civil, political, or societal affairs.¹⁵

Thus throughout much of the early national and antebellum period, the army was
relegated to the fringes of American life, where it struggled to create an identity independent
from the citizen-soldier ideal. The period in which the regular army grew—1815 to 1860—is
crucial to understanding the manner in which military occupation during the Mexican-American
War, but especially during the Civil War and Reconstruction, elicited such robust national
commentary. The assumptions and uncertainties that defined the regular army’s antebellum
existence were drawn upon later during the United States’ wars of occupation in Mexico and the
Confederacy.

As the nineteenth century dawned, the American public looked on the regular army soldier with contempt. Believing that a permanent army was, at best, a necessary evil, citizens alleged that it possessed the capacity to create class distinctions in an otherwise egalitarian society. The United States Military Academy, founded in 1802, endured constant criticisms from observers who likened the institution to an arbitrary aristocracy that produced aloof, condescending officers. Enlisted men were regarded as good-for-nothing failures in life, who had never taken advantage of the fruits of individualism and equality bestowed to all white males. Volunteers for the regular army, American commentators noted, willingly removed themselves from the capitalist market in which a man had the liberty to shape his own unique identity. Instead, these individuals chose to have their rights and freedoms stripped away, fixed in stale subordination to the army.¹⁶

Once enlisted in the military, regular soldiers spent their days in posts far removed from American society. Indeed, whether they knew it or not upon enlistment, troops dedicated most of their time to building and maintaining forts, oftentimes isolated from all other human interactions. “They are rather prisoners in that country,” wrote a civilian regarding the regulars in frontier outposts, “all they can do is take care of themselves.” Few soldiers witnessed or participated in combat, with the exception of episodic clashes with local Indians. Wielding the shovel and ax much more than the musket, troops built roads, erected defenses, and cleared land for future settlement. A West Point graduate commented that “[a]ctive service ought always to be sought after by a soldier, but in Florida,” where he was stationed, “there is neither thanks, profit nor honor to be gained, therefore I confess my positive dislike to the service.” If the American public sought to detach itself from the regular army, it succeeded admirably in doing

so. Soldiers, who were citizens in their own right, felt segregated from the new republic burgeoning in the distance.¹⁷

The regular army came to be associated with the garrisons in which the soldiers lived. These small, enclosed spaces encapsulated the way in which the American public viewed its professional army. Relegated to the frontier, largely removed from any civilian presence, and suffocated by the lack of individual liberty, garrisons epitomized an antithesis of the American character. Their presence stood in stark contrast to the citizen-soldier tradition. Private civilians were not subject to the harsh discipline that had to be maintained in such static environments, nor were they forced to succumb to the mind-numbing tedium that permeated a garrison life. Officers and enlisted men also considered themselves subjected to garrisons’ impenetrable environments. Troops often used the term “monotony” to describe their daily existence, underscoring the lack of variety and seclusion from society.¹⁸

Garrisons functioned as immobile, permanent, and professional spaces, which restricted freedom and movement—collective contrasts to the republican citizen-soldier model. Indeed, drill exercises, bureaucratic administration, and constant training occupied the daily rhythm of garrison life, which soldiers viewed as affronts to the American temperament. From his post at Jefferson Barracks, Missouri, Edmund Kirby Smith noted that a garrison existence induced soldiers to become “automaton like” and “involuntary.” Although most regular soldiers accepted these realities, such characteristics, as were formed by the garrison ethos, still defied what contemporaries considered exceptional about the early American experience. Such disconnects between army life and civilian life reflected broader American concerns that soldiers, because they were removed from the standards of civil society, would revert to practices that contradicted


¹⁸ Coffman, *Old Army*, 67, 81-82.
a moral republican character. Drinking especially came to be associated with regular army
garrisons in which soldiers sought outlets for their tedious lives. Yet garrisons rarely offered an
opportunity for soldiers to escape from their cloistered military subculture.\textsuperscript{19}

The peculiar design of antebellum garrison culture thus induced soldiers, both officers
and enlisted men, to form unique social relationships that were, naturally, far different from the
non-military world. Patterns of behavior, expectations about authority, and the problem of class
distinctions collectively infected army garrisons, thus providing the American public with
additional modes of criticism against such institutions. Officers oftentimes treated the enlisted
men with degrees of benevolence tempered by the expectation that they would conform to
notions of deference and submission. Officers were challenged most by their men’s fierce
dedication to independence, governed by an unruly disposition. Officers, therefore, had to enact
unusually strict forms of discipline within the constrained spaces of garrisons in order to secure
the important distinctions between both groups. Garrisons produced a peculiar milieu in which
officers exerted an authoritarian image against enlisted men who struggled to preserve their
individualistic, democratic prerogatives.\textsuperscript{20}

Garrisons, therefore, were unnatural, limiting environs that dotted the landscape of an
otherwise egalitarian republic. Reflecting long-held concerns about standing armies, the
American public came to see garrisons as the embodiment of permanent military establishments.
Thus, contemporaries sought to remove the army’s presence as far as possible from republican
institutions, demarcating civil society from military culture. These dynamics became especially
evident and troubling because of the boredom and static nature that consumed a garrison
existence. Such problems, of course, plagued all United States armies, whether they were in the

\textsuperscript{19} Skelton, \textit{American Profession of Arms}, 184-90.

\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 260-81.
field, stationed temporarily near cities, or isolated permanently in frontier outposts. Yet the latter came to be viewed by soldiers and officers alike as a particularly unusual setting. This formative recognition triggered a response within the American character that would linger across the nineteenth century, later to be associated directly with the problem of military occupation.

Conversely, white American males who were not in the regular army and who retained a private, individualistic life crafted by the republican system believed that professional soldiers represented an exception to the national character. The citizen-soldier ideal evolved partly in response to the growing professionalization of the United States army, particularly in public interpretations about permanent garrisons. Potential citizen-soldiers, who would volunteer in the defense of the nation, could take comfort in the fact that their services would function in complete contrast to nineteenth-century garrison culture. Their service in the militia or army would be distinguished by its temporary, amateur appeal, representing nothing of the static, professional, and immobile quality of regular army establishments. Citizen-soldiers recognized the restrictive tendencies of the army, especially in camp, on the march, or in relations with officers; these were unpleasant realities of men’s civic obligations. Yet they strove to maintain their individualistic identities during their service, based on a fierce dedication to self-government in the ranks, not traditionally available to soldiers in the regular army.

The republican culture undergirding the citizen-soldier model merged with the professionalizing tendencies of the regular army in 1846 when the United States went to war with Mexico. Waged to exert national power and supremacy, to consolidate borders, and to acquire vast amounts of land, Americans relied on their heritage of martial volunteerism to achieve national war aims. The nation integrated citizen-soldiers and professionals only once before during the War of 1812. After decades of ideological inculcation in the citizen-soldier
ideal, Americans during the 1840s exuded a confident, almost cocky expectation about the superiority of the United States military compared to their Mexican foes. As white males rushed to fill volunteer units, the nation celebrated its citizen-volunteers on the grounds that they embodied the nation’s best interests. They were not hirelings or professionals detached from national goals; instead, patriotism reflected the essence of republican civic virtue. The very act of volunteering on behalf of the nation confirmed, for many contemporaries, notions of American nationalism and exceptionalism. And operating within the broader cultural milieu of “Manifest Destiny,” volunteer troops could be counted on to acquire new territory for the nation. Citizen-soldiers accordingly dreamed of earning battlefield glory, securing personal honor, and perpetuating the nation’s republican character that in turn preserved individual liberty. And once in the ranks, they enacted their identities as citizens, demanding the right to elect officers and maintain a degree of personal independence; their fierce individualism entered into the army with them.  

Although citizen-soldiers participated in many of the grand campaigns and battles of the conflict, they were also called upon to undertake the central feature of American war strategy: occupation of territory and pacification of civilian populations. Battlefield victories were critically important, but they meant only so much if the acquired lands could not be governed by the United States military. Citizen-soldiers, therefore, faced an unprecedented challenge in the reality of securing territory. A sizeable share of volunteers, many of whom enlisted for the entire war, were ordered to oversee lands already secured by earlier engagements. Many had volunteered for an indefinite amount time, compounding their anxieties about the potentially problematic duties of military occupation. Moreover, an established tradition of military

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21 Johannson, To the Halls of the Montezumas, 45-107; Foos, Short, Offhand, Killing Affair, 32.
governance did not exist from which to learn; even the regular army stumbled blindly, searching for a way to conduct an effective occupation.  

An ironic situation thus developed. On the one hand, military occupation had never been a feature of the United States’ republican military tradition. On the other, the republican qualities that composed the American citizen-soldier ideal would be the very characteristics that made occupation such a challenging prospect in Mexico. The character of the Mexican-American War offered additional obstacles because the concept of civic virtue operated most successfully in defense of the nation during times of crisis, not necessarily in active invasion of foreign countries. In this instance, however, the United States called upon its citizen-volunteers to actively effect change in Mexico, characterized by long-term occupation in which transitional governments were established and civilian populations regulated.

The very nature in which the United States went to war in 1846 underscored how the citizen-soldier concept had been altered. President Polk and his supporters cloaked their intentions in the rhetoric of national defense, signaling Mexico as the aggressor, and called on volunteers to defend the nation’s honor and ideals. And indeed, the rush to arms confirmed the legitimacy of American civic virtue. Yet such assumptions were, in large part, merely a façade, masking the true intentions of the administration. Manifest Destiny, a concept that preached America’s providential right to acquire vast continental lands, also inspired thousands of men to join the ranks of volunteer units. An ideological faith in American exceptionalism, and conversely a belief in the inferiority of other nations, drove countless citizens into the army. They believed that the war represented a moment to prove the superiority of the American

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22 Winders, *Mr. Polk’s Army*, 70-71.
experiment by transforming other peoples, cultures, and regions into the nation’s republican image.  

William P. Rogers, a captain in the 1st Mississippi Rifles, had heard rumors that the United States sought to conquer Mexico and overthrow its government. Rogers remained uncertain about the moral implications of this proposition, but he did believe that the war created an opportunity for the United States to fundamentally transform an inferior people. It would be “promotive of humanity and the cause of freedom and religion,” he wrote, if American arms could “greatly improve the condition of the poor Mexican.” Only the United States’ influence “will subject one of the most delightful countries on earth to an intelligent people, who will cultivate and improve its soil.” Although Mexico professed adherence to a republican form of government, Rogers continued, “their laws are more oppressive and more onerous than those of any civilized monarchy,” based on a blind dedication to the Catholic Church, which had unethically entwined itself in the operations of civil government. Rogers spoke on behalf of countless volunteers who merged their identities as citizen-soldiers into agents of cultural change. Nationalism, ethnicity, and religion, combined with the civic ideal of martial volunteerism, informed an intricate ideological worldview for American troops.

Soldiers’ visions could be achieved only if the United States enacted a substantial military presence on Mexican soil, a prospect that few anticipated or even understood. Indeed, long-term occupation in conquest of foreign territories had rarely before entered into the nation’s citizen-soldier ideal. Yet presumptions about racial and cultural inferiority, as expressed by William Rogers, suggested that this war, unlike previous American conflicts, would introduce

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occupation as a fixed standard. The conflict, in essence, was far different from the Revolution or War of 1812 in which domestic territory had to be protected from foreign incursion. In Mexico, by contrast, American tradition became inverted. The United States actively waged war in *acquisition* of territory, and the enemy was not merely the Mexican army. The United States military had to expand its influence and wage war against civilians, conquer and occupy cities, and even test existing cultural assumptions. Learning the process of occupation, therefore, proved to be a tedious, complicated, and trying exercise; its requirements and implications, especially in Mexico, were profoundly antithetical to the American military character. However, military occupation was not antithetical to the theories underlying the era’s obsession with Manifest Destiny.

In order to wage an effective war against Mexico, the United States army had to conquer, pacify, and occupy significant portions of territory. And they succeeded admirably in this endeavor, effortlessly winning battles in and establishing a garrisoned presence in numerous towns. Shortly after the war began in May 1846, General Zachary Taylor captured Matamoros; by August, California and New Mexico came under American control. Monterey, Saltillo, and Tampico, along with much of northern Mexico, fell by the end of the year. Winfield Scott, in a celebrated campaign, captured Vera Cruz in March 1847 and marched west toward Mexico City, establishing numerous garrisons along the way. He forced the surrender of the capitol city in September 1847 and enacted a nine-month occupation until peace could be agreed upon by both countries.25

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Within a two-year period, United States armies occupied much of Mexico, establishing precedents in military governance and martial law, control of civilian populations, and regulation of soldiers’ behavior on foreign soil. From the outset, military authorities encountered the troubling reality of establishing relationships between the army and its conquered foes. The Mexican-American War is one of the most consequential conflicts in United States history because it inaugurated widespread operations conducted beyond national boundaries. American forces thus had few standards by which to measure their conduct. And although much of the public expressed a wild, belligerent attitude toward the war, they paused when considering the responsibilities of a conqueror. Many hoped, therefore, that the army would guide itself according to nebulous “moral law,” acting in accordance with the civilized nations of the world. The United States could not appear, contemporaries argued, despotic in its rule but rather should be benevolent in its offering of freedom and republicanism to the Mexican people. Citizen-soldiers, however, possessed different visions.26

Almost immediately after the war began, reports surfaced about depredations committed by Zachary Taylor’s forces on the Rio Grande. Theft, murder, pillaging, random violence against civilians, and the destruction of local property tarnished the image of American forces that entered Mexico in 1846. Volunteers from Texas especially proved difficult to regulate, as they were motivated out of a frontier spirit of individualism and abject hatred for Mexicans that dated back to the Texas Revolution. The unruly spirit of Taylor’s troops emanated not only from lack of discipline but also from a sense of personal revenge and racial superiority. Such qualities were difficult to control; they were also detrimental to the American war effort. Moderate Mexican civilians, who might have joined the American cause, waged a violent and passionate defense of

their territory and homes against the ruthless invaders. Taylor proved to be ill-suited to wage an effective, ordered war of occupation.²⁷

Zachary Taylor’s failure to maintain a semblance of discipline among his troops alarmed the American public as well as other army commanders. The task fell to Winfield Scott, one of the early republic’s great military thinkers, to formulate a systemized application of “moral law.” Scott’s vision offered striking precedents for wartime occupation, martial governance, and conduct of republican armies. Future generations of American military theorists adopted his formulations, setting standards of comportment for soldiers in the field. If United States forces were to abide by a set of moral principles, Scott articulated their precise definition, firmly arranging military occupation in the national vernacular. A moral army, Scott declared, could not enter a foreign country devoid of upstanding conduct, especially if that army believed it comprised citizen-soldiers from an exceptional nation. Scott understood that the Mexican-American War represented a proving ground for the United States both in terms of demonstrating national strength and in proving national character. If the citizen-soldier ideal was worth as much as contemporaries claimed, Scott believed, it needed to be confirmed in an untested environment. Military occupation served as the great challenge.²⁸

Scott equated civil affairs and military strategy, twin prospects that had never before been united in the nation’s military practice. In order to have an effective strategic vision, Scott understood that an army needed to focus on the enemy’s military and also on its local civilians. This awareness stemmed from the reports of depredations on the Rio Grande and in other areas

²⁷ Johannsen, To the Halls of the Montezumas, 30-44; Smith, “American Rule in Mexico,” 287-302, 293-94. For examples of depredations committed by American soldiers, see Niles Register, November 14, and 21, 1846, pp. 165, 180.

in which United States soldiers were accused of unauthorized engagement against private residents. Scott feared that a hostile American army would alienate the Mexican people, unnecessarily transforming the population into an armed resistance that practiced irregular warfare. Thus, he sought to exert complete control over both his army and the local populace, punishing offenses committed by both groups.29

Scott believed that maintaining an army indefinitely in a foreign country represented the great challenge to any future American war, including the present conflict. Drawing on an extensive historical perspective, Scott formulated his visions of occupation from an intimate appreciation of the Napoleonic era. He understood that plundering French armies in Spain, for instance, needlessly isolated themselves because of their wanton behavior, violence against civilians, and oppressive military regimes. Spanish retaliations against Napoleon’s army, therefore, caused massive resistance and induced long-term chaos and instability. Scott did not want to replicate this tradition in Mexico; such practices not only threatened perpetual violence but also dislodged the United States from its moral ideals.30

Scott translated these conceptions into new policy directives that possessed profound insight but that also had dramatic implications for future American conflicts: martial law and General Orders No. 20. Understanding that invading armies were oftentimes vulnerable against hostile civilians, Scott sought to mold official strategy based on the supposition that American armies meant no harm to the local populace. The Orders, issued in February 1847, created military tribunals to try offenses committed both by soldiers and civilians and establish working relationships between the army and civil officers, who administered their localities subject to the

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30 Ibid.
authority of a military governor. Moreover, Scott did not oblige conquered towns to fund the American occupation; the army paid for the goods that it used and consumed. The Orders also protected private property, outlawed murder and rape, and demanded a civilized approach to armed conflict. Finally, Scott emphasized the importance of respecting municipal governments, stressing the need for local Mexican authorities, rather than the United States military, to direct civil affairs.31

American forces occupied scores of Mexican towns, extending from the eastern coasts through the interior, and deep into New Mexico and California. Garrisons that dotted the landscape offered departure points for future campaigns, created bases of supply, and functioned as centers of civilian appeasement. In most instances, the army employed General Orders No. 20 by establishing martial law and curfews, in addition to curbing the sale of liquor, paying for the needs of the army, and respecting the Catholic faith. Thus occupation and compliance functioned as essential components for an American victory; Scott and other authorities believed that firm but fair occupation would force the Mexicans to capitulate quickly. Yet the process and nature of this strategy provoked great concern from some participants who considered garrisoning unnecessary and damaging to the national military tradition. Even though Scott’s Orders established guidelines for an effective occupation, they were not yet tested or proven.32

It appeared that Scott’s awareness of changing character of American warfare prevented the United States army from following the Napoleonic mold that he so greatly feared. Indeed, the Orders functioned, in many cases, precisely as Scott envisioned. However, his recognition that General Orders No. 20 needed to be penned in the first place underscored a realization held by


32 Emory Upton, Military Policy of the United States (Washington: GPO, 1912), 210; Peskin, Winfield Scott, 159.
many Americans that citizen-soldiers were less-than-ideal executors for a war of occupation. Scott’s visionary outlook testified to the profound unfitness of volunteers to conduct professional, bureaucratic operations. Yet they were still called upon to regulate and govern territories already won by United States arms. Their conduct, oftentimes at odds with General Orders No. 20, elicited abundant commentary from regular troops who were disgusted at their amateur comrades’ behavior. The root problem of occupation during the Mexican-American War, therefore, functioned well beyond the dictates of Scott’s vision. Some contemporaries indeed questioned the wisdom of turning the United States army into a vehicle of pacification and governance.

George Gordon Meade, a West Point graduate and long-term soldier in the regular army, revealed the uncertainties of occupation. Although he believed the United States to have a superior military force, certain to win the war, Meade looked beyond the immediate glamour of American arms and predicted what he saw as the troubling implications of martial governance. “This plan of armed occupation, I, individually am opposed to,” he informed his wife in October 1846 shortly after Monterey fell, “upon the ground of its never having an end.” Meade feared the experience of occupation would instill hatred, defiance, and revenge within the Mexican people, “which will compel us to be always prepared by having a large army on this frontier.” Demonstrating the full force of American arms on the battlefield, Meade explained, would have a much greater, shocking impact than garrisons spread across conquered territory. He also feared the expense, commitment of manpower, and effect on the soldiers who would be compelled to perform the indefinite occupations.33

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Even within a foreign context, Meade undoubtedly shaped his beliefs according to traditional American understandings of the army and wartime. Wars, he assumed, should be short and decisive, in defense of national interests; military occupation inverted these assumptions. Meade ultimately accused the United States army of not being prepared for this crucial undertaking. The recognition that volunteers, whom he despised, would be the primary forces of occupation, filled Meade with trepidation. The citizen-soldiers’ democratic tendencies, political power, and undisciplined character, combined with their blinding interpretations of Manifest Destiny, in part, proved Meade’s assessments to be correct.34

Perceptions of race and a fierce dedication to individualism informed the ways in which citizen-soldiers conducted themselves on Mexican soil. Decades of inculcation in nineteenth-century conceptions of republicanism, democracy, and national exceptionalism supplied the greatest challenges to the United States’ armies of occupation. Winfield Scott pinpointed with dread the ways in which volunteer soldiers would behave as an invading and occupying army; the troops conformed perfectly to his troubled expectations.

Although Americans and Mexicans both embraced a republican heritage, United States volunteers believed that race demarcated a strict line between the legitimacy of both nations’ governing systems. Mexico, citizen-soldiers believed, had wrongly instituted the republican system and were subservient to a state religion; American armies were therefore obligated to invade, occupy, and cleanse the enemy nation, by any means necessary. A fundamental faith in racial superiority infused myriad soldiers with particular behavioral practices. Samuel Ryan Curtis, an officer of Ohio volunteers, disagreed greatly with Scott’s restrained approach. “Subjugation or devastation is my view of the matter,” Curtis explained from Matamoros. “The

34 Ibid., 1:91-92, 94-95, 108, 152.
people are semi savage and they must be made to acknowledge our sovereignty or this war will never end.”

In spite of Scott’s overtures of restraint and moral conduct, Curtis’s outlook reflected the overall character of American occupations in Mexico. Although some military governors, including Curtis, succeeded in maintaining order and cooperating with Mexican authorities, the occupiers rarely discarded their racist views, which seeped into their behavior. Occupation thus functioned in a two-fold manner. On the one hand, soldiers enacted their racial perceptions in numerous acts of violence and destruction against Mexican civilians, seeing white supremacy and American military might as proper justifications. On the other hand, troops sometimes employed a more moderate approach while also being guided by a paternalistic belief that occupation lifted Mexicans out of their depraved condition. In either event, military occupation functioned as an active process, always working to achieve, in this sense, a racial and national end. Even regular army officers, who often displayed much more self-control than volunteers, were not immune to these conceptions. Writing from Mexico City toward the end of the war, Daniel Harvey Hill, a West Point-trained artillery lieutenant, believed that the conflict had properly cleansed Mexico. “I look upon the present movement as full of promise for Mexico,” he claimed. “May it be the precursor of the down-fall of the present corrupt hierarchy and the [beginning of] universal freedom of conscience,” met by annexation of territory and assimilation into American culture.

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Although they possessed similar beliefs, other soldiers were not nearly as reserved as Hill. Using military occupation and the language of Manifest Destiny as justification, United States soldiers sought to reorder the Mexican republic according to the standards of nineteenth-century America. Thomas Tennery, a soldier in the 4th Illinois Volunteers, described Matamoros as an exceedingly obtuse town, due in large part to the local populace’s inability to modernize. “Everything appears dull, the houses, the inhabitants little above savages and without energy or business of any importance,” he wrote. “This appears to be caused by the want of commerce,” Tennery presumed, “with the indolence of the inhabitants and perhaps the want of a settled government that will secure property.” In order to effect substantial and necessary change, Tennery determined, “the country must be inhabited by a different race of people.” The current occupants of Mexico, “[t]he Spanish and Indian,” he claimed, “do not make a race of people with patriotism and candor enough to support a republic.”

Oftentimes soldiers manifested their racist dogmas through extreme destruction and physical reprisal, rarely concerned about the implications of their actions. From their perspective, any act of violence was justified because the victims, Mexican citizens, were perceived as servile, inferior people. And even the soldiers who might have been uncomfortable at the sight of such wanton devastation still harbored similar racial outlooks. As historian Mark Neely has recently written, “[r]acial constructs help explain the unrestrained passions of the unfeeling contempt exemplified by the American volunteer in Mexico.” One regular soldier recounted numerous episodes at Monterey in which the ethos of occupation inspired countless instances of vandalism, private homes conquered by force, and destruction of private property. “The utmost insecurity prevails,” he wrote, “threatened with the perfect impunity by the unbridled

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Volunteers.” He concluded by writing that conquest could be secured only “by the extermination of the Mexican race.” The irony of these statements is striking indeed. Merely two generations removed from the American Revolution, and the fears and outrage concerning British occupation and invasion of private spaces, volunteers during the Mexican War never assumed that their actions might have resembled the very acts that inspired countless Americans to decry the excesses of an occupying army. The reason, of course, was that race justified a limitless occupation, buttressed by a violent democratic expression.  

Such behavior naturally produced tense relations between the occupying troops and Mexican civilians. The latter, naturally, responded to the violent attacks made against their property and fellow citizens. Yet a peculiar problem arose, complicating the interactions between soldier and civilian. The military incursions into Mexico spawned an organic resistance that would come to be associated with all future American wars of occupation: guerrilla conflict and irregular combatants. If United States troops were not already motivated to wage a destructive war against civilians and property, the presence and conduct of Mexican guerrillas certainly provided an excuse for American soldiers to perpetuate an incredibly violent, chaotic retaliation. Clandestine attacks by enemy combatants or guerrillas—the distinctions, to contemporaries, were unclear, confirming the inherent purpose of irregular warfare—upon the occupiers ranged from targeted assassinations in towns to violent assaults on wagon trains and supply lines in the desolate countryside.

American soldiers did not know from where the next attack would emanate, nor could they determine which civilians represented an armed threat. Guerrilla warfare came to be regarded as highly dishonorable, barbaric, and uncivilized. Volunteers and regulars alike

38 Neely, Civil War and the Limits of Destruction, 28; Thomas Bangs Thorpe, Our Army at Monterey: Being a Correct Account of the Proceedings and Events which occurred to the "Army of Occupation" under the Command of Major General Taylor . . . (Philadelphia: Carey and Hart Publishers, 1848), 120.
believed that such modes of martial conduct indicated that Mexicans were primitive and unsophisticated. Secretary of War William L. Marcy explained that “[t]he guerrilla system is hardly recognized as a legitimate mode of warfare, and should be met with the utmost allowable severity.” Thus, soldiers justified any mode of retaliation or revenge, reinforcing their long-established beliefs in Mexican inferiority. Members of anti-guerrilla units burned villages, killed civilians arbitrarily, and meted out vengeance anywhere they saw fit. United States forces ultimately designated the professional Mexican army as a dishonorable institution, equating it with independent guerrilla bands. Emotions grounded in revenge and retribution clouded an already troubling environment, intensified by racial difference.39

Whereas Winfield Scott perceived his conquests in Mexico to be magnanimous, always seeking harmonious relations with civilians, he too looked upon guerrilla warfare with utter contempt. Civilized war, he said, could not countenance such conduct. Thus, Scott employed merciless retribution against suspected civilian combatants, supported the destruction of towns and property, and hoped to stem resistance through displays of American force. “The system of forming guerrilla parties to annoy us,” he assured the Mexican government, “will produce only evils to this country.” Scott explained that retaliation would bring little moral pause to his army, “which knows how to protect itself, and how to proceed against such cutthroats.” With great fanfare, Scott deliberately wielded his citizen-solders against guerrillas, understanding that volunteers possessed the unruly and uninhibited qualities necessary to wage an irregular war. Scott’s admission was indeed ironic because it appeared, at least at first glance, that the integrity of the citizen-soldier ideal had been compromised. Scott, however, acted within a long-established American tradition, first announced by George Washington, that amateur soldiers

served a valuable purpose in patrolling the countryside and subduing enemy combatants.

Volunteers, Scott believed, functioned as ideal candidates for an irregular war because they demanded freedom of mobility, unburdened from the constraints and professionalization of the regular army.40

Scott’s soldiers responded enthusiastically to his order of no-quarter, which he declared in early 1847 while on the road to Mexico City. The troops believed that an uncivilized mode of warfare necessitated styles of retribution that might appear shocking. Yet irregular conduct, which was often sanctioned by the Mexican government, endorsed by local priests, and embraced by increasing numbers of civilians, signaled to American volunteers that Mexico could not honorably claim a republican heritage. Soldiers presumed that Mexico’s unexceptional character invited the very type of uncultured warfare that its citizens perpetrated on American armies. Some troops, who witnessed depredations committed by guerrillas upon local citizens, were stunned that members of the same nation could harm one another. “[W]e will leave behind us here a force to keep the guerrillas from plundering the people and protect them from the rapacity of Government troops,” Major John Corey Henshaw wrote near Puebla. “Whoever before heard of a people asking of the enemy protection against their own Government? What a commentary does this present on the state of affairs in this unfortunate country,” he determined.

“I think,” Henshaw concluded, “I can see in the introduction of our army into this country, the final annexation of all Mexico to the United States.”

A faith in national hierarchy and racial superiority colored responses to the irregular war, blinding citizen-soldiers to the implications of their actions. Thomas Barclay, a soldier in the 2nd Pennsylvania Volunteers, wrote a lengthy diary exposition highlighting these very problems. Declaring that a war of civilizations between the United States and Mexico had long been inevitable, Barclay considered the present conflict justified because “[t]he Anglo Saxon race, that land loving people are on the move.” He criticized Mexican governing and religious structures, claiming that their inferior, passé, and corrupt institutions helped occasion the bloody conflict, which destined Mexico to be forever changed. “However great a calamity war may be and however much we may regret the sad consequences which follow in its train,” Barclay stated, “mankind will [have] no cause to mourn a change of things in this Country.” The Mexican people, Barclay reasoned, had long been enslaved by a system that resisted progress and improvement. They were not entirely to blame for their condition; instead, they must be saved from present circumstances, if necessary by force.

Barclay believed that the unrefined culture in which the people lived inspired the uncivilized manner by which they waged war. “The highways are infested with villains and neither person nor property are safe in travelling,” he insisted, undoubtedly recalling the murders of American soldiers that he witnessed earlier in the conflict. The guerrilla war, he explained, arose as a desperate, dishonorable means of preserving territory quickly being ceded to the

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United States. Those who stubbornly and violently resisted societal evolution, ignored the “forbearance and chivalrous spirit” of the United States army. Thus, Barclay and myriad American observers endorsed a cleansing of the Mexican countryside at the mere presence of civilian combatants.43

United States volunteers did not consider participation in the guerrilla war to be an affront to their identities as citizen-soldiers. In their minds, they conformed perfectly to George Washington’s contention that amateur soldiers, when left to police civilians and badger the enemy, served a profound purpose for the army. Indeed, Winfield Scott subscribed to the same view, oftentimes transforming volunteers into forces of counterinsurgency, rather than advance elements of the army. Yet irregular warfare, spawned exclusively by the presence of invasion and occupation, possessed a very dark and irrevocable underside. Violent, sporadic interactions allowed soldiers to liberate themselves from what they considered the oppressive, limiting character of the army. The guerrilla presence, moreover, gave volunteers a coveted excuse to wage war on civilians who might be combatants, to plunder local villages, and to express their visions of manifest destiny.

Whereas American volunteers rarely identified the inconsistencies in their behavior toward civilians, regular army soldiers reacted with abject disgust. Professionals harbored comparable beliefs about race and nation, yet they were much more tempered in the manner by which they enacted and articulated their prejudices. They instead viewed American occupation through a much broader lens, believing that provisional troops, by virtue of their volunteerism, were unfit to conduct any semblance of an ordered military occupation. While despising irregular warfare, regulars contended that volunteers helped perpetuate the chaos of an already unstable environment. The American military tradition was fraught with great love lost between regulars

43 Ibid.
and volunteers; occupying Mexico further widened the gulf between both groups. Regulars thus voiced an apprehensive language about military occupation that would never be fully reconciled by mid-nineteenth-century Americans. They sensed that if the United States army transformed into an institution of foreign invasion, as it had in Mexico, it must also take into account the internal cultural elements that composed the army’s character, namely the citizen-soldier ideal. Regulars understood that invasion and occupation functioned in a style that was unusually disconnected from the American disposition. Thus, an occupying force needed a specific temperament to achieve its objectives; citizen-soldiers, they believed, failed this test.

Regular army officers during the antebellum period developed a unique culture that informed their web of beliefs long before, during, and after the war against Mexico. They crafted a professional culture that stressed honor, duty, and decorum, buttressed by a sense of political neutrality and systematic regulation; these qualities were nurtured within a peacetime garrison ethos. Although they privately endorsed Manifest Destiny and American exceptionalism, careerist officers remained tempered in their public expressions and actions. Instead, regulars wedded themselves to the bureaucratic functions of the army and, by extension, national goals. Refusing the temptation of entering Mexico to actively shape, through the power of armed force, political, national, and racial ends, regulars believed that their profession restricted them from interfering with the ambitions set forth by civil authorities. Indeed, they distanced themselves from pursuing personal missions or achieving individual conquests, in favor of remaining duty-bound to the pragmatic requirements of war. Their peacetime service accordingly erased the trendy Jacksonian impulses of the age, allowing regulars to focus on wartime bureaucratic necessity. And when called into battle, regulars performed admirably well, vindicating their
profession against an American public that continued to look askance at a permanent military establishment.\textsuperscript{44}

The regular army’s professionalization exhibited itself most importantly in the realms of invasion, military governance, and interactions with civilians. Manifest Destiny, by definition, signaled national expansion through invasion, bringing peoples and territories under American influence. This process had to be occasioned carefully through the use of institutions and practices, such as garrison culture, that were long established in the professional army tradition. Thus regulars did not question the wisdom of military occupation on ideological or moral grounds; they interpreted it through the lens of bureaucratic efficiency. And they positioned volunteers at the center of their critique. Regulars claimed that if Manifest Destiny served as the basis of American war aims, citizen-soldiers, because they most ardently identified with the concept, were the least qualified to enact a war of invasion and conquest. Yes, their unruly and chaotic temperaments made them ideal candidates in irregular battles against guerrillas. But in a war of systematic occupation in which proficient invasion and population control were crucial components, volunteers proved detrimental.\textsuperscript{45}

Regulars, therefore, articulated the fundamental paradox of a republican army of occupation: civic virtue, democratic tendencies, and ideological predispositions, which undergirded the citizen-soldier ideal, were the very concepts that destabilized an effective, streamlined, and bureaucratic military governance. Thomas Thorpe commented on the “vandalism of the Volunteers who serve under the banners of the United States,” shortly after American arms captured Monterey. “[T]he utmost insecurity prevails; that no one is master of


\textsuperscript{45} Winders, \textit{Mr. Polk’s Army}, 50-87.
his own property, or even of his own existence, threatened with perfect impunity by the unbridled Volunteers,” he wrote. Conversely, the regulars who occupied the city remained “well disciplined, subordinate, and under excellent officers.” Citizen-soldiers, he concluded, behaved “much like the Comanches in their appearance, ferocity, and customs.”

The style of volunteers’ behavior, which was non-existent in the peacetime professional army, shocked the regulars. Officers such as George Meade, D. H. Hill, and George McClellan believed that citizen-soldiers’ conduct would alienate the Mexican people; indeed, they were correct. Professional soldiers judged their amateur comrades unfit for a war of invasion because such conflicts were not merely about fighting. Instead, active wars necessitated military governance, interacting with civilians, remaining in fixed positions for indefinite periods of time, and, in some cases, garrisoning territory for the duration of the conflict. Thus, regulars determined that volunteers transferred their democratic ideals to the army in which they resisted authority and obligation to order, the very characteristics of which conflicted with the requirements of invasion and conquest. Even William P. Rogers, a citizen-officer of a Mississippi regiment, recognized this conundrum, writing that volunteers did not possess the critical attributes necessary for an effective war of occupation. “One who has never commanded a company of voluntiers can form no idea of the unpleasantness of the life,” he explained. “Volunteers I am satisfied will never do for an invading army—They will do well enough to defend their own firesides, but they can not endure the fatigue incident to an invading army, besides to keep them under proper discipline they should be under excitement.”

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Rogers, in merely a few sentences, captured the underlying irony of volunteer troops occupying foreign lands. The citizen-soldier ideal, he indicated, had been constructed on the basis of defending personal liberty and protecting the nation. The essence of occupation, conversely, upset these assumptions—the cultural ingredients composing the citizen-soldier heritage refused to mix with the realities and requirements of military occupation. Rogers implied that citizen-soldiers could not be relied upon to conduct efficient military governance because they were not imbued with a tradition of such practices. If anything, they were inculcated in a tradition that resisted military occupation and standing armies. Yet they were instilled deeply in mid-nineteenth-century conceptions of race, national progress, and democracy, all of which inspired the invasions and occupations of Mexico, but which also threatened the very core of an organized American occupation. Regular officers also recognized these tendencies, which they interpreted as fundamental flaws in the citizen-soldier concept.

Citizen-soldiers accordingly resisted what they considered the constraints of invasion, believing that the physical embodiment of military occupation—garrisons—were much too evocative of professional military culture. They did not object to occupying Mexico on ideological or moral grounds. Rather their protests were grounded in beliefs that army life in general, and garrison duty in particular, endangered their identities as free citizens who temporarily functioned as soldiers. Battling guerrillas and waging war against civilians, however twisted such practices may appear today, offered relief from the otherwise suffocating environment of occupation. Yet once volunteers were placed in garrisons, they inaugurated a conversation about the role of republican soldiers in a professional, static environment. Ironically, most civil and military authorities alleged that volunteers, because of their unruly,
democratic tendencies, should be relegated to garrison duty. Thus within these environments,
citizen-soldiers had to negotiate modes of discipline, restraint, and decorum that the regular army
had long practiced in garrisons on the American frontier. Citizen-soldiers, therefore, came to
equate garrisons and physical occupation as unwelcome checks on their service.

A vast majority of citizen-soldiers during the Mexican-American War faced the
burdensome problem of being assigned primarily as garrison forces, relieving regulars to
campaign and fight in the war’s central battles. Volunteers felt cheated, prevented from enacting
their full responsibilities as defenders of the nation. They claimed that remaining in segregated,
secondary military classes brought dishonor both to themselves and their home states. A
Pennsylvania volunteer stationed in Mexico City in late 1847 voiced the concerns of many
citizen-soldiers, writing, “[t]here is neither honor or prospect in a garrison life. . . . the question is
asked, ‘Supposing this war should continue 5 or 8 years, are we to be kept doing garrison duty?’”
This inquiry raised the specter not only of martial integrity, but also the problem of permanence.
Garrisons, by their very nature, signified immobility and indicated a halting of military aims.
Henry Lane, an Indiana volunteer, considered the capture of Monterey “a most brilliant affair,”
yet “the taking of the place has not advanced us towards a peace one inch. It is an injury to us.”

In order to function properly during wartime, the citizen-soldier ideal needed continual
progress toward a definitive conclusion. Even camp life, a standard experience in all armies,
could at least be construed as temporary, confirmed by a presumption that campaigning would
resume in the near future. Garrisons, however, were permanent spaces, physical reminders of a
soldiers’ immobility and restriction of freedom and progress. Formal combat and movement did

48 Thomas Barclay diary entry, November 26, 1847, in Peskin, ed., *Volunteers*, 216; Diary entry, December 23-25,
(December 1957): 408; Winders, *Mr. Polk’s Army*, 198-99. See also, Isaac Smith, *Reminiscences of a Campaign in
Mexico* (Indianapolis: Chapman and Spann, 1848), 8-9, 93-95.
not exist with the confines of garrisons; rather, soldiers had to learn how to remain stationary, enduring the static rhythms of daily life. In some cases, citizen-soldiers blamed their political leaders for being positioned in such restrictive environments. “Well this is the G____d damnest shot of work I ever saw yet,” a volunteer sentinel wrote from Burita in 1846. “I voted for old Polk G____d d____m him and here I am in mud and rain and misery. I came out here to fight and instead of fighting I have to tread this mud for four hours what a d____d fool I was—I ought to be in Hell.”

Over time, garrison culture erased volunteers’ passionate attachment to the war. When they invaded Mexico, acquiring territory and engaging civilians, citizen-soldiers believed that they actively fashioned the vision of Manifest Destiny. But when forced to govern lands and people, volunteers became detached from their ideals. The essence of citizen-soldiering was steeped in fierce ideology; permanent zones of occupation were not. James Coulter, of the 2nd Pennsylvania Volunteers, articulated this very problem. “I suppose we are destined again to endure the vexation and troubles of a garrison,” he bemoaned, shortly after entering Mexico City. “A garrison,” his comrade Thomas Barclay concluded a month later, “is very dull and tiresome and is injurious to both the body and mind.”

Regulars would have agreed fully with Coulter’s and Barclay’s assessments. Yet professionals, who had long been reared in the static environment of garrisons, and who oftentimes refused to be governed by ideology, understood how to function within such a peculiar setting. They accepted the disquieting reality that garrisons were undemocratic institutions, created not for the purposes of martial egalitarianism but rather for military

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50 Diary entries, James Coulter diary, September 21, 1847, and Thomas Barclay diary, October 26, 1847, both in Peskin, ed., Volunteers, 192, 203.
centralization and efficiency. Thus, garrisons exposed the army’s rigid hierarchies, oftentimes erecting barriers between officers and common soldiers. Citing the professional tradition, historian William B. Skelton explains that “[t]he routines of garrison life generated almost continual tensions within the ranks and recurrent friction along the officer–enlisted man boundary.” These same dynamics became inflamed during wartime once volunteers entered the equation. They mandated equality, resisted when their demands were not met, and became detached from the nation’s war aims. Instead, they focused on reestablishing their democratic rights, which they believed had been curbed by a confining garrison culture. Their resistance translated into breakdowns of discipline and order, revealing the troubling consequence of volunteers serving as permanent occupiers.51

American troops in Mexico, like Barclay and Coulter and especially the regulars, cited garrison culture as the central problem that influenced the behavior and discipline of citizen-soldiers. Although Winfield Scott envisioned General Orders No. 20 as a regulation of conduct, volunteers construed the measure as an impediment to their democratic rights. Some volunteers became virulently angry at Scott’s measures, believing that citizen-soldiers should not endure the harsh penalties of military discipline. They alleged that Scott was more interested in protecting the rights and property of Mexican civilians than he was in assuring the welfare of his own troops. These claims, of course, were not entirely true, yet they informed the attitudes of myriad soldiers who served in occupied garrisons.52

As the days dragged on, and soldiers became increasingly bored, they unleashed their aggression not only against local civilians and property, but also against what they considered the restrictive nature of the garrison ethos. J. B. Duncan, a volunteer in the 1st Illinois, cited a

51 Skelton, American Profession of Arms, 266.
52 Johnson, Winfield Scott, 192-93.
common problem endured by many soldiers, which contributed to their behavioral problems. “We are living a very lazy life,” he wrote in April 1847 from Buena Vista, where his regiment would be stationed for the next six weeks, “nothing to do only drill a little twice a day . . . and the rest of the time laying on our backs kicking up our heels or promenading around the [town].” Duncan’s illustration suggested that soldiers let down their guard, trapped by the seductive rhythm of a quiet Mexican town. Yet the rising tide of monotony and sameness overwhelmed many soldiers who sought ways to alleviate their bored tensions.53

Racial and ethnic prejudices continued to inform the ways in which volunteers fractured the constraining mold of garrisons. Troops sometimes blamed Mexican civilians for infesting American soldiers with laziness, citing what they considered the indolence of local life. Other troops cited the indigenous corruption of occupied towns as sources of their unethical behavior. Samuel Ryan Curtis wrote from Matamoros, “[a]bout the principle corners loiter groups of men of all colours and all countries are collected cursing swearing fighting gambling and presenting a most barbarous sight. Volunteers especially are conspicuous in these groups. . . . Murder rapine and vice of all manner of form prevails and predominates here.” Stunned by the behavior of his troops, Ryan considered Matamoros “a conquered city [yet] much the receptacle of all the dregs of the United States.—As it now stands, it is a disgrace to our country; for our own citizens are much worse than the Mexicans who are mixed up with them.” Similar scenes dotted the occupied landscape, as citizen-soldiers confronted their boredom through distraction and violence, often continuing to take out their aggression against civilians and public spaces. Such conduct produced great tensions between the occupier and the occupied, creating environments of

discord, strain, and turmoil. Thus the characteristics that military occupation was supposed to erase ended up functioning as the very attributes that challenged martial governance the most.54

In order to keep volunteers in check, officers often employed violent disciplinary methods characteristic of the regular army. Citizen-soldiers despised, above all else, these modes of physical regulation, declaring that as free men they were absolved from arbitrary authority. Nevertheless, discipline during the Mexican-American War assumed a notorious reputation because it revealed how the United States army shaped behavior in ways completely unfamiliar to American republican culture. Discipline became most severe when volunteers slipped into the doldrums of garrison duty, plagued by its stagnant and tempting character. Soldiers embraced their identities as citizens within these environments, detaching their duties as a soldier, and clinging to cherished notions of freedom, movement, and individualism. These qualities, however, often transformed into the very types of conduct cited by Samuel Ryan Curtis; officers thus sanctioned severe physical penalties against any suspected perpetrator.

An incident at Saltillo testifies to the severity of wartime garrison discipline. After Zachary Taylor’s celebrated victory at Buena Vista, parts of his army occupied Saltillo for the next several months. Insubordination, gambling, drinking, sleeping on guard posts, and general belligerence enveloped the garrison as the army remained idle. Officers, especially Robert T. Paine of North Carolina, responded with unusually strict disciplinary measures, both to consolidate his authority and to curb the behavior of troops in the garrison. To demonstrate his power, Paine introduced an intimidating, but also chiefly symbolic, method of punishment that regular army soldiers knew all too well. The “wooden horse,” an instrument sustained by two

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sets of legs, suspended by log, was a symbol of severe pain and discomfort. Soldiers were forced to straddle the bar for indefinite periods of time, ranging from hours to even days. Convicted troops both endured physical agony and public disgrace. Paine placed the horse in front of the camp of a North Carolina regiment, an unspoken admonishment about their behavior. Paine never utilized the wooden horse, however. Nearly one hundred soldiers from a nearby Virginia regiment stormed the area and dismantled the reviled icon of undemocratic power, launching a widespread mutiny.\footnote{Foos, Short, Offhand, Killing Affair, 92. For a visual representation of the wooden horse, see John D. Billings, Hardtack and Coffee: The Unwritten Story of Army Life (Boston: George M. Smith, 1887), 150.}

Volunteers’ responses to the wooden horse signaled the types of discipline that could occur in a garrison setting. Soldiers were sometimes whipped in public, which reflected the brutal and occasionally limitless modes of garrison violence. Four soldiers stationed at Puebla in May 1847 were convicted of robbery and ordered to remove their shirts. “[A]mid much writhing,” one soldier observed, “the prisoner received 39 [lashes] well and slowly laid on.” The demonstration was intended to punish the offenders, setting an example to other soldiers. “There was among all however a general feeling of disgust... everyone regretted that such a punishment could be inflicted under the laws of our country.” Volunteers possessed a fierce streak of defiance and individualism and did not conform after witnessing the flogging. “Instead of reforming,” one soldier concluded, “culprits by the exposure are hardened. Spectators forge the crime in sympathy for the sufferers.” And thus the problem of behavior and discipline continued unabated, enveloping garrisoned towns in conflict and chaos, as soldiers struggled to enact their democratic privileges while simultaneously resisting un-republican authority.\footnote{Thomas Barclay diary entry, May 19, 1847, in Peskin, ed., Volunteers, 97; Neely, Civil War and the Limits of Destruction, 21.}
The problem of behavior and discipline in Mexico was, ironically, a self-perpetuating phenomenon. The vast majority of volunteers never saw formal combat, the precise reason for which they professed to have volunteered. They instead remained in passive circumstances, thereby called to perform very subtle forms of duty that clashed wildly with their imaginations of war. Rather than campaigning, participating in battles, or even remaining in camp, most citizen-soldiers experienced the conflict guarding supply lines, garrisoning towns, and serving on the fringes of the wartime landscape. Indeed, military occupation came to be the rule, rather than the exception, that defined volunteer service during the Mexican-American War. This troubling reality intensified the racial tensions that already governed most troops, escalated existing feelings of individualism, and accelerated prevailing desires to prove oneself while in uniform. Soldiers channeled these attributes into a calculated war not on an enemy army but rather on civilians, public spaces, and private property. And they also damaged themselves through ubiquitous alcohol abuse and reckless behavior. They sought anything to break out of the restrictive molds of army life that they associated with garrison duty. The prevalent violence and chaos committed by volunteers can be explained, in large part, by the varied features of the garrison ethos, raising a question about the fitness of citizen-soldiers for wars of invasion and occupation.57

Senator Jefferson Davis understood all too well the problem of employing volunteers as garrison forces. A veteran of the Mexican-American War, Davis, shortly after being elected to the Senate, endorsed the Ten Regiment Bill, a proposal to increase the American occupation presence in Mexico City. Based on the assumption that an augmented military presence would

push the Mexican government to discuss peace, the bill authorized ten new regiments to be sent to the war-torn capitol. Suspicious Whigs opposed the measure arguing that President Polk secretly desired a larger, permanent military establishment. Thus, the debate revolved around the kinds of regiments that would be raised.\footnote{William J. Cooper, Jr., \textit{Jefferson Davis, American} (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000), 178-80.}

Davis cherished the American citizen-soldier heritage and celebrated the volunteers’ efforts during the war. Yet “to secure a peace,” he clarified, “we must show our power to compel submission.” A formidable occupation presence, Davis explained, was far different from campaigning and fighting in the field, tasks at which United States armies had proven exceptional. Davis then drew a clear dichotomy between garrisoning and campaigning and explained how the Mexican-American War had altered the assumptions underlying the citizen-soldier ideal. “[H]owever necessary it may be to call forth the chivalry of the country to fight its battles, let us not send such men, to be wasted in the mere duties of the sentinel,” Davis argued. If the United States had been invaded, however, “I would turn to the great body of the militia . . . for its defense,” he countered, championing the purity of volunteer service.\footnote{“Remarks on the Ten Regiment Bill,” January 3, 5, 1848, in James T. McIntosh, et al., eds., \textit{The Papers of Jefferson Davis: Volume 3, July 1846–December 1848} (13 vols.; Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1971-present), 3:255, 258.}

Davis’s commemoration of the citizen-soldier ideal, although genuine, was also a veiled attempt to explain how volunteers did not possess the capacity for military occupation and garrison duty. The consequences, he believed, could be potentially destructive. Davis made clear that armies of invasion and occupation required a particular temperament, grounded in focus and detached from ideological persuasions. “There is a great difference in the material of the volunteers and the regular force,” Davis acknowledged. The former, he claimed, harbored the necessary passion to defend home, hearth, and nation. The latter, conversely, were preferred in
foreign wars “because they can be maintained in better discipline. They will maintain a better state of police. . . and therefore more effective,” Davis concluded, “for mere garrison duties.” He then asked rhetorically if citizen-soldiers would “be content with the performance of the police of a garrison?” Would volunteers be satisfied with “a lower grade in society, and more accustomed to such duties?”

Here, Davis acknowledged that American culture regarded garrisons as ancillary institutions, unfit for citizen-soldiers. Indeed, contemporaries had long equated garrisons with the regular army, an institution relegated to the fringes of society. But Davis’s distinctions extended far beyond those of the American public. He returned forcefully to his contention that the conflict with Mexico, the United States’ first (official) war of invasion and occupation, necessitated a specific class of troops. As a soldier trained in the professional West Point tradition, Davis understood that garrisons offered the ideal vehicle by which to enact a successful occupation, as long as they were populated by regulars who comprehended the unnatural environment of garrison life. “[I]t is one thing to beat the enemy and another to hold him in subjection,” he continued, “which rests upon the supposition that Mexico is conquered.” Davis, however, stipulated that “there is more hostility against us in Mexico now than there was at the beginning of the war. Mexico is not conquered.” Davis justified his reasoning by arguing that “we want this force to hold towns and posts in Mexico—to convince the Mexicans that resistance is idle, and beyond all this, to afford protection to all the citizens of Mexico who are ready to recognize our authority.”

Jefferson Davis ably articulated one of the central problems of military occupation in the republican tradition. The United States, by the late 1840s, had established itself as a nation

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60 “Remarks on the Ten Regiment Bill,” January 5, 1848, in Ibid., 3:258-59.
61 Ibid., 3:259.
willing to engage in foreign invasion. Yet Davis implied that occupying territory and peoples, however inferior they may be perceived, came unnaturally to the American character. Manifest Destiny, contemporaries argued, justified the acquisition of foreign lands, yet the challenge of governing newly acquired spaces presented numerous, unforeseen difficulties. Davis cited a troubling scenario that Americans would never fully reconcile throughout the rest of the nineteenth century.

The citizen-soldier ideal, which had been constructed for a particular purpose and grounded in limited assumptions, now intersected the peculiar culture of a changing American military tradition. The idealism of volunteer soldiering—civic virtue, republicanism, and democratic privilege—collided directly with the realities of wartime occupation—visions of conquest and governing different peoples, all in static, immobile environments. Citizen-soldiers encountered great difficulties when trying to navigate these incongruous traditions, establishing a national conversation about the role of the volunteer soldier in a war of invasion. This dialogue did not end in 1848, when American forces withdrew from Mexico. It intensified after the Civil War began in 1861; it would not be addressed directly until Abraham Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation went into effect in 1863.
CHAPTER TWO

POLICY, PROCESS, AND PERCEPTION: IMAGINING UNION OCCUPATION DURING THE CIVIL WAR

The Mexican-American War established a solid foundation of principles and precedents about wartime occupation for future generations to emulate. Yet, although the United States engaged in a war of extended occupation between 1861 and 1865, contemporaries initially heeded only a few lessons gleaned from the conflict with Mexico. Civil-military relations dominated conversations among political and military leaders at the outset of the Civil War; focused exchanges about the limits of citizen-soldiering during an indefinite war of occupation, however, did not. In addition, observers learned that the war against, and occupation of, the Confederacy, would be far different from conquering Mexico. United States military forces would invade the southern interior, yet their mission was unusually complicated. They had to defeat Confederate armies but also convince white southerners that northern arms meant no harm to civilians and property, while likewise at first ensuring the status quo of southern social systems, namely slavery.

Contemporaries, though, quickly observed that the Civil War possessed a dual identity that fused elements of traditional nineteenth-century military combat with the bureaucratic problems of martial governance and regulation of peoples. Americans sensed that the war would feature these twin attributes, but they did not initially comprehend the scale of wartime destruction that would occur nor did they foresee the countless problems of military occupation that Union armies would face. The ways in which civil and military leaders in 1861 imagined the policies and processes of wartime occupation revealed the stunning absence of comprehensive experiences with military government in the American tradition. And it exposed a misplaced faith in white southern motivations and ideology. With the exception of the Mexican-American
War, contemporaries had never seriously considered the complex elements that comprised an extended war of occupation.

Ultimately, Americans had to reconcile two crucial differences between the war with Mexico and the impending crisis against the Confederacy: occupying United States territory and regulating the behavior of white American citizens. Wars of occupation were, and are, generally waged against nations and peoples who are noticeably “different.” Indeed, it is much easier to justify a war of invasion, conquest, and occupation when “the other” possesses what are assumed to be striking traits of presumed inferiority. This troubling scenario blinded American soldiers in Mexico to their questionable conduct; in many ways, they rationalized their behavior on racial and cultural grounds. The Civil War, however, presented a different set of circumstances.

Although much of the antebellum period witnessed a steady divide growing between northerners and southerners, occasioned largely by irreconcilable cultural and social forces, members of each section struggled to plausibly deny that the other was “American.” Race especially united North and South, in spite of the divisions sparked by divergent political, cultural, labor, and economic conditions.

Once United States armies penetrated the Confederacy, soldiers had to resolve these unsettling realities. Whereas Union troops may have envisioned white southerners to be backward hayseeds who committed violent, treasonous acts against the nation, they were also considered white citizens who lived on American soil. This bothersome dichotomy fashioned formative wartime policies, which reflected a desire to keep the war as far away from civilians as possible. The United States military thus chose to craft a limited, conciliatory, and pragmatic program crafted not to alienate southern citizens, but rather one that sought magnanimous invitations back into the Union. Abraham Lincoln and his leading generals fully endorsed this
approach, trusting that the war would not be defined by total conquest and complete destruction. Indeed, many believed that the conflict should retain a “civilized” character.¹

As the war progressed, spurred indefinitely by the Union army’s inability to extinguish Confederate military forces, northern observers encountered a startling, unprecedented reality. Their preferred policy of conciliation began to crumble in the face of defiant resistance from white southerners who, initially unbeknown to the Yankees, harbored deep resentment about the northern invasions. Faced with a presumed threat to their honor and dignity, southern white civilians, now in addition to formal Confederate armies, waged their own form of war against United States military forces. Union troops responded accordingly, oftentimes employing calculated, destructive retaliations against southern insolence. Soldiers’ unauthorized behavior, coupled with stubborn opposition from southern civilians, shocked civil and military leaders, who promptly sought a revision of national policy. Thus by early 1862, Union authorities inaugurated a shift from conciliation to “hard war” in which complex military occupations became a foremost component of United States military strategy.²

The lack of substantial national precedent, though, created numerous problems for the occupiers. Although the military and government unveiled policies and standards for wartime occupation, the actual process of conquering and regulating Confederate territory unfolded very differently depending on locale, region, or circumstance. Oftentimes a general’s temperament, rather than explicit directives from Washington, dictated the process by which military

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² Ibid.
occupation evolved. Nevertheless, a sequence of generalizations can reveal how Americans imagined the progression of military occupation during the Civil War. The policies and processes of wartime military governance anticipated the ideological and cultural challenges faced by citizen-soldiers as they occupied the Confederacy, interacted with southern civilians, and encountered a very peculiar institution.3

At the outset of the war, contemporaries assumed that massive Union armies, populated by loyal citizens-turned-soldiers, would march into the rebellious Confederate states and bend stubborn secessionists to the will of the federal government. Perhaps only a single battle would settle the conflict; certainly the threat of armed force would enlighten restive southerners of their misguided deeds. The government decried any punitive measures to compel most southern whites, many of whom the Lincoln administration regarded as potentially loyal, back into the Union. Indeed, countless northerners believed that secession had been occasioned by a coterie of slaveholding aristocrats, determined to erect a new society that catered to their own unique, selfish interests. Common white southerners, on the other hand, although they had been manipulated through conspiratorial fears of racial unrest, miscegenation, and amalgamation, surely did not support treason or the Confederacy. Lincoln played on this theme, calling for all

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Americans to appeal to “the better angels of our nature.” This modest, yet powerful phrase guided early Union occupation policy.  

United States armies employed a policy of conciliation in their initial invasions of the Confederacy. Reestablishing loyal state governments by toppling the secretive cabal of secessionists assumed top priority; engaging common civilians or tampering with slavery, however, were strictly forbidden. Secession was seen as a revolutionary act fashioned by a radical minority that controlled the levers of southern power. If they could be removed, the crisis would vanish. Thus, many policymakers concluded that long-term military occupation, driven by fundamental social and political reform, would not be necessary. In fact, the military had rarely ever been employed in any previous modes of civil transformation. Although myriad northerners considered slavery to be a stain on the national fabric, a contradiction of free labor principles and republican individualism, they also believed that interfering with the institution would only estrange the border states, further threatening the Union. Much to the chagrin of abolitionists, the war would not be waged as a revolutionary struggle.  

Army commanders embraced these conciliatory philosophies, imbuing their legions with the nation’s war aims. Luring white southerners back into the Union, they explained, rather than fundamentally reshaping the South, was the purpose of the war. Generals warned their soldiers

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about southern suspicions of the blue-clad armies. Southern whites had indeed been propagandized about Union armies’ preparations to invade the South, plundering the region’s riches, raping chaste women, and confiscating enslaved blacks. Union troops, therefore, should conduct themselves accordingly, disabusing such faulty preconceptions. This plan, according to many officers, seemed brilliant: if United States armies demonstrated that they meant no harm, offered refuge and protection from slaveholding aristocrats, and respected the sanctity of private property, white southerners would willingly reject the Confederacy, thus terminating the conflict.⁶

During the first year of the war, from May 1861 to May 1862, numerous Union army commanders espoused the conciliation policy, instructing not only their troops about the government’s program, but also informing white southerners that they would receive mild treatment. Benjamin F. Butler declared that soldiers at Fortress Monroe, Virginia, must respect “[t]he rights of private property and of peaceable citizens.” He further encouraged any loyal civilian, “at peace with the United States,” to report unruly, plundering soldiers. A month later, Irvin McDowell, commanding the army that had recently invaded Northern Virginia, feared that reports of depredations committed by his troops “have exasperated the inhabitants and chilled the hopes of the Union men.” McDowell accordingly demanded that all of his regiments should “be restrained as well as led.” Similar refrains echoed across the wartime landscape. Shortly after Nashville, Tennessee, capitulated in February 1862, Don Carlos Buell, commander of the Army of the Ohio, reminded his victorious troops that “[w]e are in arms, not for the purpose of invading the rights of our fellow-countrymen anywhere, but to maintain the integrity of the Union and protect the Constitution under which the people have been prosperous and happy.”

⁶ For extended discussions of the conciliation policy, see Ash, When the Yankees Came, 13-37; Grimsley, Hard Hand of War, 23-66; Danielson, War’s Desolating Scourge, 33-35.
Buell added that soldiers must respect local property, refrain from entering private residences, and show deference to loyal citizens. Appealing to his men’s sense of honor, Buell warned that any violation of restraint or decorum will “bring shame on their comrades and the cause they are engaged in.”

Preservation of the Union through moderation governed the manner in which Union armies initially entered the Confederacy. The cautious nature emanated, in part, from Abraham Lincoln’s attitudes toward the war and the South. Arguing that the southern states had never legally seceded but rather assumed a condition of temporary rebellion, Lincoln believed that southerners still retained their status and identities as American citizens. This logic partially explains why the army was supposed to interact as little as possible with southern civilians, the majority of whom were presumed loyal. In addition, the military traditionally functioned as an institution removed from civil and political affairs, maintaining an anti-bureaucratic stance. The government feared, at least at the outset of the war, that the army might become too powerful and overstep its prescribed authority in the affairs of the southern states and people, thereby threatening any possibility of reunion and reconciliation. The Union, its proponents claimed, did not wage war against peaceful civilians or even the states; rather, the military trained its grievances on enemy armies and the lawless band of radical secessionists who had unduly silenced the region’s loyal Unionists. Thus, early policy was shaped by desires to eradicate the secessionists while also redeeming southern whites from the grip of slaveholding tyrants.

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8 McClintock, Lincoln and the Decision for War, 149, 172-73, 181-82, 187-89, 205, 239, 247-52, 275; Ash, When the Yankees Came, 26.
Once Federal armies fanned out across the southern countryside, entering towns and cities, the uniformed presence confirmed the government’s conciliatory overtures. A host of military proclamations belied the Confederate propaganda that painted northern armies as vandal hordes. Army commanders sought to convey the formative visions of the United States government. They claimed that their armies entered the South merely to preserve order, protect domestic institutions, and ensure the tranquility of civilian life. Ambrose E. Burnside informed the citizens of Roanoke Island, North Carolina, in February 1862 that the Union did not intend “to invade any of your rights, but to assert the authority of the United States, and thus to close with you the desolating war brought upon your State by comparatively a few bad men in your midst.” Declaring his faith in the mass of southern loyalty, Burnside urged residents to resist secessionist indoctrination, which “impose upon your credulity by telling you of wicked and even diabolical intentions on our part; of our desire to destroy your freedom, demolish your property, liberate your slaves, injure your women, and such like enormities, all of which, we assure you, is not only ridiculous, but utterly and willfully false.” Burnside then celebrated the common heritage shared by northerners and southerners, underscoring a mutual faith in God, reverence for the Constitution, and adherence to republican government. Union armies, he concluded, and not the state’s secessionists, sought to ensure the perpetuation of these cherished traditions.9

The policy of conciliation, although crafted in good faith and reflective of the government’s original conceptions of the war and South, met stiff resistance. Union soldiers were, ironically, the first group to cast aside the military’s conciliatory posture. Generals and officers had indeed expected their ill-trained, volunteer troops to display an unruly disposition.

9 Ambrose E. Burnside, “Proclamation made to the People of North Carolina,” February 16, 1862, OR, 9:363-64. See also, OR, 5:492-31, 6:4-5; Browning, Shifting Loyalties, 55-80; Durham, Nashville, 43-70; Danielson, War’s Desolating Scourge, 34, 44-45; Ash, When the Yankees Came, 28.
which manifested itself breakdowns of discipline, petty theft, and destruction of private property. Fearing that such questionable behavior would obstruct Union war aims, commanders labored to restrain their men. As amateur soldiers, however, the vast majority of troops simply sought to recreate a semblance of their domestic lives. They believed that they were entitled to foraging for food, commandeering fence rails to build fires, and even seeking places of shelter. Donning the blue uniform seemed to imbue soldiers with a sense of invincibility, fostering a sense that service in the South exonerated behaviors that would have been unacceptable in civil society. Union troops did not necessarily disagree with the conciliatory policy. They simply ignored it, moved instead by forces that had plagued invading armies throughout the centuries: disorder, conceit, and a sense that their martial presence necessitated aggressive, disorganized conduct. Unauthorized foraging and tampering with private property, of course, threatened the essence of the conciliation policy.  

Aside from soldiers’ conduct, another problem threatened to undermine the Union’s stance of pacification. White southerners responded to the policy of conciliation with arrogant contempt, signaling that they were not, in fact, passive Unionists. The mass of southern whites exhibited a firm dedication to the Confederacy, an identity emboldened by the Yankee invasions. Northern assumptions about the strength of southern loyalty were proven patently false, as civilians defied the invaders through deed and expression. White southerners, whether they were of the planter elite or yeoman middle class, characterized Union troops as heartless invaders, unlawful plunderers, and apostles of corruption and vice. Many whites declared that the elements of early wartime military occupation, including foraging and incursions of private spaces, indicated that Union armies aimed to wage a dishonorable and heartless war against southern

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Confederate opposition to the growing United States military presence manifested itself in numerous ways. Although they could not effectively battle thousands of well-armed, uniformed soldiers, white southerners employed an array of tactics, seeking to stagger and slow the process of occupation. Civilians shouted verbal taunts and flaunted Confederate symbols, making it very clear that the invaders were not welcome. Shrewdly aware of the conciliation policy’s moderate and lenient tone, southern whites tested the limits of civil-military relations, challenging the occupiers’ resolve. Upon entering towns, soldiers were treated to cheers for Jefferson Davis, anthems celebrating the Confederacy, and other forms of undisguised impudence. Southern women especially acquired a notorious reputation, challenging both the army’s legitimacy and nineteenth-century gender assumptions. Stepping out of the bounds of presumed female decorum, women would lift their skirts in front of soldiers, spit in their faces, and exhibit an unruly demeanor.12

The occupiers, much to their surprise and disgust, learned that the bulk of white southerners embraced a fierce dedication to the Confederacy. Defiant behavior, among other things, confirmed this presumption. Union armies found it difficult to regulate restive civilians in order to consolidate authority, while also clinging to a policy of conciliation that seemed

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increasingly unrealistic. The Federals struggled to employ a moderate approach, hoping that Confederate emotions would eventually subside. Rather than targeting entire communities, the occupiers attempted to coerce prominent citizens into declaring loyalty to the Union, setting an example for other residents to emulate. Military authorities expected that wealthy elites, clergymen, and newspaper editors might comply with the realities of occupation, thereby demonstrating the leniency of Federal policy. This method, however, also met stiff resistance from community leaders, many of whom demonstrated overwhelming loyalty to the Confederacy.\(^\text{13}\)

It became clear by early 1862 that the majority of white southerners were not soothed by the policy of conciliation. They countered the Yankee presence with steady defiance, ranging from insults to noncooperation, and refusal to affirm loyalty to the United States. In some cases, they engaged in armed resistance, instigating and supporting a brutal guerrilla war that would plague large swaths of the Confederate South for the remainder of the war. At first, civilians committed sporadic attacks on Union supply lines, soldiers on picket duty, or even civilians who pledged loyalty to the Union. Ultimately, though, the irregular war deteriorated into widespread, chaotic violence, engulfing entire regions. Federal soldiers quickly learned that the South was not a land of citizens devoted to the United States. Pockets of unionism, of course, existed, but they were overshadowed by oppressive guerrillas, bent on removing the Yankee presence. Indeed, Union troops considered themselves stranded in a sea of violence, surrounded by suspicious civilians and bloodthirsty killers.\(^\text{14}\)

\(^{13}\) Ash, *When the Yankees Came*, 44-45.

Union military authorities learned two important lessons by the spring of 1862. First, the policy of conciliation had failed, due in part to soldiers’ unruly behavior, in addition to rampant Confederate defiance. United States armies could not simply march into the South, fight a definitive battle, conclude the war, and expect white southerners to flock willingly back to the Union. Major General George B. McClellan, commander of the grandest military force ever assembled on the North American continent, and a leading proponent of conciliatory measures, verified this blunt reality. His failure to capture Richmond in the spring of 1862 confirmed that the war would now continue indefinitely, sparking hurried debates about new wartime policies.15

Second, and directly related, civil and military authorities also clearly understood that the enemies of the United States were not merely small bands of secessionists and large Confederate armies. It seemed as if the entire white South, driven by agitated and zealous civilians, threatened any hope of reunion. And if these scenarios were not troubling enough, a new confusing situation arose. Thousands of enslaved African Americans began flooding Union lines, forcing army commanders and politicians to recognize their presence. Within a year, the war for the Union evolved, moved by powerful internal and external forces, into a complicated war of occupation. Indeed, Union armies were transformed, almost overnight, into occupying forces, instructed to regulate civilian behavior, erase Confederate ideology, wage an irregular war, and devise policies to accommodate “contraband” slaves, all while maintaining control of huge slices of conquered territory. Few northerners had prepared for these immensely complicated tasks. Thus,

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Sutherland, A Savage Conflict: The Decisive Role of Guerrillas in the American Civil War (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009).

15 On the correlation between McClellan’s failed Peninsula Campaign and evolving Federal occupation policy, see Grimsley, Hard Hand of War, 31-35, 67-68, 71-74.
the process of wartime occupation developed congruent to situation and circumstance and not necessarily according to visions outlined at the outset of the conflict.¹⁶

United States civil and military authorities agreed that southern civilians were now somehow central actors in the conflict. Yet the invaders struggled, at least early on, to determine exactly who constituted an enemy combatant or who might deceptively pose as a passive civilian, while all the while supporting guerrilla warfare. Rampant uncertainty about the nature of civilian-enemies, therefore, helped inform the ways in which United States authorities drafted new occupation directives. While the status of ominous civilians necessitated a change of policy, generals and politicians could not lose sight of the most formidable obstacle to national reunion: Confederate armies in the field. If the enemy’s military forces, which functioned as the principal inspiration of Confederate independence, could not be defeated, the Union war effort would be greatly imperiled. Thus, by early 1862, most northern observers sought a strategy and policy built on conquering territory, regulating civilians, combating irregular enemies, and challenging formal armies. The war now assumed an incredibly massive scale, setting loose unprecedented complications, challenges, and commitments.¹⁷

Authorities nevertheless understood that the enemy’s ability and will to fight correlated directly to its capacity to subsist. If Union armies suffocated large, strategic areas of the southern nation, Confederate civilians and soldiers, in addition to their resources, could be thoroughly fatigued, leading to defeat. A flawless scheme, though, did not exist. Yet one thing was certain: conquering, garrisoning, and occupying Confederate communities would play a crucial role in determining the success or failure of any new wartime policy. Such an approach deprived the

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Confederacy of essential resources in manpower, food, and labor, thereby weakening the will to resist further occupation, placing increased pressure on rebel field armies to secure necessary battlefield victories.18

A political dimension also existed. When cities and states capitulated to United States forces, loyal governments could be established, inaugurating the process of wartime reconstruction. When Union armies pacified towns, local Unionist citizens exerted their influence under the protection of national arms, hoping to establish loyal governments. They complied with military authorities, while also believing that local rule, rather than outside influence, would ultimately predominate. Their professed devotion to the Union comforted the Lincoln administration, which sought loyal southerners to begin a quick and painless process of local and state reconstruction. The dearth of reliable and trustworthy southern Unionists, however, presented a problem, even in states such as Tennessee and Louisiana, where the Union army maintained a strong presence. Unionists endured multiple challenges: balancing power alongside the military, maintaining dedication to Lincoln’s vision of reconstruction, and especially warding off attacks from hostile civilians and guerrillas. The process of reconstruction achieved only a degree of success. On the one hand, some loyal governments were established. But on the other hand, a constant power struggle between rabid Confederates, reserved Unionists, and powerful military commanders imperiled the political idealism of wartime reconstruction. The process would always be challenged as long as southern armies remained in the field and the chaos of war reigned.19


United States armies, therefore, ultimately adopted the strategy of exhaustion, as it came to be known, blanketing the Confederacy with garrisons manned by scores of Union soldiers. Working in concert with the blockade, which the Navy employed to capture strategic cities on the Atlantic and Gulf Coasts, Union infantry and cavalry penetrated the southern interior, demanded the surrender of towns, reestablished Federal authority, patrolled the countryside, and maintained an armed presence. No fewer than one hundred southern communities capitulated to Union armies during the war, transforming into occupied garrisons administered by the United States military. Armies did not have to occupy and pacify the entire Confederacy, nor did they have to conquer Richmond. Their ultimate task, however, was much more difficult. The Union army could not hope for success by placing garrisons in just any region. Instead, captured towns had to serve as strategic centers of Union control, from which to regulate the countryside through raids and expeditions, to reinstate commerce with the North, and to provide bases of supply for the mobile field armies. The most prized communities, therefore, were normally located near rail lines or rivers, which provided efficient transportation and access to commercial markets.20

As complicated as this strategy appeared—and it was immensely difficult—Union armies slowly but steadily forced the surrender of dozens of crucially important Confederate cities. Although it took nearly four years, the policy of garrisoning through exhaustion occasioned the fall of Alexandria, Nashville, Memphis, New Orleans, Baton Rouge, Norfolk, Little Rock, Pensacola, Vicksburg, Charleston, and Savannah, to name merely a few. Dozens of smaller towns were also garrisoned, establishing Federal authority across great swaths of the Confederacy. Thus, the southern tapestry was dotted with growing islands of blue in a sea of gray violence and chaos. It is crucial to recognize, though, that the Union army did not attempt to

20 Ash, *When the Yankees Came*, 76-92.
unfold its forces permanently across every piece of Confederate territory. Instead, the garrisoning concept worked only when the United States forces *concentrated* within a city, using it as a principal zone of occupation to launch temporary raids and campaigns, with the intention of weakening civilian resolve.²¹

Although the strategy of garrisoning and occupation ultimately succeeded, numerous high-ranking generals criticized the premise of conquering and holding territory. Their critiques underscored the extent to which nineteenth-century Americans were not accustomed to long-term wars of occupation. Drawing on their formative educations in military theory, some contemporaries argued that garrisoning wasted precious resources, deprived the armies of manpower, and cost extraordinary amounts of money. As early as 1861, General-in-Chief Winfield Scott warned against a protracted war of occupation, fearing that Union forces might become mired indefinitely in the Confederacy. Scott believed in the possibility of conquering the rebellious South, yet he argued that such a task would take several years and could be accomplished only by an army numbering 300,000 men. But such an invasion would result in an “enormous waste of human life to the North” and create “Fifteen devastated Provinces! not to be brought into harmony with their conquerors; but to be held for generations by heavy garrisons,” sustained with the exorbitant cost of indefinite maintenance and regulation. Such wars of conquest and occupation were the designs of European kings and mercenary forces—not American presidents and citizen-armies.²²

In these confessions, Scott implicitly alluded to a central feature of the United States’ early republican tradition: the fear of a standing army. Even in the midst of war, and especially

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²¹ Ibid.

its immediate aftermath, both the American citizenry and government distrusted the concept and utility of a standing army due to its potentially corrupting influence, its seemingly outrageous economic cost, and its tendency of privileging military law at the expense of civil law. Perhaps most important, both a peacetime and wartime standing army would potentially devalue the symbolic and tangible function of the citizen-soldier. These were stunning admissions from the revered general who conquered Mexico through garrisoning, occupation, and pacification. Scott, though, paused when he recognized the unique circumstance in which the United States found itself in 1861. Although the South was in rebellion, its citizens were still Americans. Scott undoubtedly worried about the implications of the military regulating the lives of citizens; as he said, such scenarios reeked too much of European wars.23

The war evolved into the very type of protracted occupation predicted by Scott. The erection of occupied garrisons became vital and necessary components of the North’s Civil War strategy. Yet some contemporaries continued to criticize the wisdom of such policies. Whereas Scott shunned long-term occupation on ideological grounds, William T. Sherman approached the concept from a pragmatic standpoint. Sherman sensed, by the midpoint of the war, that Union armies employed far too many troops to garrison the Confederacy. Conquering more and more territory, he worried, necessitated increased numbers of occupation troops, thus depriving campaigning armies of crucial manpower.24

Although Sherman endorsed the premise of wartime occupation, he believed that garrisoning should take place only in a few select regions. Undoubtedly influenced by his brief

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24 Hattaway and Jones, How the North Won, 493-94.
governance of Memphis in the early summer of 1862, Sherman considered control of the Mississippi River crucial to all Union prospects. “I think the Mississippi the great artery of America,” he informed his wife, “and whatever power holds it holds the continent.” But for Sherman, the river symbolized a deeper, more fundamental problem of occupation. United States armies should focus their attention chiefly on the Father of Waters, appreciating its efficient access to the North in addition to its natural barriers, rather than attempting a thorough conquest of the Confederate interior. “Dont expect to overrun Such a Country or subdue such a people in [one] two or five years,” he warned his brother John, “it is the task of a century. Although our army is thus far south we cannot stir from our Garrisons.” Control of the river, Sherman explained, would then allow small army detachments to penetrate quickly into the countryside and disrupt civilian life. “To attempt to hold all the South would demand an army too large even to think of,” he cautioned, reminiscent of Winfield Scott’s counsels.25

Ulysses S. Grant, who envisioned the process of war better than any other Union commander, agreed with Sherman’s assessments. Grant closely wedded his strategies to the concepts of occupation and garrisoning, believing that they offered the best means by which to subdue the Confederacy. There simply did not exist, in Grant’s mind, a better alternative. He believed, like Sherman, that too much garrisoning would seriously impede the progress of United States armies, also confirming Scott’s fears in 1861. Yet the presence of Union occupation, demonstrated by formidable, strategically placed outposts, presented a demoralizing influence to the Confederate people while also serving as useful points of concentration for Federal armies.

Grant, therefore, deemed unrealistic the conquest of all rebellious territory; sufficient Union resources and manpower did not exist to occupy the entire South.\(^{26}\)

Thus, by late 1863 through the end of the war, Grant subtly adjusted the process of occupation to encompass a line, rather than a region. Instead of straining to occupy an entire state, or even large parts thereof, Union forces would concentrate along lines through the states, often times guarded by a river or coastline, or secured by close access to a railway. Then, various detachments would leave the garrisons and temporarily raid the countryside, foraging for food, destroying property when necessary, and cleaning out pockets of guerrilla resistance. Grant’s vision of occupation, therefore, did not function merely as a fixed process, against which Scott had warned, in which Union armies remained immobile. Occupation, Grant explained, was also a peripatetic event, driven by transitory expeditions and raids. The war could be taken directly to the white southern populace both internally and externally. The raiding plan, which offered a slight moderation to the strategy of exhaustion, relieved the Federals from occupying every corner of the Confederacy. And the plan worked perfectly, subduing parts of Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama; Western and Middle Tennessee; the interior of Georgia (Sherman’s March to the Sea in autumn of 1864 was indeed a raid); and the Shenandoah Valley in Virginia.\(^{27}\)

The Union high command successfully modified the approach to wartime occupation, assuaging Scott’s worries while also accommodating the concept of permanent, yet strategic garrisoning. United States armies, though, could not escape the fact that overwhelming numbers of troops would be required to garrison the occupied Confederacy. In order for the strategy of exhaustion to work, an armed presence needed to remain garrisoned at all times, while also raiding the countryside and posing a formidable barrier against any upheaval. Indeed, once a

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\(^{27}\) Ibid; Ash, *When the Yankees Came*, 76-107.
campaigning army conquered a town or region, a sizable occupation force had to stay behind.

Wartime occupation, though, was a fluid process, and regiments were not designated exclusively for garrison duty. The 12th Connecticut Volunteers, for instance, the first regiment to enter New Orleans in May 1862, occupied the city until October before being assigned to the ongoing campaigns to open the Mississippi River. Another unit then took its place, signaling the permanency of Union occupation, even if it was not conducted at all times by the same regiments.28

As the war evolved and Federal armies secured additional Confederate territory, Union occupation required growing numbers of troops to garrison the conquered cities and regions. Forces of collective occupation sometimes even exceeded the size of the United States’ principal field armies, underscoring the stunning commitment necessary to garrison the wartime South. A brief glance at official returns from 1863 testifies to this point. In May, Union forces stationed in the Confederacy and loyal border states numbered nearly 500,000 soldiers, 58 percent of whom comprised the major campaigning armies: the Armies of the Potomac, the Cumberland, and the Tennessee. The remaining 42 percent were stationed in previously conquered regions, performing the numerous tasks of occupation. That nearly half all Union arms occupied the Confederacy two years into the war indicates that civil and military authorities, although somewhat apprehensive, considered military occupation to be a crucial determinant in potential victory.29

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28 The 12th Connecticut was the first regiment to land at New Orleans on May 1, 1862, where it remained until October. The regiment then participated in various occupation duties in southeast Louisiana, expeditions into the Teche country, a foray into Texas, and in the Port Hudson campaign. Frederick H. Dyer, A Compendium of the War of the Rebellion (3 vols.; Des Moines: Dyer Publishing Co., 1908), 3:1012.

Indeed, United States armies employed at least one-third of its soldiers to garrison strategic positions throughout the war. Oftentimes the figures were much greater, as indicated by the May 1863 returns. Grant, Sherman, and other Union commanders understood that the war was not merely a contest between opposing field armies. It also encompassed the need to protect long supply lines, railroad access, and communication networks; battle insurgents; establish and maintain reconstructed state governments; regulate hostile civilians and sometimes squelch secessionist sentiment; provide safe haven for refugees and contraband; and sustain commercial ties to northern markets. Grant encountered these truths in early 1862, shortly after Fort Donelson fell. “I am being so much crippled in my resources that I very much fear that I shall not be able to advance so rapidly as I would like,” he confided to his wife Julia. Aside from the causalities sustained in the fighting, Grant also had to detail two regiments as prison guards, “and if I leave, garrisons will have to be left here, at Clarkesville and Fort Henry. This will weaken me so much that great results cannot be expected.” Most victorious Union generals and officers encountered these very dynamics each time Confederate territory yielded to United States armies.30

Thus, wartime occupation did not function as an ancillary event to the war’s principal campaigns and battles. Instead, both worked together, each contingent on the other’s successes. If Union forces could not successfully campaign across the Confederacy, they could not capture towns, cities, and regions. Incidentally, the major field armies would be stranded precariously if occupation and garrison forces failed to stabilize and hold conquered regions. And the entire

For similar returns and percentages from 1864, see OR, ser. 3, vol. 5, p. 136-37, 496-47; Alfred Young, “Perhaps There Was a Confederate Strategy,” North and South 14 (November 2012): 30, 22-30.

project of wartime Reconstruction would likely never materialize without an occupation presence.

The United States’ ability to wage a war of occupation and one of campaigning armies confirmed its abundance of manpower and resources. Grant and Sherman each recognized this great advantage, even while remaining somewhat unsettled at the prospect of leaving behind so many soldiers in zones of occupation. Yet alternatives did not exist. And in the end, such realities actually aided each general in his conquest of the Confederacy. On the eve of the Atlanta campaign and subsequent marches through Georgia and the Carolinas, for instance, Sherman counted 180,082 soldiers “present for duty,” dispersed among the Armies of the Cumberland, the Tennessee, and the Ohio. Each army commander, however, had to detach enough men to address the exigencies of garrison duty and to maintain control over occupied regions. Sherman thus departed for Atlanta with about 100,000 troops, 55 percent of his initial command. Such trends mirrored the process of occupation throughout the wartime landscape.

Logistics and lines of communication helped determine the success or failure of campaigns, such as Sherman’s march. Although most of the Union’s campaigning armies successfully foraged the countryside for food and supplies, they still had to be tied to occupied regions and major garrisons in order to ensure success, highlighting the crucial importance of railroads. Waging an extensive war spread across thousands of miles in enemy territory required

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32 In his memoirs, Sherman wrote of these numbers, “The department and army commanders had to maintain strong garrisons in their respective departments, and also to guard their respective lines of supply. I therefore, in my mind aimed to prepare out of these three armies . . . a compact army for active operations in Georgia.” William T. Sherman, Memoirs of General T. Sherman by Himself (2 vols.; New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1875), 2:15. OR, vol. 38, pt. 1, p. 115; pt. 4, p. 16-19, 359-62, 373-76; Russell F. Weigley, The American Way of War: A History of United States Military Strategy and Policy (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977), 130. Grant also wrote that “[i]t is safe to say that more than half of the National army was engaged in guarding lines of supplies, or were on leave, sick in hospital or on detail which prevented their bearing arms. Then, again, large forces were employed where no Confederate army confronted them. I deem it safe to say that there were no large engagements where the National numbers compensated for the advantage of position and intrenchment occupied by the enemy.” Ulysses S. Grant, Personal Memoirs of U. S. Grant (2 vols.; New York: Webster, 1885), 2:504-5.
substantial infrastructure. Indeed, occupied garrisons were islands of bureaucratic administration
and organization, steeped in matters of logistics. Thus, logistical support and maintenance of
supply lines, of which occupation forces played a crucial part, provided freedom of mobility to
the major field armies. And the bulk of logistical sustenance was not performed by professional
organizations, such as the Army Service Forces, that filled that role in World War II. The
Quartermaster’s Department played an undeniably central role, yet the common volunteer
soldiers, designated from the line regiments, implemented and sustained logistical lines across
the occupied landscape.33

The central problem, though, was a dual-edged sword. On the whole, Union logistical
operations, in concert with the process of occupation, worked reasonably well. Yet the continued
conquering and acquisition of territory necessitated increased numbers of volunteer soldiers to
oversee distended communication and supply lines. Presumed advantages in northern manpower,
though, belie any notion of inevitable Union victory. Yes, the North, compared to its southern
counterpart, possessed superior numbers of able-bodied, military-age men. Yet such figures need
to be placed within the context of the types of war waged by both nations.

The Union’s war, in terms of bureaucratic necessity, maintenance of administrative
logistics, and indefinite occupation while also populating the great field armies, required great
numbers of soldiers to perpetuate the nation’s war machine. The Confederacy, on the other hand,
did not have to conquer and hold enemy territory. Robert E. Lee, when the Army of Northern
Virginia invaded the North, did not intend permanent occupations of Maryland in 1862 and
Pennsylvania in 1863. But he, and other Confederate commanders, did require a near total
mobilization of the South’s white males to fill the respective field armies. “Northern manpower

33 Weigley, American Way of War, 131; Earl J. Hess, The Civil War in the West: Victory and Defeat from the
and material advantages, then, were not so great as they might have seemed,” historian Russell F. Weigley writes of this dichotomy. “The Northern reservoir of manpower was not inexhaustible” because “generals faced perplexing problems in waging an offensive war of conquest, in pursuit of rapid victory, without suffering causalities so severe that they would destroy the very resolution which the quest for rapidity of conquest was supposed to sustain.” In the end, though, the Union military employed its mass of soldiers successfully to occupy strategic areas of the South, raid the countryside, battle Confederate armies, and ultimately extinguish the enemy’s will to keep fighting.34

However, that it took four long years to conquer, garrison, and occupy large portions of the Confederacy testifies to the resolve of white southerners, both civilians and soldiers, who expended great energy to resist the Union invasions. The Confederacy lasted as long as it did, in large part, because its people simply could not be exhausted. Confederates’ popular will to endure was oftentimes reinforced, ironically, by the presence of Union occupation. Although United States armies manifested themselves across the wartime landscape, their job was made ever more difficult by the restive and sometimes violent demeanor of white southerners. Thus the failure of conciliation compelled civil and military authorities to employ increasingly stringent methods, culminating in the Union’s “hard war” policy.35

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34 Ibid., 132. Hattaway and Jones cite the Union’s understanding and employment of logistics, combined with a superior strategic vision, to be the key ingredients of northern victory. (How the North Won, 685-88). United States armies benefitted from the enlistment of 180,000 African American soldiers, many of whom were former slaves. Nearly two-thirds of all black troops were assigned to permanent garrison positions, thereby relieving white soldiers for active field service. The process of emancipation and the enlistment of black men into the Union army testify to the northern superiority in manpower and strength. See Chapter 5 of this dissertation for extended discussions on emancipation, African American soldiers, and the problems of black occupation.

35 For interpretations of the sources of Confederate persistence and popular will, see Gallagher, Confederate War, 17-59; Blair, Virginia’s Private War, 6-7, 19-21, 52-56, 76-80, 131-32, 140-50; Rubin, Shattered Nation, 86-111; Campbell, When Sherman Marched North from the Sea, 71-74; Jason Phillips, Diehard Rebels: The Confederate Culture of Invincibility (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2007), 2-4, 25-26, 41-46, 53-60, 77, 80. Mark Grimsley defines “hard war” as “the erosion of the enemy’s will to resist by deliberately or concomitantly subjecting the civilian population to the pressures of war.” Grimsley, Hard Hand of War, 5.
Focus must now shift to the ground level to appreciate how the particular process of occupation unfolded. Understanding that occupying large, strategic locales and regions served as the basis of wartime policy, how did the armies garrison towns and cities, how were civilians regulated, by what method were raids conducted, and how did the armies apply the hard war philosophy to white southerners? Remarkably, United States armies did not have a unified policy by which to guide the garrisoning of towns. Individual commanders oftentimes employed their own methods to meet the immediate challenges of occupation. But their actions tended to reflect a common approach, allowing generalizations to be gleaned from their actions.

Occupied garrisons functioned as the locus of Union occupation. Seeking to reshape white attitudes, establish bureaucratic centers of administration, and operate as direct sources of wartime reconstruction, garrisons symbolized absolute Federal authority. Whereas the armies may not have conquered all of the Confederate countryside, they thoroughly dismantled dozens of southern communities, establishing formidable military outposts. Garrisons offered further penetration into the Confederate interior, allowing armies to expand their influence. Although the approach to garrisoning seemed simple, the actual process proved to be quite difficult.

Once a southern city capitulated, and oftentimes even before, commanders of conquering armies faced a troubling situation: defining the nebulous laws of war. Humanity catalogued a great (and notorious) history of dominant military forces occupying foreign lands. And herein lay one of the ironic yet exceptional qualities of the American Civil War: however rebellious and culturally inferior they may have been perceived, white southerners-turned-Confederate were still American citizens, living on, at least according Lincoln’s definitions, American soil. Thus, how were victorious Union generals supposed to transform conquered cities into Federal garrisons? A simple answer did not exist, leaving each individual commander to develop specific
policies contingent on his temperament, competence, and particular relations with the southern people.

The process of garrisoning usually followed a general template. Union armies entered southern cities, ordered the mayor to surrender authority, temporarily discontinued local courts, halted newspaper printing, and curbed civilian rights, while simultaneously establishing military rule. The commanding officer rarely worried about the particular legal status of the seceded states, instead believing that any locale occupied by Union armies was subject to martial law. Occupying soldiers then assumed positions throughout the city to ensure order. Southern civilians had two choices: accept the realities of occupation or resist. Most chose the former, realizing the futility of armed defiance in the face of such concentrated Federal force.\textsuperscript{36}

When United States armies initially entered conquered Confederate towns they encountered rampant chaos, unruly mobs, and threats of unrestrained violence. Military authority, in most cases, had to be established immediately, signaling that the army now controlled every aspect of civil life. “Affairs in this city,” Grant described Memphis in June 1862, “seem to be in rather bad order, secessionists governing much in their own way.” Thus to establish a functioning garrison, commanding generals appointed a post director and provost marshal who formulated rules and regulations and organized regiments of soldiers to be dispersed throughout the city. Once order had been established internally, remaining troops were deployed outside of town to repair and guard railways, form picket lines along roads, and regulate communications into the city. The commanding general issued further orders protecting private property and requiring all soldiers to remain at their posts. Military police patrolled the city, arresting civilians who violated martial law as well as soldiers who strayed from their

required duties. The process of garrisoning and the assembling of Federal authority usually occurred in less than one week.\textsuperscript{37}

The dearth of national precedent actually aided army commanders in their occupations of Confederate cities. With the exception of the United States’ foray in Mexico, military governors were not bound by a defined tradition of martial law. Civil and military authorities in Washington thus granted wide autonomy to officers to conduct their wartime occupations. Even after the government adopted General Orders No. 100, which codified and streamlined the guidelines of occupation, commanding generals continued to interpret their powers broadly. Circumstance, regional and local necessity, and personal beliefs about the rules of war, rather than strict legal dictate, guided commanders in their approach to garrisoning and occupation. Above all, they focused on strategies to ensure the preservation of order, maintenance of civility, and consolidation of Federal authority.\textsuperscript{38}

Army commanders’ governance of occupied zones exposed their rejection of conciliation in favor of stringent regulation of white southerners and their institutions. Several examples testify to the varied ways in which commanders wielded their authority. John C. Frémont and David Hunter, both abolitionist generals in command of Union-controlled Missouri and parts of South Carolina respectively, early in the war issued proclamations of emancipation, freeing enslaved African Americans under the United States army’s jurisdiction. Although President Lincoln revoked both measures, Frémont and Hunter contended that they had acted lawfully in accordance with the broad nature of martial law. Similarly, Benjamin F. Butler, shortly after

\textsuperscript{37} Grant to Henry W. Halleck, June, 24, 1862, in Simon, ed., \textit{PUSG}, 5:149-52 (quotation, p. 149); \textit{OR}, vol. 27, pt. 2, pp. 30-31.

entering New Orleans in May 1862, consolidated his authority once William B. Mumford, a
local gambler, scaled the local mint and tore down the United States flag. Outraged, Butler
demanded Mumford to be tried before a military commission, which found him guilty of
desecrating the flag and resisting Federal authority. Butler promptly ordered Mumford’s
execution: to be hanged in public for his crimes. In other cities across the occupied landscape,
military governors arrested dissident citizens, restricted treasonous speech, and confiscated

Although the military governors assumed supreme control and influence in garrisoned
communities, the local provost marshal managed the day-to-day affairs of occupied cities. Not
necessarily subordinate to a city’s overall commander but rather appointed by the provost
marshal general of a district or department, local provost marshals governed each garrison’s
bureaucratic matters. All subjects of wartime import, local business, civilian concerns, and
military regulation flowed through the provost marshal’s office. Municipal governments were
allowed to function yet were also governed by martial law; the provost marshal directed most
forms of local administration. Their office acquired a ubiquitous specter in all garrisoned towns,
“attend[ing] to such duties as are usually performed by the magistrates and civil officers of
towns, as far as consistent with the military occupation of a place.” Provost marshals indeed
enjoyed a wide latitude of authority and were responsible for granting licenses to trade,
regulating and maintaining order and cleanliness, punishing parties guilty of crimes, presiding
over property disputes, issuing permits and passes to leave garrisoned towns, and “enforc[ing]
such orders as the post or district commander may find it necessary to issue.” Whereas military
governors represented the face of occupation, provost marshals symbolized the body of wartime
governance, directing every movement and action within the garrisons.40

While the army commanders governed cities and provost marshals managed
administrative affairs, common soldiers actually carried out the process of wartime occupation.
They shouldered a varied and wide-ranging set of duties, which reflected the bureaucratic and
perfunctory operations required of garrison life. Both officers and enlisted men engaged in
sanitary cleanup, policed the town, issued rations and loyalty oaths to civilians, and served as
picket guards outside of town. “Perhaps you do not understand what sort of duty this is,”
Massachusetts soldier William H. Whitney wrote from Baton Rouge. “Pickets are groups of
three or four men placed at regular intervals in a line around a place,” he illustrated. “These
groups are within seeing or hearing distance of one another and one or two are obliged to be on
the lookout at a time. This is to prevent a surprise from the enemy as well as to keep citizens or
spies from entering without a pass.” Each brigade in the occupation force furnished men for daily
picket duty, ensuring that an armed presence always existed both in and out of the city.41

Other responsibilities mandated that occupying soldiers transform previously peaceful
towns into daunting military outposts. Fatigue duty, which consisted of constructing
fortifications, erecting breastworks, discharging and stocking transports, repairing railroads, and
outfitting units for raids and expeditions, consumed great energy and strength. “The duty consists
in unloading vessels laying or repairing plank walks,” Charles Blake of the 12th Maine wrote
from Ship Island, Mississippi, “and may well be called fatigue duty for it does fatigue one

40 Circular, No. 3, Department and Army of the Tennessee,” April 29, 1864, OR, vol. 32, pt. 3, pp. 537-41, 538
(quotations); “Police Regulations for the Army of the District of Arkansas,” Headquarters, Provost Marshal
General’s Office, Helena, Arkansas, December 14, 1862, Special Collections, David W. Mullins Library, University
of Arkansas, Fayetteville, Arkansas; Hess, Civil War in the West, 63.

greatly.” Indeed, Michigan soldier Elihu P. Chadwick revealed that such labor at De Vall’s Bluff, Arkansas, “caused a great many of our number to take sick and die it being very hot and a sickly place.”

Massachusetts volunteer Charles Francis Adams painted a vivid picture of daily life, outlining soldiers’ various duties and chores. “Our life is one of rigid garrison duty,” he wrote in 1861, “reveille at half past five with breakfast at six; dress parade at seven; a squad drill at eight and a company drill at ten; at twelve dinner and at three a battalion drill which lasts until half past five, when we have an evening dress-parade, which finishes work for those off guard for the day.” Soldiers typically enjoyed a quiet evening, retiring early to bed. For those on sentinel or picket duty, though, Adams explained that their responsibilities were far different. “When on guard, which every man is about twice a week, it is rather restless,” he explained, as for twenty-four hours we are on guard two hours and off four, day and night, and properly can’t leave.” In spite of the stiff rhythms of garrison life, Adams admitted that he had become “as rugged and hearty as an ox, passing all my time in eating, drilling, sleeping and chaffing.”

Based on the power and influence of military governors, provost marshals, and occupying soldiers, wartime garrisons were pillars of Federal authority. Although it required abundant resources, materiel, and manpower to function, the garrisoning strategy worked, consolidating United States influence throughout important pockets of the Confederacy. However, occupation continued to meet stiff resistance, not necessarily from white southerners who lived in conquered cities, but rather by those who roamed the untamed countryside far from the persuasions of


Union armies. These contested arenas witnessed the most direct application of the hard war occupation policy.

The United States army subjected the landscape surrounding garrisoned towns to repeated raids and expeditions, which served multiple purposes. First, white southerners, who lived in the general vicinities, were always exposed to a recurrent Federal presence. The army did not have to establish a permanent occupation of the entire countryside; instead, consistent incursions confirmed that the Union army did, at least unofficially, control large swaths of Confederate territory. Yet, guerrillas and irregular bands swarmed this no-man’s-land, challenging Federal supremacy and reminding Union soldiers of their precarious, isolated positions. Thus, occupation authorities had to deal carefully with all of the civilians in their midst, never fully confident about who represented a potential threat.44

Union occupation authorities sought, above all else, to establish loyalty, to pacify the white southern populace, and to eradicate secessionist sentiment. These desires proved immensely difficult. At first, army commanders punished their troops for unruly behavior and plundering, believing that displays of good faith would convince white southerners that they did not live under the thumbs of military tyrants. This approach, however, failed, instigated by suspicions that local whites secretly aided or harbored guerrillas or vocally endorsed the Confederacy. It became clear that the occupied, in many cases, flouted the occupiers’ attempts at appeasement. Thus, when Union patrols departed garrisons and entered the unstable no-man’s-land, they took the war directly to the people. Indeed, the only potential enemy in the immediate area very well may have been civilians.45

44 Ash, When the Yankees Came, 92-107; Hess, Civil War in the West, 62-70.
45 Ibid.
To punish these suspected rebels, Union raids focused on arrests, confiscation of private property, commandeering of livestock and food, and, sometimes, burning homes and towns. The Union’s armies of occupation, in other words, had to display its authority, even in the face of persistent defiance. From Nashville, Major General William S. Rosecrans announced in late 1862 the limits of civil-military relations. All loyal citizens who abstained from any interference with the occupation were granted the full privileges and protections of citizenship, enforced by the army. “Those who are hostile to our Government,” however, “repudiating its Constitution and laws, have no rights under them. . . . The only laws to which they can appeal and which we are bound to observe toward them are the laws of war and the dictates of humanity.” Rosecrans characterized guerrillas, and even those suspected of moderately supporting irregular warfare, as “pirates and robbers.” Such individuals “are entitled to no rights,” characterized exclusively as lawless enemy combatants.46

Such overtures were common by late 1862 and early 1863, outlining the broad and quickly evolving dictates of Federal occupation policy. Army commanders learned not to waste time trying to determine which white southerners might be loyal. Instead, while on expeditions and raids, soldiers were instructed and willingly carried out policies of confiscation and foraging that depleted the countryside of goods, produce, and property. Yet the Union’s developing hard war policy was, ironically, somewhat restricted and pragmatic. Historian Mark Grimsley, who authored the definitive work of the limits of hard war, suggests that much of the destruction occasioned by occupying armies “had occurred in retaliation, deserved or otherwise, for bushwhacking and other partisan incidents.” The growing expanse of a destructive war, he argues, functioned as “a combination of strategic insight[s] and practical circumstances,” directed at shattering the white South’s spirit to resist. Union armies, therefore, sought to break

46 General Orders No. 19, Department of the Cumberland, November 19, 1862, OR, ser. 2, vol. 4, p. 737.
the Confederacy’s ability to wage war, directing their power against property and infrastructure, rather than arbitrary, callous punishment against civilians.47

William T. Sherman famously embodied the essence of the Union’s shift to hard war, writing, “[w]e cannot change the hearts of those people of the South, but we can make war so terrible and make them so sick of war that generations would pass away before they would again appeal to it.” He indeed understood that the war, by virtue of indefinite occupation, was not a conflict waged merely by opposing armies on distant fields of battle. The United States military, therefore, must “make old and young, rich and poor, feel the hard hand of war.” If the theory of military occupation, Sherman implied, functioned as the direct regulation of civilians’ behavior and conduct, then its application must be fluid enough to meet the demands of unforeseen circumstances. Thus, the hard war occupation policy exemplified a broad combination of ideological, strategic, and political imperatives, aimed at dislodging white southerners’ faith in secession, dismantling their ability to carry out war, and dissuading their dogmatic attachments to the Confederacy.48

Although he sometimes questioned the concept of garrisoning, Sherman begrudgingly accepted its necessity, believing that fortified outposts laid the initial foundation for hard war. If Union armies could not establish a fixed presence in the Confederacy, they could not fan out across the countryside, taking the war to rebel civilians. Indeed, the combination of garrisoning and raiding widened the scope of wartime occupation, making it both a stationary and active process. It was a brilliant tactic and one that ultimately worked. Increasing numbers of white

47 Grimsley, Hard Hand of War, 143. See chapter 7 of this dissertation for an extended analysis on the Union army’s retaliation against guerrilla warfare, which reflected the “hard war” approach.

southerners felt the presence of Federal occupation, even if they did not live permanently in occupied garrisons. The integration of garrisoning and mobile occupation placated Winfield Scott’s early fears of permanently occupying every inch of Confederate territory. And they worked, on a broader level, to meet unforeseen wartime crises. In its most basic form, military occupation sought to reshape white southern opinion and to reestablish loyalty to the Union. When this proved immensely difficult, and the United States armies’ need to feed themselves grew desperate, taking the war directly to white southerners seemed to be a reasonable alternative.  

Hard war was not total war. Union armies did not blur the lines between soldier and civilian, targeting the latter as they did the former. Active murdering of civilians and brutalizing their bodies did not characterize the United States’ approach to wartime occupation. Although soldiers oftentimes burned private homes, pillaged property, and stole goods, commanders punished their men accordingly, demanding that they abide by a code of civilized conduct. The Civil War, as historians Mark E. Neely and Mark Grimsley have gone to great pains to demonstrate, was not a European war of occupation in which merciless and unrelenting violence was applied arbitrarily to civilians, no matter how rabid white southern support of the Confederacy appeared. Nor did Union army commanders carve the Confederacy into military colonies, erasing southern borders and dislocating peoples. The entire purpose of wartime occupation operated as a means to achieve reunion, uniting the rebellious states in their original positions within the nation.  

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Wartime military occupation, therefore, served multiple purposes: reintroducing Federal authority in the South; establishing loyalty among the populace; reconstructing secessionist state governments; pacifying a hostile countryside; providing lines of communication and logistics for the principle field armies; and carrying out the policy of emancipation, which Abraham Lincoln added as a war aim in 1863. Not one of these goals could be secured if Union armies capriciously scorched the South, murdered disloyal civilians, or created permanent colonies in which all citizens’ rights were forever erased. The Union’s war of occupation had a fundamental rationale, guided by specific policies and processes. And whereas it took four long years, garrisoning the Confederacy, combined with the battlefield victories, forced Confederates to surrender.\footnote{Willie Lee Rose, \textit{Rehearsal for Reconstruction: The Port Royal Experiment} (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 141-168, 199-377; Joseph G. Dawson III, \textit{Army Generals and Reconstruction, 1862-1877} (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982), 5-45; Ted Tunnell, \textit{Crucible of Reconstruction: War, Radicalism and Race in Louisiana, 1862-1877} (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1984); Durham, \textit{Reluctant Partners}, 174-97; Eric Foner, \textit{Reconstruction: America’s Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877} (New York: Harper and Row, 1988), 1-123; Ash, \textit{When the Yankees Came}, 50, 53, 171-76, 181-83, 234. See chapter 5 of this dissertation for a discussion of wartime emancipation policy, especially as it related to the raising of African American Union soldiers.}

Although successful, wartime occupation faced an ironic challenge: the volunteers in the ranks. The very men tasked with the responsibility of garrison duty came to be its loudest critics. Perhaps the greatest challenge to the Union’s war of occupation was its fundamental alteration of the American citizen-soldier ideal. United States troops who had rushed to defend their nation’s flag now encountered a host of ideological and cultural challenges that shocked their sensibilities and attachment to their cause.
CHAPTER THREE

UNION SOLDIERS AND THE IDEOLOGICAL AND CULTURAL CHALLENGES OF WARTIME OCCUPATION

“The romance is gone. The voluntariness has died out in the volunteer,” concluded a troubled Wilder Dwight. In August 1861, several months after he enlisted in the 2nd Massachusetts Infantry, Dwight reflected on his brief service to the Union. As a member of a large force occupying portions of western and central Maryland, Dwight suggested that soldiering was, perhaps, far different from what he and his comrades expected when they initially volunteered. “I think we are doomed to a life of warm inaction for many weeks,” he surmised, and he noticed that his fellow soldiers became tested by the growing ennui and languor of sitting idly on the Maryland countryside. The thrill of rushing to war had long expired, and “[t]he hard work, hot weather, and soldier’s fare begin to tell upon the men, and they are not as well satisfied as they were.” Ultimately, “the inaction is depressing to the [soldiers], and they long for an occasion to fight.” “The result is,” Dwight concluded, “that the regiment seems to lack willingness, obedience, enthusiasm, and vigor.” However, he carefully added, “let no one think that because we are not fighting battles, therefore we are not serving our country.”

More than two years later, Samuel Pierce, a New York cavalryman stationed near New Bern, North Carolina, expressed not only utter contempt for his position within the Union army, but also his disgust “from the torpor into which we have fallen.” Patrolling marshy swamplands, regulating the increasingly restive soldiers under his command, and straining to obtain news from distant theaters forced Pierce to consider that “[n]othing could be more monstrous than the idle existence I have led.” He had ventured from his home long ago in hopes of satisfying “that

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eager anxiety for a fight” and preserving the Union that he loved dearly. Yet his position in the Carolina backwoods fomented discouraged feelings of uselessness and disillusionment. He characterized his present military arrangement as an indolent and shiftless existence, which implicitly underscored his concern for achievement both as a soldier and as a man. Serving indefinitely in a hidden backwater of the occupied South indeed made Samuel Pierce a distressed individual.²

The hopes and fears articulated by Wilder Dwight and Samuel Pierce echoed those of countless other United States volunteers who struggled to comprehend their roles as citizen-soldiers in zones of military occupation. Rather than battling their nation’s enemies on distant battlefields, some Union soldiers were forced to respond to the peculiar tasks of policing white and black southerners, occupying seemingly foreign towns, straining to define the nebulous limits of enemy combatants and insurgents, and standing idly as the war seemingly exploded around them. Such were the dynamics of military occupation, all of which were a far-cry from the imagined, and often romanticized, world that Union soldiers thought they were entering. What happened, for instance, to Union volunteers who served as occupiers when their expectations for service were not met? Of course varieties of disillusionment marked nearly every Civil War soldier periodically throughout the conflict. Yet, military occupation presented a unique blend of trials that forced occupying soldiers to question their pre-conceived notions about their place within the army, society, and nation.

During the war northern volunteers articulated an explicit chorus of ideological and cultural convictions, all generally centered on their expectations of the citizen-soldier ideal. The

² Samuel C. Pierce to Dearest Ellen, September 18, 1863, item DL0329, John L. Nau III Civil War Collection, Houston, Texas—hereafter cited as JLNC. Pierce served in the Third New York Cavalry and patrolled the New Bern area from July to October, 1863. His unit was stationed throughout much of eastern North Carolina for most of the war, before it was transferred to the Virginia theater in the spring of 1864.
twin concepts of nationalism and Union helped inspire enlistment and allowed men to persist through hardship, battlefield horror, and the threat of death. Even during periods in which men experienced low morale and plummeting spirits, many remained dedicated to the principles for which they fought. Why, though, did soldiers in occupied zones seem to experience a sharp fluctuation in their commitment to the war for the Union? The wartime soldiering experience was messy and fragmented and sometimes did not offer clear avenues to contest disillusionment, which ultimately produced complicated ideas about the war’s meaning and the individual soldier’s relation to the “cause.” What specifically about the role of occupier fomented ideological discord among soldiers stationed in garrisons across the Confederacy, and how did they endure?3

This ideological conflict did not function in isolation. The experience of wartime occupation also unleashed a powerful host of cultural clashes that served to detach the volunteer soldier from his society. Union soldiers entered the military with a corpus of carefully defined cultural imaginations, drawn largely from the republican citizen-soldiering tradition. Although they were private citizens, many white American males cherished the citizen-soldier ideal, which suggested that, in the event of national crisis, they would leave their homes and families to battle their country’s enemies until the emergency was resolved, at which time they would resume their civilian lives. Acting within this republican framework, free men countenanced that their independence hinged partly on voluntary service to the nation, an idea which held constant across the nineteenth century, regardless of era or military conflict. The civic virtue intimately attached to military service served to confirm one’s citizenship and patriotism. Ultimately, men

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expected that their service would be quick, temporary, and resemble nothing of a static, private profession.\(^4\)

Although Union soldiers followed and celebrated this rubric, they soon suspected that the nature of military occupation seemed to challenge much of what they understood and treasured about their citizen-soldier heritage. Indeed, soldiers were called upon not only to fight their nation’s battles, but also to hold and secure territory, pacify a hostile civilian population, and serve indefinitely in constrained garrisons, which often resembled a suffocating military bureaucracy. These characteristics were born during the Mexican-American War, grew to fruition during the Civil War, and blossomed, at least temporarily, during the postwar years.\(^5\)

Thus, how did Union soldiers reconcile their assignments as an occupation force against the cultural understanding of the republican citizen-soldier ideal? Moreover, how did this discrepancy impact soldiers’ relationship to their nation?

The cultural challenges faced by Union occupiers extended beyond the republican citizen-soldier ideal to include questions of masculinity, ambition, honor and duty, and concepts of American exceptionalism. White American males aspired to meet the required societal standards of being honorable and dutiful citizens. Men carefully gauged, during wartime especially, whether they achieved these cherished distinctions. The quest for individual battlefield glory fueled only a small part of men’s desire for honorable service. They also aspired to meet their society’s approval for proper wartime conduct, to buttress their identities as


\(^5\) See chapters 1 and 8 for broader and comparative analyses of American military occupation both before and after the Civil War.
independent men, and to believe that they provided appropriate aid both to their cause and comrades during times of national trial. Soldiers’ responses to wartime military occupation unveil the closely linked hopes and fears of the American citizen-soldier to his larger society and nation.

In order to interpret effectively why soldiers responded so negatively to the nature of military occupation and the garrison ethos, this chapter must first briefly consider the broader cultural milieu in which northern men were reared during the antebellum years. Soon after they donned the Union blue, new volunteers articulated a host of expectations and thoughts about “proper” military service that they had learned, or at least to which they had been exposed, during their formative years. While the pre-Civil War North certainly possessed a domestic, peaceful, and puritanical character, it also developed a particular and deeply rooted martial culture. Contrary to the popular scholarly opinion that only the antebellum South displayed an obsession for military pursuits, the North also exhibited a martial spirit rooted largely in the heritage of colonial and Revolutionary America. This tradition grew impressively during the years after 1775 and manifested itself in an organized militia system, a substantial literature on military affairs, the establishment of numerous military schools and academies, and the celebration of a masculine, warlike prowess that promised to defend the region from outside invaders. Indeed, John Adams, a quintessential northerner, believed that “Military abilities and Experience, are a great Advantage to any Character.” Throughout the nineteenth century, in times of both peace and war, Americans attached themselves to the martial practice, which energized patriotism and fueled nationalism.

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6 See chapter I for a fuller investigation of this topic.

The secession crisis in 1860-61 unleashed these collective values as white northern males poured into the ranks. Massive enlistments during the weeks, months, and even years following Fort Sumter occasioned a flood of popular literature and imagery that helped craft the North’s citizen-soldier ideal. The celebration of each individual’s voluntarism, bravery, and virtue colored the pages of myriad popular publications, strongly echoing the martial ardor of the antebellum period. Walt Whitman, for instance, penned several poems at the beginning of the war that captured the military atmosphere and celebrated the men who dressed in their nation’s uniform. His “Beat! Beat! Drums!” catalogued the numerous places through which the winds of war blew: “Through the windows—through doors—burst like a force of armed men; Into the solemn church, and scatter the congregation; Into the school where the scholar is studying; Leave not the bridegroom quiet—no happiness must he have now with his bride; Nor the peaceful farmer any peace plowing his field or gathering his grain; So fierce you whirr and pound, you drums—so shrill you bugles blow.” Whitman continued this theme in another poem in which he characterized 1861 as the “year of the struggle,” an era that did not accommodate “dainty rhymes or sentimental love verses,” nor as “some pale poetling seated at a desk lisping cadenzas piano.” This year was instead unique, “a strong man erect, clothed in blue clothes, advancing, carrying a rifle on [his] shoulder, With a well-gristled body and sunburnt face and hands, with a knife in the belt at [his] side.” Unlike any year previous, the military ethos of 1861, according to Whitman, spread across the northern landscape, connecting the crowded streets of Manhattan to the fertile plains of Illinois. Although supremely metaphorical, Whitman’s words captured the celebrated

image of the early volunteering process: private citizens leaving their homes to enter the military, fight their threatened nation’s battles, and if necessary, die for the cause.8

The soldiers themselves articulated sentiments that conformed perfectly to the popular culture. George L. Gaskell, a member of a Rhode Island artillery company, informed his sister in March 1862 that he had recently crossed the Potomac River, reporting that “Leesburg [,Virginia,] is ours.” “Let me tell you it was one of the greatest events of my life,” he wrote; and he concluded, “I am a man, Mary and a soldier and if my country needs my life she is welcome.” William Thompson Lusk, a New York officer who served on the South Carolina coast in early spring of 1862, similarly deduced that peace could be achieved only when “bloody battles must be fought in which we must all partake.” Some soldiers built on these sentiments and even determined that because they volunteered to give their lives to the cause, the war would be naturally short and swift. From his position on the Maryland countryside, Wilder Dwight believed that “we may have a part in the great battle that crushes them.” “There is no real cause for depression,” he wrote, because “[s]ubduing rebellion, conquering traitors, in short, war, is the work of soldiers. . . . In the fullness of time, we shall wipe out this Southern army, as surely as the time passes.” The principle enemies, according to Dwight and his comrades throughout the North, were the Confederate armies, all of which must be defeated on distant fields of battle in

order for peace to return. And it was principally the duty of Union soldiers to accomplish such deeds.\(^9\)

Soldiers shared with their civilian and political leaders the assumption that the war would be brief, limited in scope, and merely a contest between opposing armies. Many northern volunteers even feared that they might fail to participate in the grand campaign to capture the Confederate capital, Richmond, Virginia, and end the war in victory. Stationed within the defenses of Washington, D. C., in May 1861, Henry Wilson Hubbell of the Seventh New York State Militia estimated that “We will all be home within a month, and we may be cured of any ambition for military glory at time.” Concerns of honor, duty, and masculine courage emanated from the writings of these soldiers who believed that their position in the military necessitated rapid and decisive action. Seldom, if ever, at the beginning of the conflict did they consider the more complicated notions of occupying, subduing, or even subjugating the entire Confederacy. Engaging in an irregular war against hostile civilian-enemies hardly seemed a realistic possibility. Establishing and managing bureaucratic garrisons, buttressed by a host of difficulties therein, did not correspond to the nature of war understood or imagined by the soldiers.\(^10\)

The common soldier assumed that his duty did not require indefinite service but rather voluntary and temporary duty. Thus, the way in which he constructed the republican citizen-soldier ideal did not include long-term military occupation, even during wartime. Although most

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soldiers relished the idea of serving and even fighting, others remained uneasy about such prospects. Yet, they still volunteered their services because of their cultural contracts as free American citizens. As early as July 1861, William Davis of the 22nd Illinois Infantry admitted that “I am sick [of a soldier’s life] and nothing would induce me to follow it if the country was not in danger but as it is I consider that I am doing my duty to my country.” Other men waited as patiently as possible for their terms of service to expire but understood in the meantime that their first obligation was to the nation. “As soon as I assist in uniting our once happy & prosperous country & firmly planting that glorious old flag in every State in the Union,” wrote Joseph F. Field from his camp of instruction in Boston, “then can we enjoy that happiness that it would be impossible to find in the present state of our country.”

As a combination of unselfish voluntarism and the desire for a quick, decisive war, the republican citizen-soldier ideal was based on a complete dedication to the Union. Devotion to the American nation supplied the ideological foundation for enlistment and underscored why free men believed so deeply in offering their services, and potentially their lives, for its preservation. Horace Garrigus of the Eighth Connecticut Infantry declared that “I have enlisted in the U.S. Army and will fight till the last. . . . we must save the Union.” Another New Englander, Charles H. Smith, implored his wife and children to consider their lives if “they would have to live in [a country] if there was no government to protect them.” “When we fight to sustane this government,” he argued, “we fight for our [families].” Garrigus and Smith echoed the sentiments of countless nineteenth-century Americans who cherished the concept of Union. The entire Confederate rebellion, they believed, constituted a dire threat to the democratic-republican ideals

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11 William Davis to Dear Sister, July 28, 1861, William Davis Papers, Civil War Miscellaneous Collection (hereafter cited CWMC), USAHMI; Joseph F. Field to My Own Dear Kittie, October 5, 1862, Joseph F. Field Papers, 1859-1866, James S. Schoff Civil War Collection, William J. Clements Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan (hereafter cited as SCWC).
of individualism and liberty, the rule of law, and an exceptional government that guaranteed and protected free institutions for its people. If the Union failed, so too did the promise of liberty for all humanity. American citizens took seriously and literally Abraham Lincoln’s famous characterization that the United States represented the “last best hope of earth.” Thus, it is abundantly clear why thousands of men rushed to war and desired to participate directly in its outcome, one which they trusted would be swift and conclusive. Any perceived failing in this quest would result in depressed spirits, a questioning of their dedication, and, ultimately, ambivalence about whether their Union could be preserved.\(^\text{12}\)

The war, however, evolved into a conflict of long-term occupation, erected by dozens of immobile garrisons. Still, men in the Union armies imagined defeating Confederate forces, marching unopposed into the oppressed South, and being welcomed by a grateful citizenry. Some soldiers even believed themselves to be a body of liberation to a region and people governed aggressively by an aristocratic slaveholding regime. Many soldiers believed that most white southerners were not guilty of promoting secession but rather had been forced into their station by radical and selfish leaders. Only the latter, reasoned Union troops, were the ones to be deposed and replaced by the region’s unionists who most assuredly would mold the South into the North’s image. While they passionately wanted to overthrow their enemies on the field of battle and uproot the oppressive slavocracy, the North’s citizen-soldiers also assumed that the war must be waged in a conservative manner in order to bring progressive notions of democracy and free institutions to the backward South. These optimistic ideas comprised the extent of Union soldiers’ assumptions about the nature of military occupation. Thus they did not consider

that garrisoning and holding enemy territory, establishing lines of communication and supply throughout the occupied Confederacy, administering martial law, instituting loyal state governments, and, ideally, inspiring oaths of loyalty from southern civilians, all required a massive military presence and indefinite dedication of time and patience to ensure success.  

As Union soldiers marched south and settled into their roles as military occupiers, their experiences changed the ways in which they interacted with the civilians in their midst, challenged their perspectives of “proper” military service, and altered their perceived relationship to the nation, changes that were fueled by the garrison ethos. Fundamental shifts in morale governed these circumstances. Even if soldiers had fought in battles to claim territory—and many did—their experiences of actually occupying that territory presented a drastically different challenge to the citizen-soldier ideal. The nature of military occupation ultimately forced Union soldiers to realize that they served in a “foreign” land, most of whose inhabitants seemed hostile to their presence. Moreover, indefinite occupation pushed soldiers to question whether they were actively supporting the broader war effort, especially during extended periods in which campaigning and fighting in distant theaters seemed completely detached from their existence. Occupation seemed to provide fleeting moments of relative peace. Thus, morale could be adversely shaped when soldiers considered that they were not helping to make substantive progress toward their nation’s ultimate wartime goals. Since Confederate armies remained in the field and the rebel capitol continued to function, Union occupiers felt alienated from the critical effort to conclude the war successfully and go home.

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United States soldiers were forced to understand the changing realities of American warfare in which military duty required far more than merely campaigning, camping, and fighting. Most soldiers gave little thought to anything else; their focus remained fixed on national victory and a return to private life and family. Soldiers enlisted with defined contracts of service, and they remained unaware of how long they might spend occupying the Confederacy. With the termination of formal hostilities in occupied zones, Union troops had to determine their purpose in the military. Thus, soldiers struggled to comprehend the character of occupation and its significance, especially as they received reports, news, and rumors from other theaters in which the war would potentially be decided. Guarding government stores in New Orleans, for example, was far different, and seemingly less significant, than battling the principal Confederate armies in Tennessee or Virginia. Thus, the occupiers strained to define the limits and meaning of their service while remaining dedicated to the cause of Union.\textsuperscript{15}

Northern troops stationed on the peripheries of the war-torn Confederacy endured multiple sources of disillusionment that directly threatened their perceptions of the citizen-soldier ideal. Serving in a static environment largely detached from conventional armies forced Union occupiers to reconstruct the meaning of enemy combatants. Whereas they initially expected the great mass of white southerners (not the aristocratic planters) to greet them with open arms, the Yankees instead arrived to find a populace either vaguely suspicious of their presence or openly aggressive and antagonistic. Soldiers accordingly questioned precisely how civilian-enemies should be treated. No such code existed as there did on the battlefield: kill or be killed. Plus, many potential enemies were women and children, traditional non-combatants, whom soldiers simply could not shoot, but rather with whom soldiers were forced to negotiate, while simultaneously displaying martial authority. Moreover, the sheer boredom and monotony

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid.
of the occupation experience fostered a gloomy and uninspiring view of the nation and its war aims. Union soldiers were also obliged to undertake a host of duties that they initially considered “beneath” their self-worth and that threatened their identity as men and volunteers. They had enlisted to fight their nation’s battles; instead they struggled to navigate the disillusioning waters of wartime military occupation and life in static garrisons.

Union occupiers felt detached from the war because their position operated, quite literally, in the conflict’s background. Thus the stagnant conditions of the garrison ethos prompted a host of soured sentiments. Stationed in New Bern, North Carolina, David L. Day of the 25th Massachusetts Volunteers acknowledged that “[w]e have now been several weeks in the city and the boys are beginning to tire of it. This every-day humdrum life is getting irksome, and the boys are anxious for a change.” Day’s unit was positioned in the general vicinity of New Bern for approximately fifteen months, for which he admitted, “Frequent changes and excitement are what keeps up a soldier’s spirits. In the dull routine and idleness of camp, they grow uneasy, homesick and despondent.” The sameness of the region and the daily routines of guard, picket, and outpost duty, and even expeditions into the countryside, evoked in Day and his comrades a sense of uselessness. Similarly, John Corden wrote from New Orleans in November 1862, “I am sick of it. [T]here is no news here. [W]e are experiencing the monotonous life in Camp which is awful dull.” Even though Corden and his regiment, the 6th Michigan Volunteers, had the honor of being one of the first units to occupy the Crescent City immediately after it fell in May 1862, the long weeks and months sitting on the Gulf Coast forced Corden to question why he needed to remain idle for so long. “[W]e are still guarding this rebel parapet,” he explained to his wife, “and dont hear a word about any attempt of [them] to attack us, and I dont think they ever will. . . . I have no idea how long this infernal war will keep us here. Oh! My
Dear Sarah you cannot think how sick I am of it and how anxious I am to return to my dear and peaceful home.”16

The various occupation duties and garrison assignments soldiers performed generally failed to alleviate the tedium and weariness experienced behind the lines. For example, soldiers were transformed into glorified police forces intended to provide a semblance of order in occupied towns and cities. “Police duty, in a military sense, is the duty of cleaning up the camp,” clarified Zenas T. Haines of the 44th Massachusetts Volunteers. “As provost-guard,” he continued, “our duty is to ‘clean out’ disreputable places, to see that soldiers in town are not absent from their regiments without leave, and to attend to moral publicians generally.” Haines considered this life “too uneventful to call for much letter writing . . . and the duty is found at once severe, irksome, and often abhorrent. I am rather glad that our present reputation as policemen is not to be the measure of our characters as soldiers.” “This police would soon demoralize, if it did not kill us quite.” Union soldiers-turned-policemen were expected to act as a stabilizing presence to protect property and ensure peace among civilians and occupying forces. Nevertheless, Yankee troops found it difficult to endure such mind-numbing work. “A detail of forty men from our regiment was sent into town on provost guard,” wrote Alexander Downing of the 11th Iowa Volunteers from occupied Vicksburg. “Our orders were to arrest all citizens and soldiers found upon the streets without passes . . . and take them before the [Provost Marshal] for investigation and punishment.” Union occupiers used similar language to characterize additional

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16 Diary entry, April 25, 1862, in David L. Day, My Diary of Rambles with the 25th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry (Milford, Massachusetts: King and Billings Printers, 1884), 55; John Corden to My Dear Wife, November 2, 1862, John Corden Letters, 1821-?[?], Michigan in the Civil War Military Collections, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan (hereafter cited BLUM). New Bern, North Carolina, fell to Union forces in March 1862; the first Union soldiers arrived in New Orleans, Louisiana on May 1, 1862 (McPherson, Battle Cry of Freedom, 373, 418-20; Capers, Occupied City, 25-76 ). See also Diary entries, March 14 and May 25, 1863, Melville C. Linscott Diary, CWMC, USAMHI.
monotonous assignments, which included fatigue labor and building fortifications, carrying dispatches, drilling, foraging, and generally regulating civilian behavior.¹⁷

Countless soldiers responded to such tasks with a strikingly similar refrain: these are not the reasons for which we volunteered. Several examples illustrate this contention. Major Frank Peck enlisted in the 12ᵗʰ Connecticut Volunteers in late 1861 and participated in General Benjamin F. Butler’s expedition to capture New Orleans. Merely a few days prior to the city’s capitulation, Peck wrote his mother and asked, “do you think any of us are sorry we enlisted? I suspect even you will be reconciled to the fact that you have been deprived of my valuable society for the space of two long months by the result that has been accomplished.” Peck had good reason to feel confident, sensing that his service helped occasion the surrender of the Confederacy’s largest city. He even mentioned that “I am blessed in my honorable position” within New Orleans because “our army is a god send to shop keepers and poor people, to the first in giving them customers who have got any money and that of some value, and to the last in furnishing much employment to those who will to work.”¹⁸

¹⁷ Zenas T. Haines letter, June 1, 1863, May 12, 1863, and May 29, 1863, in [Zenas T. Haines], Letters from the Forty-Fourth Regiment M.V.M.: A Record of the Experience of a Nine Months’ Regiment in the Department of North Carolina in 1862-3 (Boston: Harold Job Office, 1863), 114 [quotations 1 and 3], 106 [quotations 2 and 4], 113 [quotation 5]; Diary entry, November 28, 1863, in Olynthus B. Clark, ed., Downing’s Civil War Diary (Des Moines: Iowa State Department of History and Archives, 1916), 154; John M. Brooks to Nathaniel P. Banks, [early 1864], Provost Marshal General Records, Record Group 393, Part 1, Department of the Gulf, #1845, Box 3, Letters Received, 1864, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D. C. (hereafter cited as NARA). The provost marshal and subsequent provost guard functioned, in part, as the military police force in occupied towns and cities. See Ash, When the Yankees Came, 84; and Walter T. Durham, Nashville: The Occupied City: The First Seventeen Months-February 16, 1862, to June 30, 1863 (Nashville: The Tennessee Historical Society, 1985), 239. For other assignments undertaken by Union occupiers see, Samuel H. Root to My Dear Wife, May 20, 1863, Seabrook, South Carolina, Samuel H. Root Letters, CWMC, USAMHI; John Guild to Dear Mother, June 21, 1862, New Orleans, John H. Guild Letters, 1862-1864, Mss. 3204, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana (hereafter cited as LLMVC, LSU); Milton P. Chambers to Dear Brother, July 20, 1864, Little Rock, Milton P. Chambers Papers, 1853-1864, Special Collections, David W. Mullins Library, University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, Arkansas (hereafter cited as UA); John Bartell to Sister, October 28, 1863, DL0375.006, JLNC.

However, after a month of service in the Crescent City, Peck acknowledged that “our life has been very monotonous,” particularly after civilian order was restored and local government reinstated under the military’s supervision. By the summer of 1862 he formulated clear distinctions between his time in New Orleans and “active service,” to the point that he worried about “our plans and my own hopes and ambitions.” Peck yearned to be in a battle, mainly to prove himself as a man and to contribute to the national war effort. However, “in the service here I suppose we dont talk half so much about the war as before we enlisted,” he admitted, and “we seldom get excited at any news. Every mans thoughts are occupied with the minutiae of his duties.” Although his unit ventured periodically on expeditions into the nearby Lafourche and Teche countryside, Peck remained unimpressed with his duties at New Orleans. Finally, in the late fall of 1862, as his unit dug ditches near the city, Peck confessed, “[this] isnt what I enlisted for.” With the exception of a minor foray into Texas in September 1863, Peck and the 12th Connecticut remained positioned in southern Louisiana through the spring of 1864. Then they were transferred to the Eastern Theater where Peck finally experienced battle. He was killed leading a charge at the Third Battle of Winchester, Virginia.19

Peck’s sentiments resonated across the landscape of the entire occupied Confederacy. John W. De Forest, also an officer in the 12th Connecticut, despondently remarked that his regiment remained in New Orleans while other Union troops moved north toward Vicksburg. “Singular as it may seem, this is a disappointment,” he wrote. “Nearly every officer and the majority of the men would prefer to go up the river, taking the certainty of hard fare and hard times generally, with a fair likelihood of being killed or wounded, rather than stay here drilling and guard mounting in peace.” De Forest touched on a common theme shared by countless other

soldiers. From Nashville, John M. King of the 92nd Illinois wrote in February 1863, “[w]hile thus laying in camp we [are] all dissatisfied and uneasy. The men preferred anything to inactivity. . . . We came out to fight and we would rather now go right at it and have it done with. To lie in camp with nothing to do is one of the most disagreeable things in the world.” Adolphus P. Wolf similarly wrote from nearby Memphis, where his regiment, the 117th Illinois Volunteers, had spent most of 1863, that his comrades were willing to endure the hardships of a campaign and battle: “it is an evident fact that we did not enlist to play the gentleman in a blue uniform, but to be a soldier and be satisfied with a soldiers fare.”

Other Yankee troops built on these beliefs, contending that it might be in their best interest to go home, if they were not to be used in active service. Charles H. Smith considered the garrison ethos’ constricting nature when he wrote from Beaufort, South Carolina, “I thought a while ago we should get a chance [to campaign against the enemy], but it does not look much like it now. . . . I hope we shall strike tents and go home soon.” Samuel Kerr of the 47th Indiana likewise informed his sister that “I want to do my share of fighting and go home and not be laying around [Helena, Arkansas] doing nothing for that will never close the war.” Even in Kentucky, where the Union army’s presence was to ensure the state’s loyalty, one soldier hoped “when [the] Government has nothing more for me to do than guard wach a town as that they will send me home and I will go to tailoring again.” They no longer shared the romantic passions of engaging in battle—many of them had fought to secure the territory on which they currently occupied—but understood that active participation, rather than idle occupation, would conclude the war, at which point they could return to their private lives. In their minds, military occupation

20 De Forrest, Volunteer’s Adventures, 25; Diary entry, February 10, 1863, in Swedburg, Three Years with the 92d Illinois, 54; Adolphus P. Wolf to Dear Parents, Jan. 24, 1864, Adolphus P. Wolf Letters, CWTC, USAMHI.

21 Charles H. Smith to Dear wife, March 17, 1863, CWMC, USAMHI; Samuel Kerr to Dear Malvina, September 22, 1862, DL0522.44, JLNC; John Sidney Andrews to Dear Laura, March 25, 1862, John Sidney Andrews Papers, BLUM.
equated to moments of temporary peace, which operated on the periphery of formal war. Thus, as occupiers in a static position, Union soldiers struggled to understand how their roles as citizen-soldiers were effectively fulfilled.

The distinction between occupation and active involvement in the war, however, functioned much deeper than merely acknowledging “this is not what I enlisted for,” or suffering from unremitting boredom. The very nature of the garrison ethos mandated United States troops to participate in the central feature of wartime occupation: interaction with and regulation of southerners, white and black, men and women. Martial governance of civilians during the Civil War unleashed a host of troubling and near irreconcilable assumptions about gender, race, and culture. American soldiers in Mexico, on the contrary, justified their domination of civilians according to racial difference. They also entered the conflict imbued with presumptions of national superiority, which “vindicated” any wayward conduct toward the populace. Union soldiers, however, faced a much more nebulous scenario. White southerners and Yankee occupiers spoke the same language, shared a common political culture, and subscribed to the same national heritage. United States troops indeed detested the southern slavocracy, believing it fashioned an unscrupulous, aristocratic ruling class, which fueled secession and threatened the core of Union. Yet those same soldiers paused when they met the common white southerner, fearing how a people of presumed cultural inferiority would be integrated back into the Union. The first problem, though, manifested itself in the image of “the southern belle.”

White southern women, and the peculiar manner in which they engaged Yankee soldiers, stymied the invaders’ quest to define the precise limits of civilian-enemies, as well as the proper recourse against such aggressors. The major Civil War armies operated generally within an arena of mutually accepted masculine codes, largely due to their remoteness and independence from
civilian communities. Thus, soldiers within each opposing institution agreed that they, as men, perpetuated killing as a means to decide the conflict. Zones of occupation, however, fundamentally inverted this acknowledged truth. The enemies within garrisoned communities or immediate occupied frontier were not uniformed Confederate men, but often were unarmed women. The civilized rules of war, combined with the respectability governing gender relations, further frustrated Yankee efforts to conform to the citizen-soldier ideal.

White southern women, upon meeting Federal soldiers, sometimes raised their skirts, tossed insults and gibes, blatantly paraded Confederate flag pins or bonnets, and, in New Orleans, emptied chamber pots atop the occupiers’ heads. Women also acted as spies and secretly smuggled medicine and intelligence through the lines. In some instances, they even spat in the faces of Yankee troops. Historians have superbly documented the reasons for such behavior, concluding that white women attempted to combat the militaristic encroachments on their private lives and spaces. The literature on Confederate women has been well documented, yet coverage of the Union soldier’s understandings of gender relations under occupation is somewhat ambiguous.22

Over the course of the occupation experience, Union occupiers became markedly disgusted at the verbal abuses hurled by local women. “It is decidedly a secesh town,” remarked John Vreeland about Murfreesboro, Tennessee, “shown in a thousand different ways, especially by the women, who are as insulting as possible the immunities of their sex saving them from any molestation.” Vreeland clearly alluded to his desire to treat women as combatants in military

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22 See, for example, George C. Rable, Civil Wars: Women and the Crisis of Southern Nationalism (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989); LeeAnn Whites, The Civil War as a Crisis in Gender: Augusta, Georgia, 1860-1890 (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1995); Drew Gilpin Faust, Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Victoria E. Ott, Confederate Daughters: Coming of Age during the Civil War (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2008).
zones, yet their very identities as non-combatants prevented Union soldiers from using the prescribed martial methods to deal with enemies. Instead, they were forced to show restraint, which infuriated their sensibilities. In return, women oftentimes accused the occupiers of cowardice for failing to combat their sneers and taunts.23

Women were not merely passive and annoying civilians in occupied zones. Rather, their purposely antagonistic behavior shaped the manner in which some Federal policies evolved and, more important, crafted how occupiers negotiated their identities both as soldiers and men. The infamous episodes surrounding General Benjamin F. Butler’s occupation of New Orleans offer an ideal example. From the moment the Yankees landed in the Crescent City, local women taunted the soldiers and insulted their presence. This behavior quickly pushed some troops into outright anger. As one officer walked to church, he passed two ladies on the street and moved to let them pass. However, as he did so, one woman stopped directly in front of him and spat in his face. Although angry, the soldier did not know how to respond, except to “take his kerchief and clean his face.” He then went to see Butler about the matter. One of the general’s staff asked, “Why didn’t you do something?” “‘What could I do,” responded the abused soldier, “to two women?” “‘Well,’” the staffer suggested, “‘you ought to have taken your revolver and shot the first he rebel you met.” The officer finally admitted to Butler, “‘General, I can’t stand this. This isn’t the first time this thing has been attempted towards me, but this is the first time it has been accomplished. I want to go home. I came here to fight the enemies of the country, not to be insulted and disgusted.”24

23 John Vreeland to Dear Parents, March 31, 1862, Vreeland-Warden Papers, USAMHI.

This exchange revealed the presence of a gender identity crisis within the garrison ethos. Union soldiers expected to kill those who threatened the nation and its wartime policies. They proved this on the battlefield and willingly extended the definition to encompass civilians who practiced guerrilla warfare. Yet perpetrators of these acts were white southern men. As Butler’s staffer indicated, proper recourse against insults from women should be directed at southern males. Yankee occupiers struggled mightily with the implications of including women within these same categories. The southern lady understood precisely the limits of this problem, and slowly, yet consciously, pushed the occupiers to decide what constituted a war zone and who participated within its realm. Women’s explicit protest of military occupation tested the existing social order, upending Union soldiers’ expectations of complete military victory by rejecting traditionally accepted notions of defeat. The occupiers could not relish in the satisfaction of total triumph because a defined enemy still remained. Yet this enemy, because she was a woman, could not be properly combated. Thus, gender relations in occupied communities retained, at best, an ambivalent character.

Indeed, one soldier characterized women in Baton Rouge as “for the most part almost violent, threatening to spit in the faces of union officers. . . . Such unsexing was hardly ever before in any cause or country so marked and so universal.” Iowan Minos Miller, whose unit occupied Memphis during the winter of 1862, was much more explicit. Miller explained to his mother that “the citizens looked daggers” at the Union soldiers as they marched down a street. “The ladies on the side walks clapped their hands and laughed [at us] but they got their delicacy shocked, if they had any, for one of our boys bawled out . . . go to h__l you d__m little rebble

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25 See Chapter 7 for Union soldiers’ responses to guerrilla warfare.

sone of a b___h. if it had been a man he would have been shot down quicker than lightning.”

Charles G. Blake of the 34th Massachusetts undoubtedly would have agreed with Miller.

Although he enjoyed the “sight of their pretty selves as they pass our camp,” he wrote from Harpers Ferry, Virginia, “you ought to hear [local women] talk when we search their homes for arms &c. If some of their prayers should be answered I fear that there is little hope for we poor 34th boys.”

Union soldiers’ attempts to define the ambiguous nature of southern women only resulted in further ambivalence and confusion. The clash of gender cultures produced by wartime occupation shocked Yankee men who had been reared in a society that painted a radically different picture of women. The so-called “cult of domesticity” informed presumptions of a northern woman’s behavior and conduct, classifying her role both in the home and in public. Women, this cultural ideal held, were reserved and passive, yet also fiercely moral, always establishing standards of civility and ethics. Northern authors, pamphleteers, and lecturers arranged the region’s entire gender balance according to these assumptions. Union troops were undoubtedly exposed to such antebellum concepts, which they likely brought with them into the ranks. Thus the southern women with whom Yankee soldiers interacted indeed shocked northern sensibilities. “Its enough to make a man disgusted with the sex to see them spare them talk,” a Michigan officer wrote from Tennessee. “I suppose they are human or will be in some far distant era in some other sphere.” Expecting to encounter the refined and polite southern belle celebrated in popular culture, the citizen-soldier instead confronted uncouth, antagonistic, and

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coarse women who presented a direct threat not only to the troops’ lives, but also their assumptions about nineteenth-century gender dynamics.28

The soldiers equated southern women’s resistance to occupation as a form of savage defiance, absent any civilized discourse or conduct. Women, the soldiers understood from their formative years in the North, were not supposed to exhibit uncontrolled and violent boldness, especially in matters of politics or civil affairs. Yet Confederate women seemed to test this entire rubric, pushing the occupiers to reorganize the conception of true womanhood. The soldiers sensed, as one observer wrote, that the rebellion had unleashed “the furies of women . . . who unsexed themselves to prove their scorn of ‘the Yankees.’” Cyrus Boyd, of the 15th Iowa Volunteers, related an incident from Holly Springs, Mississippi, in which a woman pled for protection of her property and children. “I told her not to fear as no man would disturb her,” Boyd explained. “This evening this same woman was arrested for shooting one of our men who was on guard. . . . She cowardly shot him although he was guarding her property.” Women were, therefore, no longer women; they were combatants, hostile enemies of the federal government who rallied rebel troops, demonstrated vicious enthusiasm for the southern nation, and defied United States authority.29

Although disgusted, Cyrus Boyd also seemed quite confused about the troubling episode at Holly Springs. His vignette underscored how Union soldiers were brought face-to-face with an

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enemy who did not don a Confederate uniform, but rather whose identity was purely civilian. Few soldiers, upon their enlistment, expected to encounter such peculiar circumstances, yet the ethos of occupation bred dangerous interactions between soldier and citizen. Many other southern women, of course, did not pose such a blunt threat to Union troops. Whereas some female Confederates, through their outspoken boorishness, tested northern gender perceptions, other women’s coarse appearance and vulgar behavior elicited equally bewildering commentary from the occupiers.

The gender identity crisis experienced by Union soldiers extended beyond the difficulties of defining women as enemy combatants. It also included the shocking presumption that many white southern women did not conform to societal expectations about refinement and femininity. Soldiers often equated women’s odd behavior to that of vulgar men and “uncivilized” African Americans. “I had often heard of the beauty of southern ladies,” J. Henry Blakeman, of the 17th Connecticut, wrote from St. Augustine, Florida, “[but I] find it much exaggerated. The men are tall, slim, and homely specimens of humanity . . . and the women look as if they were very nearly related to the men,” he chronicled. “The principle accomplishments of both sexes consists of drinking whiskey chewing and smoking tobacco and taking snuff.”

Soldiers stationed in North Carolina especially deemed women’s peculiar habits quite undignified; the ubiquity of tobacco negatively influenced northern perceptions. David Day, of the 25th Massachusetts Volunteers, reported that women in New Bern “have a filthy habit of snuff chewing or dipping as they call it, and I am told it is practiced more or less by all classes of women.” He described how “they take a small stick or twig about two inches long . . . and chew one end of it until it becomes like a brush,” which was then dipped into the tobacco and inserted into the mouth. Day claimed that many local women “can squirt the juice through their teeth as

30 J. Henry Blakeman to [Wife], August 27, 1864, J. Henry Blakeman Letters, Lewis Leigh Collection, USAMHI.
far and as straight as the most accomplished chewer among the lords of creation.” Richard Kirtland Woodruff, a volunteer in the 15th Connecticut, admitted his revulsion at South Mills “of Dixie’s fair ones, of the poorer classes, & even some in pretty good circumstances.” Although disgusted by women’s use of tobacco, Woodruff reserved his harshest criticism for “the most disgusting practice I ever saw in all my life, called dipping. . . . I have read of it, but I never saw it before.” George O. Jewett, also stationed in coastal Carolina, confirmed Day’s assessment, yet offered an additional interpretation. “The women here, both black and white ‘dig’ snuff like thunder,” he observed. “[I]t will do for niggers, but for white women, faugh!” White southern women not only challenged gender expectations, but also tested the accepted limits of whiteness.31

Jewett’s sentiments characterized a broader problem encountered by the occupiers. While mystified by the peculiar gender dynamics of southern culture, Union soldiers also struggled to negotiate the region’s equally puzzling racial components. Jewett indeed revealed his conceptions of “acceptable” racial behavior. Whereas Yankee troops found white southern women contemptible, dull, or coarse, the occupiers claimed that African Americans were the most bizarre inhabitants of the South. Countless enslaved blacks, though, equated the blue-coated armies as a force of liberation. It is difficult, if not impossible, to ascribe a universal northern posture toward African Americans, yet Union soldiers were quite cautious in their appraisals of the thousands of black southerners who flocked to army lines. But as historian Reid Mitchell writes, “if there was one attitude, it was an ambivalence compounded of pity, affection, disgust, and hatred.”32

31 Diary entry, April 24, 1862, in Day, My Diary of Rambles with the 25th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry, 55; Richard Kirtland Woodruff letter, October 19, 1863, item DL0172.018, JLNC; George O. Jewett to Dear Deck, June 1, 1862, CITATION, LOC.
Union soldiers, as Mitchell suggests, perceived African Americans through a variegated lens. Yet the one constant in their assessment was that of difference. The common northern soldier, who reflected the broad swath of northern anti-slavery opinion, attributed black women and men as unique to the South. The stark racial constructs of southern society, Union soldiers believed, resulted from centuries of slavery, which had imbued the region with a permanent, racial underclass. The occupiers generally agreed that black southerners were naturally inferior, yet this conviction was expressed in different ways. Some soldiers considered contraband to be docile children who had been deprived of opportunities to mature. “They are indeed a happy set of creatures,” James Henry Smith of 75th New York wrote from Santa Rosa, Florida, “the many antics they perform is really laughable. They appear like birds who have been long caged.”

Other soldiers were considerably harsher in their critiques of black life. They believed, ironically, that slavery had transformed African Americans into slothful, apathetic people for whom freedom was not fit. “The negroes are pretty much all lazy and shiftless. They do not seem to appreciate the pleasures of liberty,” Joseph Fiske wrote in 1863 from Beaufort, North Carolina, underscoring white northern dedications to individualism and active mobility. Yet the occupiers believed that black southerners, by virtue of a lifetime of bondage, had been stripped of these natural rights. William Thompson Lusk worried that potential emancipation would convince former slaves that their days of work were complete, “and that henceforth they are to lead that life of lazy idleness which forms the Nigger’s Paradise.”

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33 James Henry Smith to Dear Father and Mother, March 12, 1862, James H. Smith Papers, William Gladstone Collection, USAMHI.
Although Fiske and Lusk rooted their sentiments in abject racism, their comments extended far beyond notions of white supremacy. Their interactions—similar to countless other Union soldiers—with enslaved and freed blacks, fostered a sense that there existed a deeply troubling quality about the American South. Slavery, as many northerners had come to learn, contradicted the principles of free labor, which celebrated individual initiative and rewarded a persistent work-ethic. The peculiar institution, however, presumably fostered laziness and indolence. Even in the aftermath of emancipation, Union soldiers did not know how and by what means black southerners would be incorporated into the mainstream of American society.

And herein lay a three-fold problem informing the racial worldview of Union occupiers. On the one hand, a faith in white supremacy governed the outlooks of most United States soldiers. But on the other hand, many troops came to accept emancipation as a necessary tool to preserve the Union. And abolition would necessarily destroy the slaveholding aristocracy, considered by many to be the ultimate paradox of egalitarianism. A final consideration, though, sent shockwaves throughout the ranks of United States armies. How would formerly enslaved African Americans be introduced to the world of freedom, and more specifically, a reunited nation of free northerners and southerners, black and white? Slavery threatened the very core of American exceptionalism, yet so too did any pretense of racial equality, which Union soldiers regarded as mutually exclusive to abolition.35

Charles Francis Adams, the grandson and great-grandson of famed presidents, and a volunteer officer in the 1st Massachusetts Cavalry, articulated the racial crisis encountered by Union occupiers. Adams firmly supported emancipation, believing black freedom to be long

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35 On the scholarly debate about when, how, and why Union soldiers came to support emancipation, see Chandra Manning, *What This Cruel War Was Over: Soldiers, Slavery, and the Civil War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2007), 86-90, 118-19, 121, 150-55, 191-92, 218-19; and Gallagher, *Union War*, 40-41, 78-82, 101-10, 112-14, 142-45; Browning, “‘I am Not So Patriotic as I was Once,’” 225-26.
overdue, especially since slavery sparked the terrible war in which the nation was engaged.

“Slavery may perish and no one regret it,” he wrote from the Union-occupied South Carolina Sea Islands in April 1862, “but what is to become of the unfortunate African?” Adams celebrated the “many good qualities” of the local black population: they were “good tempered, patient, docile, willing to learn and easily directed.” He made a clear distinction, though, further questioning the demeanor of black southerners. “[T]hey are all slavish,” he wrote of the freed-people, “and all that the word slavish implies. They will lie and cheat and steal; they are hypocritical and cunning; they are not brave and they are not fierce.” Adams did not blame African Americans for their presumably depraved conditions; “these qualities the white man took out of them generations ago, and in taking them deprived the African of the capacity for freedom.”

Although he endorsed abolition, Adams was unsure how black Americans would become integrated into the American economic system. White northerners, he explained, had long been imbued in the cultures of republicanism, material progress, free labor, and individual liberty; recently enslaved peoples had not. “My views of the future of those I see about me here are not therefore encouraging,” he acknowledged. Adams could not conceive how African Americans might transition from the backward world of slave-based agriculture into a progressive, industrial setting that required self-initiative and economic training. “Will they be educated and encouraged and cared for,” he asked, “or will they be challenged to compete in the race, or go to the wall, and finally be swept away as a useless rubbish?”

Adams could not answer these questions, “but one thing I daily see and that is that no spirit exists among the contrabands here which would enable them to care for themselves in a

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37 Ibid., 132-33.
race of vigorous competition. The blacks must be cared for or they will perish, and who is to care for them when they cease to be of value.” Adams believed that the United States would emerge from the war destined to be a beacon of industry, progress, and liberty for the entire world to emulate. Yet for African Americans, “the gift of freedom may prove his destruction. Still the experiment should and must be tried and the sooner it is tried the better.”

The ways in which Charles Francis Adams attempted to negotiate the problems of black freedom and “Americanism” reflected the concerns of many Union occupiers as they daily encountered the process of emancipation. Few could ignore black southerners’ natural yearnings for freedom, and many troops came to endorse the end of slavery. They believed that white slaveholding oligarchs had long tyrannized the South, dividing the nation and threatening its free-labor promise. But as Adams stated, the aftermath of emancipation proved just as troublesome as did the existence of the peculiar institution. Black freedom meant the introduction of new participants into the nation’s long-established economic and political cultures, which stressed initiative, self-reliance, and the responsibility of civic virtue. Yet what if emancipation and the rise of a black working class threatened the essence of these principles? Union soldiers asked this question repeatedly, even as they continued to endorse the destruction of the southern slave system.

Charles Enslow Calvin, a volunteer in the 77th Illinois, built on Adams’ sentiments nearly a full year after Lincoln’s Proclamation went into effect. Calvin had spent much of the war occupying various portions of Mississippi, bringing him face-to-face with the realities of slavery and emancipation. He came to hate the institution, arguing that it simply was immoral for one human to enslave another. By November 1863, while stationed near Frankfurt, Kentucky, Calvin attempted to organize his thoughts on emancipation, which had plagued him since the beginning.

38 Ibid., 132-33.
of the war. “I have been saying so much about negroes lately that I feel you may be getting the wrong idea about my views,” he wrote to his wife. “In the first place I advocate the entire abolition of slavery,” and in an allusion to the Declaration of Independence, Calvin favored “equalizing the negro with the white man so far as life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness is concerned.”

Yet Calvin hesitated in the very next sentence, pausing to reconsider the idealism of his initial statement. “I do not believe that with all the education that might be bestowed upon the African race that they could be brought on equal terms with the Anglo-Saxon race in regard to intellect.” In fact, “I do not believe in having them in the North,” nor did he advocate “putting them in some far off islands by themselves.” Calvin suggested that because enslaved blacks had for generations been native southerners, acclimated to the region’s climate, and inculcated in specific labor practices, “therefore I say keep them in [that] part of the country.” However, he believed that, as free laborers, African Americans were entitled to a wage and, as potential citizens, eligible for a proper education. Then, in the course of a single sentence, he once again altered his position. Within one generation, Calvin explained, southern blacks would be elevated above their present condition “so far that they would want to be in a country where they could have their own government and then let the United States by them some country and they would gladly go there by their own choice.”

Calvin had wandered aimlessly, searching for a consistent position. It appeared that his latter sentiment finally struck a chord on which to build his ultimate worldview. Emancipation, he explained, would allow African Americans to hone their skills, obtain an education, and appreciate the benefits of self-government. Then, “they would gladly [leave the United States]

39 Charles Enslow Calvin to wife, November 15, 1863, Charles Enslow Calvin Letterbook, 1862-1863 LOC.
40 Ibid.
and they would make room for almost five million white laborers who are now born down and trod upon in Europe.” Writing seven months later Baton Rouge, Calvin again declared, “it will not be the best policy to have [African Americans] come North among us and let them have all the rights and privileges that we as white people and a superior race do.”

Union occupiers such as Adams and Calvin believed that preservation of the Union and emancipation formed a paradoxical relationship. On the one hand, the elimination of slavery was crucial to upholding republican self-government and egalitarian free-labor ideology. Yet on the other hand, the people who benefitted most from emancipation—African Americans—were presumed unfit for, and even potentially threatened, the very institutions that defined American exceptionalism. How would black freedom integrate itself within national (white) traditions and customs? The experience of occupying the South instilled within United States soldiers a sense that their nation was rapidly changing, unaware of how the postwar Union would look. They wanted to preserve the republican ideology of the antebellum nation, yet they also came to believe that elements of southern society would illegitimatize American uniqueness.

This racial crisis, however, was not reserved only for Union soldiers’ views of African Americans. It extended also to perceptions of poor southern whites, whom the occupiers sometimes even regarded as inferior to blacks. This was, perhaps, the most ironic relationship in the entire sphere of wartime occupation. White nineteenth-century contemporaries used racial difference to demarcate society, drawing distinctions between social fitness and unfitness, equality and inequality. Yet the presence of white southerners inverted Union occupiers’ preconceived notions about race and culture. If African Americans, based on centuries of slavery and racial insubordination, were ill-equipped for the promises of republican liberty and the capitalist market, then why did white southerners appear just as unqualified?

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41 Ibid.; Charles Enslow Calvin to My Dear Wife, June 6, 1864, Calvin Letters, LOC [last quotation].
The basis of this question shocked the soldiers who, of course, also were white. And thus a similar inquiry into the fate of the Union lingered: although the war sought to preserve the nation, how could a postwar United States flourish with the inclusion of black and white southerners who, by virtue of their regional, cultural, and racial distinctiveness, threatened the very essence of American exceptionalism? This question informed the reasons for which Union soldiers detested white women who dipped snuff and acted out of the bounds of presumed female decorum, in addition to African Americans who appeared lazy and unappreciative of their liberty. Race and culture, therefore, merged within the mind of the Union soldier, creating a crisis that he had not anticipated nor that he could solve.

When they encountered black and white southerners, Union occupiers did not see only racial difference, but rather a single, unique, and depraved people. Charles Carleton Coffin, serving in the occupation of Savannah, Georgia, in 1864, considered poor white southerners to be “below the colored people in ability and force of character. They are a class from which there is little hope.” He believed that lack of aptitude deprived personal ambition, erasing any desire “to rise to a higher level of existence.” Coffin even equated the white southern dialect as “a mixture of English and African,” which he believed was the language of regression. Blaming centuries of slavery for fostering cultural inferiority, Coffin claimed that “[t]he poor whites were in bondage as well as the blacks, and to all appearance will remain so.” He concluded that Union victory in the war would not bring southern whites into the fold of American uniqueness, simply because they did not possess the attributes necessary to live in a progressive nation molded in the North’s image. “Idleness, not occupation,” he declared, “has been, and is, their normal condition. It is ingrained in their nature to despise to work. Indolence is a virtue, laziness no reproach.”

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42 Charles Carleton Coffin, *Four Years of Fighting: A Volume of Personal Observation with the Army and Navy, from the First Battle of Bull Run to the Fall of Richmond* (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1866), 432-33. See also, John
Interactions with black and white southerners, therefore, forced the occupiers to reshape their interpretations of American exceptionalism, instilling fear that the South deprived the nation of its unique character. “Everything is unlike new england,” one soldier wrote from New Orleans, “the inhabitants are all kind of some Nig.” Union soldiers thus sought refuge, trapped within a region of presumably backward and lazy people, buttressed by degenerative institutions. Everywhere they turned they encountered the opposite of their northern world. The South, they believed, had robbed its inhabitants, both black and white, of the Revolution’s promise. Personal liberty, individualism, and republican virtue, they claimed, did not exist in the land of Dixie. The experience of occupation brought common northern men into direct and perpetual contact with southerners, fueling sentiments of moral and cultural superiority while also inculcating concern for nation’s destiny. The fate of the Union hung in the balance, not merely because of slaveholding oligarchs and secession, but also because of the southern way of life and the ways in which both black and white lived. The antithesis of northern progress was seen in southern regression.

Union soldiers understood, therefore, that the crucible of war had to remake the South in the northern image. Yet the experience of occupation, defined by its restrictive and static character, forced countless soldiers to remain in fixed positions, largely prevented from contributing to the war effort. Union occupiers thus exhibited a keen awareness and comprehension of what their particular service meant and constantly sought to define the state of their current positions within the occupied Confederacy. Yankee soldiers viewed military


Sam to Danice, February 28, 1863, Sam (Union Soldier) Letter, MSS 3666, LLMVC, LSU [quotation]; Rankin M. McPheeters to Annie McPheeters, January 11, 1864, McPheeters Family Collection, USAMHI; Hess, *Liberty, Virtue, and Progress*, 78-79.
occupation as highly dishonorable and, for a host of reasons, wanted to be removed from its presence. United States volunteers profoundly cherished the concept of honor and perpetually strove to fulfill the cultural obligations embodied by the citizen-soldier ideal. They believed that they were being deprived from engaging in the principal theaters in which the war would be settled. Northern troops accordingly worried that their static positions in occupied garrisons and absence from the major armies dishonored the sacrifices made by their comrades in arms; they yearned to participate in the central battles for the Union.

Seymour D. Thompson of 3rd Iowa Volunteers articulated the apprehensions of many northern occupiers. Assigned in 1861 initially to pacify Missouri, his unit was transferred later to Tennessee, where it participated in the battles of Shiloh and Corinth. For nearly the next two years, Thompson and his fellow soldiers guarded railroads and garrisoned major towns and cities throughout Tennessee and Mississippi. Reflecting on his current position, Thompson wondered, “[w]hat had we done to merit less than these comrades of ours? Had we failed our country in the hour of trial? Had we done so little, suffered so little, and complained so much?” Thompson acknowledged that men in the 3rd Iowa, as well as other units occupying the region, “read glowing accounts” of distant battles. However, “we almost ceased to be proud of it ourselves. A soldier would rather die than be behind in honor,” he admitted. Thompson did not merely wish to secure honor and battlefield glory for himself and his unit; he also feared that the stagnant position of occupying and securing territory dishonored the sacrifices and deaths endured by countless other Union soldiers on distant battlefields. “We began to be ashamed of ourselves,” he concluded. “We would have blushed to look our friends in the face; for who thought of us now?”

44 S. D. Thompson, *Recollections with the Third Iowa Regiment* (Cincinnati: published for the author, 1864), 186-87.
Union occupiers echoed Thompson’s attitude and longed to be transferred to other theaters and armies. The garrison ethos prompted soldiers to feel that they were physically constrained from aiding their brethren in arms. Immobility infused soldiers with a sense of helplessness, pushing some to question how history would view their particular contributions to the Union cause. Charles G. Blake, writing from Fort Lyon, Virginia, believed that he would “remain here on ordinary Garrison duty.” He then mused that the war’s “deeds of valor . . . will probably exist only in the imagination and ‘my name unknown in story.’” Henry C. Gilbert, an officer in the 19th Michigan Volunteers, explained that by remaining isolated in central Kentucky, “[w]e are only playing war.” Although the army preserved the state’s loyalty, regulating secessionist sentiment, “there has been nothing but inaction.” Other soldiers, such as P. N. Seely, believed that inaction threatened his masculinity. “I don’t want to come home,” he wrote from Baton Rouge in March 1863, “without being into a fight. a man can never be a man untill he has ben into a fight.”

In contrast to armies of occupation, the Army of the Potomac, the Union’s chief military force, held particular allure for men in occupied zones. James M. Willet of the 8th New York Heavy Artillery, which garrisoned parts of Baltimore for much of the war, acknowledged to his wife that Union soldiers in the Army of the Potomac were the nation’s “best men.” Willet drew a clear distinction in 1862 between the principal northern army and his own current position. He thus insisted that “they ought to send us forward and put a new regiment here in our place.” Nearly two years later, after the 8th New York was ordered out of Baltimore, and after fighting at the battles of Spotsylvania Court House and Cold Harbor, Willet concluded from the Petersburg

45 Charles G. Blake to unknown, April 26, 1863, Charles G. Blake Letters, JLNC; Henry C. Gilbert to My Dear Wife, November 2, 1862, Gilbert Papers, SCWC; P. N. Seely to Claria, March 31, 1863, P. N. Seely Letter, MSS 3659, LLMVC, LSU.
front, “I shall endear what service there is for me to do in the Army of the Potomac cheerfully and I hope patriotically.”

The Army of the Potomac functioned as a symbol of national purpose for Union soldiers, especially for those who remained behind lines in the Confederacy. Its character and composition designated it as the foremost institution fighting to preserve the Union, while Yankee occupiers found themselves consumed with battling guerrillas, interacting with civilians, and sitting idly in far-away Confederate communities. Oliver Willcox Norton, who originally served with the 83rd Pennsylvania Volunteers in the Army of the Potomac, enlisted as an officer in the 8th United States Colored Troops that occupied parts of Florida through the spring and summer of 1864. “Any news of special importance is simply out of the question,” he wrote from Jacksonville. “Only a few roving bands of [guerrilla] cavalry remain.” Although Union forces occupied much of Florida, “it seems to be a sort of dunce block for the government – a place where they send men good for nothing in any other place. . . . There is no pretense of an enemy,” he professed. “There are not seven hundred rebels in the state.” Norton determined that his regiment languished needlessly in the backwaters of Florida, and he feared the “demoralizing” effects on his men. “I have wished many times this summer that I was back in the Army of the Potomac,” he lamented. “We would probably knock about more there than here, but it would be to some apparent purpose and we would have the satisfaction of trying to do some good.”

Norton’s words echoed across the wartime landscape as Union occupiers idealized service in the Army of the Potomac as honorable, worthwhile, and productive. Such sentiments underscored the citizen-soldier ideal: Yankees sought to perform a defined and active service to

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46 James M. Willet to Dear Helen, November 22, 1862, and to My darling Wife, November 7, 1864, James M. Willet Correspondence, 1862-1877, NYHS.

47 Oliver Willcox Norton to Dear Mother, April 14, 1864, and to Dear Sister L, July 23, 1864, in Oliver Willcox Norton, Army Letters, 1861-1865: Being Extracts from Private Letters to Relatives and Friends from a Soldier in the Field during the Late Civil War (Chicago: O. L. Deming, 1903), 210-11, 219-22.
the nation and conclude the war in a timely manner. The stagnant milieu of occupation and the garrison ethos, however, conflicted with the perceived purposes of the major field armies.

Charles O. Musser of the 29th Iowa Volunteers embodied these themes. Occupying Helena, and Little Rock, Arkansas, for more than two years discouraged Musser, who wrote in February 1863, “I have been writing what would be called the dark side of soldiering. . . . the boys are getting so that they do not care much for anything. they are all getting tired of the war. they are in for peace in any way or form. if there is not some great movements made between this [winter] and spring, i believe one half of the army will throw down their arms and go home. i have not seen one man but what thinks the same.” Musser struggled to understand why a sizeable portion of the Union army had to remain permanently stationed in Arkansas, especially since guerrillas were their only immediate foe. “[A] few days ago,” he wrote of one incident, “they fired on some [soldiers] and Shot one poor fellow through both thighs.” Additional moments of unorganized and sporadic violence, combined with sheer boredom, forced Musser into complete ambivalence about his current position. Finally, in the summer of 1864, when news of the Overland Campaign reached Arkansas, Musser proclaimed, “I wish I could be transferred to the ‘Army of the Potomac.’ I would rather go there and run the chances of being Shot than Stay here all Summer. most of the boys would like a change of Department, and if this campaign is to be the decisive one of the war, we would like to partissipate in it.”

Union occupiers did not exhibit an idealistic or naïve characterization of the major field armies; they fully grasped the reality of high attrition rates and large causality lists. Yet their intense focus on honor led them to believe that a movement to the front would make them more productive to their nation. Thus, the Army of the Potomac’s symbolism did not function in

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48 Charles Musser to parents, [undated letter, probably February 3], 1863, to Sister Hester, April 24, 1863, and to Dear Father, June 12, 1864, in Barry Popchuck, ed., Soldier Boy: The Civil War Letters of Charles O. Musser, 29th Iowa (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1995), 25, 47, 135-36.
isolation. Rather, it served as an ideal, an outlet to feed Union soldiers’ desires for perceived usefulness within any of the North’s major armies. Although military occupation served a profound and essential objective for overall wartime strategy, Yankee troops largely failed to grasp such truth. “[D]on’t think I am tired of the service, it’s the lack of service I’m tired of,” Harry Beard assured his parents in November 1864. His regiment, the 30th Missouri Volunteers (Union), spent most of its time occupying portions of Mississippi and Arkansas, and Beard tired of the endless dearth of martial action. He reasoned that since Union forces conquered this region long ago, perhaps he should be transferred to locales in which Confederate forces were concentrated. “[I]f they would send our regiment to Sherman, to Mobile, or anywhere,” he wrote, “we would be kept busy [and] I would be better satisfied.”

Whereas some soldiers defined honor as aiding comrades in distant theaters, some Union occupiers ambitiously sought personal glory, which they believed could be occasioned only on the field of battle. The strictures of the garrison ethos made soldiers consider that the absence of grand campaigns would stymie promotion in the ranks or prevent their individual regiments from securing distinction and recognition. Frank Peck believed “I probably shall have no opportunity as an officer here in as safe as in his own parlor.” Regulating civilians inside the city and battling guerrillas in the countryside seemed to provide little opportunity for personal advancement. “I would have no more hesitation in shooting one of them who made the slightest hostile demonstration than if he were a dog,” he concluded, while acknowledging that such bloody acts would serve little purpose in the quest for promotion. Andrew Knox, of the 1st Connecticut Heavy Artillery, agreed. “There is only one drawback [to our position in northern Virginia], it seems that we were not doing anything towards bringing us to our families. Such an inactive life

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49 Harry Beard to My Dear Father, November 4, 1864, Daniel Carter Beard (1850-1941), Family Papers, 1798-1941, LOC.
does not suit me at all. I would much rather bear the hardships of an active campaign than to be
coop ed up here doing nothing. To see our other regiments going out in the front to reap honor
and glory for themselves is very discouraging to me. I want my regiment to do all it can and all it
is willing to do for the country, and gain honor and glory second to none.”

The quest for personal glory and honor fueled the debilitating feelings of uselessness that
permeated occupying soldiers’ existence behind the lines. Michigan artilleryman Luther F. Hale
anxiously wrote from Henderson, Kentucky, “Our men are [becoming] verry much dissatisfied.
The work which has been done here has been picket [and] scouting.” He further expressed great
concern about the implications of his regiment’s position: “I think I understand well what the
consequences will be if we are not [removed from the arena of occupation], our men will become
demoralised and useless to the government.” The soldiers in his command “are willing to serve
in any capassity that it may be necessary for them to in an emergency but they want to be
equipped for the service for which they enlisted, and as I have said will be of no service to the
government unless they are.” Soldiers took seriously the notions of quick and temporary, but also
directly expedient, assistance to the Union cause.

Yankee occupiers spoke explicitly of their perceived uselessness to the Union cause.
“The men are anxious to fight; to make decisive attacks that shall annihilate the foe,” wrote
Samuel Root of the 24th Massachusetts from New Bern, North Carolina. Other soldiers believed
that their patriotism and nationalistic attachments were threatened. “I do not think that we
permanently changed, without doing any thing; I should rather be marching round so as to see

50 Frank Peck to unknown, May 14, 1862, Peck Letters, Montgomery Family Correspondence, LOC; Andrew Knox
to My dear Wife, August 21, 1862, Andrew Knox Papers, Gregory A. Coco Collection, USAMHI.

51 Luther F. Hale to John Sidney Andrews, July 10, 1862, John Sidney Andrews Papers, BLUM. On the importance
of honor to Union soldiers, see Linderman, Embattled Courage, 11-15; McPherson, For Cause and Comrades, 23-
25, 77-82, 168-70; Hess, Union Soldier in Battle, 73-109.
something, & be of some benefit to my country,” wrote Adolphus P. Wolf in 1863 from Memphis, where he had been stationed for several months. Volunteers stationed in occupied zones assumed that their inactivity behind the lines constituted a failure to aid the nation. George W. Hotchkiss, who served in the 19th Connecticut, believed that “we are so comfortable situated now” in Alexandria, Virginia. “Some boddy had got to stay here and guard this city, and I dont know but it might as well be us as any boddy, but it still looks as if we wasnt doing any thing for the country.” Feelings of usefulness underscored the reasons for which soldiers wished to be transferred from zones of occupation to the front.  

The garrison ethos fomented a final problem for occupation soldiers: defining military service as a static form of labor. Although the citizen-soldier ideal required that volunteers execute that which was necessary for the nation during times of crisis, the concept of uniformed labor behind the lines was a foreign concept. Volunteers purposely, voluntarily, and temporarily left their private lives—in essence, their lives as a laborer—to fight for the Union. Yet constructing bridges, guarding railroads, fortifying towns, and engaging in fatigue duty did not conform to his cultural definitions of military service.

“I am in the railroad business again,” wrote Charles Harding Cox of the 70th Indiana Infantry, “running as Military Conductor and comdg train guard between [Nashville] and the Tenn river in Alabama.” Soldiers articulated a specific and almost uniform language that characterized their conceptions of military labor. One man wrote from Hilton Head, South Carolina, “we have to work on the wharf on loading and [un]loading vessels most of the time.”

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52 Samuel H. Root to My Affectionate Wife, November 20, 1862, Root Letters, CWMC, USAMHI; Adolphus P. Wolf to Dear Parents, February 9, 1863, Wolf Letters, CWIC, USAMHI; George W. Newcomb to My Dear Wife, Nov. 24, 1862, George W. Newcomb Letters, CWMC, USAMHI. See also Francis M. Guernsey to My Dear Fannie, August 2, 1863, item DL0301.53, Francis M. “Frank” Guernsey Letters, JLNC; and Edward Lewis Sturtevant to Dear Mary, March 8, 1863, Edward Lewis Sturtevant Letters, MSS 390, Williams Research Center, Historic New Orleans Collection, New Orleans, Louisiana.
pair of responses offered much more explicit distinctions. Benjamin C. Lincoln, who served in the 39th Massachusetts, wrote from Poolesville, Maryland, “Fred Gage . . . said a soldiers life is full of adventures and hardships. when I wrote him again I think I must have opened my eyes to the fact, that there was a great deal of time necessary to be given to drill [and work] with [the purpose] to keep up the enthusiasm and patriotism,” he explained. “[B]ut such times are great exceptions and the greater portion of the time is as void of excitement as the life of any common laborer at home.” Courtland G. Stanton similarly described that, in occupied Portsmouth, Virginia, “one has so much to do here in the city & his labor is so ill requited that I had about as [like] be in the field.” Such sentiments underscored how soldiers equated life in occupied garrisons to the forms of labor they performed at home, which further blurred the lines between private citizen and soldier.53

Although they provided an essential service to the Union war effort, the volunteer soldiers who served within occupied garrisons struggled to understand their purpose within the broader wartime landscape. By fomenting sheer boredom, interacting constantly with southern civilians, and negotiating the meanings of honor, manhood, and labor, the garrison ethos supplied a host of critical challenges to the citizen-soldier ideal. The symbolism of garrison culture operated profoundly within the Union’s war. And men who served both in and out of occupied zones were indeed aware of its significance. The garrison ethos allowed Union troops across time and space to draw particular conclusions about the “proper” role of wartime service, the republican heritage of citizen-soldiering, and their relationship to the nation at large.

53 Charles Harding Cox to My dear Sister, October 19, 1863, in “Civil War Letters of Charles Harding Cox,” 73; Charles H. Smith to Dear and loving wife, May 22, 1863, 1863, Smith Letters, CWMC, USAMHI; Benjamin C. Lincoln to My own dear Wife, March 1, 1863, Benjamin C. Papers, 1861-1865, SCWC; Courtland G. Stanton to Wife, September 26, 1863, DL0011.062, Stanton Letters, JLNC. See also William Ward Orme to wife, November 3, 1862, Illinois States Historical Library Papers, Selected Arkansas Manuscripts, 1838-1865, UA.
Occupied garrisons symbolized constrained spaces in which individual and martial freedoms were checked. Soldiers who cherished their independence as private citizens expressed disgust at the constrictions of army life in general and occupation service in particular. They contemptuously interpreted the garrison ethos as a force that limited their ability to engage in the martial requirements expected of their service. Charles W. Kennedy, of the 156th New York, was among a sizable number of troops left behind to occupy Alexandria, Louisiana, during the 1864 Red River Campaign. “It was nearly nine months since the fall of Port Hudson to the time we were ordered here,” he told his wife. “Don’t you think that we are lucky to escape so much marching and fighting?” “But to tell you the truth, when I saw the Army marching out, with drums beating and flags flying, I would have given up all my chances of rest and comfort here to go along with it. It was a splendid sight, about thirty thousand men in [grand] fighting condition fully equipped with everything necessary to make them efficient.” Kennedy instead was tasked with unloading cargo transports, building fortifications, and regulating daily affairs in Alexandria while his comrades marched off in hopes of opening the gateway to Texas and beyond.54

Samuel H. Root, who served in the 24th Massachusetts, wrote that the procedures within occupied garrisons along the South Carolina coast “tax[ed] our martial ardor abundantly to keep up with the occasion.” Root worried that constant policing of the Sea Islands, quick expeditions into the countryside, and weekly unit reviews made him and his comrades appear merely as “peaceful men in this department.” John Russell, of the 21st Illinois, agreed. “When we will move is not known,” he wrote in December 1862 after occupying Nashville for nearly three months. “[The men] begin to pine over the restrictions of camp and long for a more active life.”

Russell had fought at Corinth and Perryville and was fully accustomed to combat, yet “[t]hough I have seen enough of the horrors of the battle field to ever desire to see more of it if it was possible to avoid it . . . I am fully conscious of the dangers attending a battle but feel that I do not fear them.”

The garrison ethos was understood not only by those soldiers who served in occupied zones; troops in the field and at the front also harbored a negative perception of their comrades who were positioned in zones of occupation. “The garrison looks like holiday soldiers,” remarked Valentine C. Rudolph of the 39th Illinois about the men at Fortress Monroe, Virginia. “They have not seen such hard times as the ‘veterans’ of the field.” Union soldiers questioned with great suspicion their fellow Yankees who served behind the lines. They also interpreted garrison service as dishonorable and scoffed at the comfortable quarters in which occupation troops resided. “I think there is very little encouragement for the old troops,” wrote Alexander Adams of the 100th Pennsylvania from Kentucky. “They have always borne the heat and burdens of the day while there is troops lying around guarding places that have ever been in a fight but the more a regiment fights the more it has to do.”

Occupying soldiers were regarded as unfit, unworthy, and incapable of adequate field service. The case of the Harpers Ferry “cowards” underscores this point. Volunteers in the 111th and 126th New York rushed in 1862 to defend the nation and were first stationed at Harpers Ferry, Virginia. Arriving on the eve of Confederate General Robert E. Lee’s invasion of Maryland, these men were responsible for protecting Harpers Ferry’s vital arsenal and strategic heights. When forces under Stonewall Jackson attacked the Federal garrison, soldiers in the 111th

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55 Samuel H. Root to Dear Wife, June 12, 1863, Root Letters, CWMC, USAMHI; John Russell to Dear Sister, December 8, 1862, John Russell Letters, CWTC, USAMHI.
and 126th (among other units) panicked, fled, and ultimately surrendered to the Confederates. The Yankee troops expressed bitter humiliation, and one officer said after being taken prisoner, “Boys, we have got no country now.” After their release from southern war prisons, the New Yorkers arrived in the Army of the Potomac and were treated as second-class citizens. They were labeled as “traitors,” the “Harpers Ferry Cowards,” and “Band Box Troops,” a term that characterized their relatively easy lives in garrisons. Soldiers who had long fought and suffered on the front lines accused the New Yorkers of indolence, which they believed had been caused by the essence of garrison culture. Those men who served behind the lines would naturally flee from the enemy, battle-hardened veterans concluded. Only at Gettysburg, nearly a year later, did the New Yorkers have a chance to redeem themselves. They fought courageously both on July 2 and July 3, and both units incurred heavy causalities. Brigadier General Alexander Hays spoke for many in the Army of the Potomac when he concluded, “[t]he acts of traitors at Harper’s Ferry had not tainted their patriotism.” Likewise Major-General Winfield Scott Hancock praised the “distinguished part” played by both units. Nevertheless, the lingering effects of occupying Harpers Ferry and places like it continued to plague Union soldiers.57

The garrison ethos not only influenced the ways in which Union soldiers interpreted each other; it also functioned on a much deeper symbolic level. Yankee occupiers came to see themselves as the embodiment of a static, large, and bureaucratic army, which they viewed with great suspicion. Reared within the republican tradition that construed standing armies as a source of corruption to personal and societal liberty, Union soldiers within garrisoned zones equated the immobility of occupation with that of a standing army. The American tradition distinguished

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between the necessity of a large, but temporary wartime army and the luxury of small independent militias during times of peace. Antebellum society believed that standing armies would become unnecessarily involved in politics, divorced from the constraints of civil law, and impose a corrupting influence upon the soldiers in the ranks. Standing armies were thus viewed as institutions far removed from civilian society, displaying loyalty only to its own traditions. And because of their idle nature, standing armies were assumed to undermine the moral, honorable, and reputable characters of the soldiers who served in their ranks.\textsuperscript{58}

Antebellum distrust for standing armies was assigned primarily to moments of peace, which is why Americans were also able to deeply regard the citizen-soldier ideal. Large armies were intended to be raised provisionally only during times of great national emergency. The American Civil War, however, created a crisis within the republican tradition’s interpretation of standing armies. On the one hand, Union soldiers fully acknowledged and even relished in their voluntary service to the nation. On the other hand, they believed that that service also came with limits. The symbolism of occupation and the essence of the garrison ethos made some Union soldiers fear that, even during the midst of war, they had become integrated into the confines of a standing army.

Thus, they worried that their status as republican citizens might be dishonored, their morality degraded, and their response to war corrupted. One soldier in the 126\textsuperscript{th} Illinois Volunteers, which occupied parts of the Western theater through most of the war, wrote in 1864 from Duvall’s Bluff, Arkansas, that his comrades had become demoralized from a lack of action and thus subject to debauched behavior. Another soldier, Edward Rolfe, worried that the younger men in his regiment would be corrupted by the rampant temptations in occupied Memphis.

“[Some] of the Boys have been in the habit of playing Cards [in town] . . . and I talked to them about the Results of Card playing and the Evils attending it,” Rolfe wrote. “I know that . . . [there] are a great many Temptations and if a young man has not got some good advicers he will fall into Bad habits.”

Although the concerns voiced by McPheeters and Rolfe characterized the nature of military life in general, it is important to understand how and why soldiers believed that the static conditions of the garrison ethos accelerated their perceived detachment from the republican ethic. The principal features of wartime occupation led soldiers to believe that they might be degraded by the adverse influences of a standing army. As his unit prepared for a seven-month garrisoning of Hilton Head, South Carolina, Charles Francis Adams imagined the long-term implications of wartime occupation. He wrote in July 1862, “If we succeed in our attempt at subjugation, I see only an immense territory and a savage and ignorant populace to be held down by force, the enigma of slavery to settled by us somehow, and, most dangerous of all, a spirit of blind, revengeful fanaticism in the North.” Adams understood full well that the Confederacy must be defeated in order to preserve the Union’s democratic ideals, yet he also comprehended that both wartime and peacetime occupation held serious consequences, many of which departed greatly from the American tradition. The current conflict, he concluded, “will bankrupt the nation, jeopard all liberty by immense standing armies, debauch the morality of the nation by war, and undermine all our republican foundations to the effect of the immediate destruction of [the Confederacy and its institutions].”


Adams’s words might appear somewhat hyperbolic; however, they underscored a host of apprehensions embodied by other Union soldiers concerning the garrison ethos and long-term occupation. They feared bad discipline and the corrupting vices that accompanied life in occupied garrisons; they became anxious at the thought of adopting irregular and violent tactics against civilians; they worried about the bureaucratizing tendencies inherent within zones of occupation; and they dreaded the symbolism of participating in a standing army of occupation, even during the midst of war. “Now my quarters are in a house,” wrote Lt. C. N. Duren from Jacksonville, Florida. “What should you think Father, if a large Army were to come along through Bangor [,Maine]—and our company of noisy soldiers—or a Regt should take up Quarters in your Yard—and the officers should take up quarters in your house[.] It is awfull—War is.” Clement Abner Boughton, of the 12th Wisconsin, agreed, as he related a scene from occupied Natchez, Mississippi. Citizens could not leave the city or the lines without a pass, which he daily had to prepare. “I have to write permits to these people after they have been to the Genl or his staff & got permission to have the permits. Thare is a swarm of them in here all the time. Neither can they draw any provisions from the Commissary with out an order from Hd Qurs[;] to do this they have to take the oath [of loyalty] which a great many dislike to do. I dont think I should like to be a citizen and [be] invaded by an enemy. Martial law does not a gree with [a] free people.”

Union soldiers sensed that wartime occupation openly destabilized society, caused in large part by the army’s managerial role in the South. Although the inherent purpose of military

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61 These situations are explained in greater detail in chapters six and seven.

occupation was to maintain stability in the face of mounting chaos, the occupiers equated the symbolism of a standing army to a rise in social volatility. George H. Cadman, a volunteer in the 39th Ohio, related a series discouraging events from Memphis that exposed his ambivalence about the successes of an occupying army. “There is very little Union feeling in Memphis,” he noted. “Nothing but the bayonet keeps it loyal.” Even though he acknowledged the strict regulation of civilian behavior, he also documented widespread resistance among white southerners. Local citizens, he explained, defied oaths of allegiance and “others turning up their noses as if the very air the Yankees breathed was poisonous.” Cadman continued, explaining how one woman became so drunk and insulting, which forced picket guards to tie her to a tree until she became sober. “God forbid,” he told his wife, “that you should ever live in a country subject to military rule.” Cadman’s disillusionment stemmed, in part, from a growing anxiety about the inability of military rule to completely pacify and change the ideologies of a subjugated people.63

Although they desperately hoped to defeat the Confederacy, Union soldiers, like George Cadman, believed that they were complicit in stripping away civil law in favor of martial law. Reared in a society that cherished free institutions and civilian control, soldiers were greatly discomforted in administering the legal tasks of occupation. “We are all hard at work. And doing all sorts of business,” wrote Michigander Henry C. Gilbert from Tennessee. “You have no idea how many things there are to look after. I cant describe it to you. Just imagine our country at home with no civil authority at all & only one man to decide all sorts of questions.” Within this realm, Yankee troops struggled to divorce their identities as citizens from their obligations as occupying soldiers. When they initially enlisted, most northern volunteers did not suspect that

63 George H. Cadman to My dear Wife, June 3, 1863, George Hovey Cadman Papers, 1857-1879, Collection No. 00122, The Southern Historical Collection, Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.
their service would entail enforcing martial law and managing the growing military
bureaucracies in occupied zones. Echoing Gilbert’s sentiments, William Montague Ferry wrote from Memphis:

I’m lonesome. Want to see my wife and babies or go and visit some [family], where something besides, ‘Army’ & ‘Regulations’ & ‘Forms’ and ‘Returns’ and Commissary ‘Whiskey’ and ‘Head Quarters’ and ‘Mules’ are talked of – but here I am – in Memphis, a good office, plenty to do (that’s a blessing) nobody outside of my Clerks or employees that I care a groat about. dont make any acquaintances, and just work like a mule, get my rations regularly, so does a mule, follow the beaten track, so does a Mule, have [the] U.S. brand on my shoulders, so does a mule, get my rations regularly, so does a Mule, pull my own load along, look wise and say nothing, so does a mule, have to salute a nigger, so does a mule (or get saluted) a ‘government’ bit in my mouth, so has a mule – hope my Constitution will be ‘as it was’ after ‘this cruel war is over’ and I permitted to sit down on my own slabs and saw-logs – I’m not so well-contended here in charge of this immense Depot of supplies.64

Being far removed from the central theaters of war and operating as a static, standing military force drove occupation soldiers to question their usefulness to the cause and nation. Such personal wrestling often morphed into a loss of patriotic fervor. Harrison Soule of the 6th Michigan Infantry penned in 1863 from New Orleans, where he had been stationed for almost a year, “the soldiers [here] who are in the service of their country but whose patriotism is not quite so ardent as it was two years since . . . now they are take[n] up [only] with nigger help.” The myriad ingredients of the garrison ethos made Yankee occupiers consider whether their time would be better spent at home with their families. “[Y]ou can have no idea of the work the soldiers have done here,” Orrin S. Allen of the 112th New York informed his wife. Stationed at Suffolk, Virginia, “there are 8 or 9 forts, about 16 miles of breast work and rifle pits and thousands of acres chopped or slashed, some of it heavy timber. Our boys see nothing on either side but work, work! We are heartily tired of it, what patriotism they had is nearly crushed out of them by hard labor and useless marches. I think today if there was a good chance to desert ¾ of

64 Henry C. Gilbert to My Dear Wife, April 1, 1864, Henry C. Gilbert Papers, 1826-1864, SCWC; William Montague Ferry to Sister, January 24, 1864, William Montague Ferry Letters, 1861-1865, BLUM.
the boys in camp would leave tonight. Still I feel no such desire to get out of the service and yet rather stay here and doing nothing, I would gladly go home properly discharged.” Samuel Corliss echoed such sentiments from nearby Newport News, Virginia. “I was not obliged to enlist i wa[s]n[’]t satisfide to stay at home i wanted to come from the time the war broke out,” he wrote during the spring of 1863, “because i thought it would be of benefit to the government but i have made up my mind that it will be an imgary [sic] in a long run it has been two years since the war broke out and we hant made any head way yet that i can se it.”

The sentiments articulated by Soule, Allen, and Corliss differed greatly from the exciting days of enlistment and the rush to war. Extended periods of occupation dissipated soldiers’ patriotic attachment to the nation. However, an additional theme emerges from these men’s writings. Whereas their cultural definitions of proper wartime service might not have been met, combined with their claimed lack of patriotism, these men still yearned to contribute *something* to the cause of Union, the ultimate reason for which they volunteered. Although the garrison ethos and the challenges of wartime occupation pushed soldiers partly to lose faith in the citizen-soldier ideal and injured their patriotic rhetoric, they rarely lost sight of their nation’s principal goal: preservation of the Union. In their minds, military occupation had fundamentally altered the individual’s relationship to the citizen-soldier ideal, yet it did not cause men to be detached from the ideological foundation that prompted them to join the army in the first place. Preservation of the Union, and all that it encompassed, was much too powerful a paradigm to make Union soldiers completely abandon the cause.

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They had not enlisted to garrison and occupy towns, interact with hostile white southerners or battle guerrillas in an irregular manner, and participate in a wartime standing army, tasks that challenged their character as men, soldiers, and republican citizens. Nevertheless, they grudgingly accepted the reality of their situation and attempted to endure through the boredom, violence, and seeming dishonor of occupation service. “Our consciences will be clear of having done our duty & the northern people may feel it in time to regard us in a favorable light and patronize our receptions in part if we need time on coming home,” wrote Samuel Root from Hilton Head, South Carolina. Some soldiers tried to see how their service behind the lines served a greater good. Edward Rolfe wrote from Middle Tennessee that “I can come home knowing that I have done my Duty to my . . . Country. we are here doing more than fighting. we are holding a good place and Rail Roads for supplies to the Brave Boy[s] . . . till they get the Chance to strike a Decisive Blow.” As the war dragged on and service behind the lines became increasingly tiresome, soldiers wished to return home to their families. James Brewer, who was stationed in Little Rock with the 112th U.S.C.T., revealed in 1864 that “I can hardly express how greatly I desire it [going home]. But, at the same time, it has been my intention all along to remain in the Army until the end of this war. . . . I do not wish to be compelled to leave the Army until I can see fully and clearly that we have a country in which we can live in peace and security—and undivided country and a good government. Without these I would not live in the country.”

Ulysses S. Grant and William T. Sherman sympathized with the troubles of Union soldiers who occupied the Confederacy. Later referring to the fall of Corinth, Mississippi, in

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May 1862, Grant wrote, “The possession of Corinth by the National troops was of strategic
importance, but the victory was barren in every other particular. . . . On our side I know officers
and men . . . [who] were disappointed at the result. They could not see how the mere occupation
of places was to close the war while large and effective rebel armies existed.” Nearly two years
later, Sherman related the reasons for which wars of occupation were so difficult to wage. “It is
impossible to lay down rules,” he explained to a friend, “and I invariably leave the whole subject
to local commanders. . . . In Europe whence we derive our principles of war, wars are between
kings and rulers through hired armies, and not between peoples.”

Regardless of the endurance shown by Union occupiers, Grant and Sherman perceptively
understood that wars of occupation—the very kind of conflict into which the American Civil
War evolved—fundamentally challenged the United States’ longstanding military tradition. The
intellectual and cultural compositions of citizen-armies did not conform to the necessities of
long-term occupation, including governing hostile civilians, administering martial law, and
holding large land masses, all while enemy armies remained in the field. Union soldiers well
understood these difficulties, as did their commanding generals. The problems, though, were not
reserved exclusively for the soldiers in blue. The garrison ethos extended deep into the
Confederacy, also influencing the troops in gray.

67 Ulysses S. Grant, Grant: Memoirs and Selected Letters: Personal Memoirs of U.S. Grant / Selected Letters, 1839-
1865 (New York: Library of America), 255; William T. Sherman to Major R. M. Sawyer, January 31, 1864, in
Simpson and Berlin, eds., Sherman’s Civil War, 598.
CHAPTER FOUR

THE GARRISON ETHOS AND THE CONFEDERATE EXPERIENCE:
CONTINUITY, CHANGE, AND THE TENSIONS OF NATIONALISM

Beginning with the publication of Bell I. Wiley’s pioneering work, *The Life of Johnny Reb: The Common Soldier of the Confederacy* (1951), scholars have authored a complex and contentious literature on Confederate soldiers, focusing on motivation and the limits of national dedication and identity. Historians have long since developed myriad interpretations to recreate the lives and experiences of the countless white men who donned the southern gray. Although the past three decades have witnessed an impressive and unusually perceptive outpouring of scholarship on the Confederate soldiering experience, almost exclusive emphasis has been placed on those white southerners who served within the war’s principal campaigning armies. Most studies, however, rarely discuss the effect of war on the “other soldiers” who served behind the lines as garrison forces. In fact, historian Kenneth W. Noe recently acknowledged that many existing studies “clearly favored the men who enlisted at the beginning of the war and battled as long as they could in the so-called fighting regiments.” He thus called for a new focus on the Confederate conscripts, deserters, late enlisters, and those who served in wartime garrisons.¹

This chapter offers a textured case-study to the established literature on Confederate soldiers by addressing how those who operated as coastal garrison troops in Texas understood the purpose of their peculiar military missions.² It further serves as a useful contrast to the larger


² This chapter analyzes only those soldiers who served in Confederate units. The Texas State Troops, while important and prevalent on the coast, were technically not in service to the Confederate nation, but rather the state.
ideological and cultural problems of Union occupation, revealing broad strands of cultural continuity between Federal and Confederate soldiers, and even those who volunteered during the Mexican-American War. Although troops in service to their respective nations sometimes articulated diverging sentiments, their collective experience as garrison forces unleashed strikingly similar definitions and expectations of the citizen-soldier ideal. Those who voluntarily entered the service both in the United States and Confederacy were united more by their perceptions of the nineteenth-century American military tradition than they were divided by sectional political difference.³

Similar to the Union soldiers who garrisoned large swaths of the occupied South, Confederates on the Texas coast experienced a dearth of martial interaction with enemy forces while assigned to one of the Civil War’s distant theaters, enduring a static environment of bred boredom and inactivity. Troops stationed in garrisons that stretched from Brownsville to Sabine Pass struggled mightily to maintain cohesion and a sense of purpose. Periodic insubordination, mutinies, and generally depressed spirits characterized this military existence as men who served in coastal outfits were deprived not only of a lack of material goods, but also from a lack of inspiring and symbolic leadership.

Rather than focusing exclusively on traditional historiographical paradigms of why, and for what soldiers fought, this chapter continues an examination on how situation, circumstance, environment, and experience overlapped to inform particular cultural responses to the nature of Civil War military service.⁴ A host of broad, yet interrelated questions are therefore posed. First,  

³ For a similar argument, see Drew Scott Bledsoe, “Citizen-Officers: The Union and Confederate Volunteer Junior Officer Corps in the American Civil War, 1861-1865” (Ph.D. dissertation, Rice University, 2012), 1-11.

⁴ This approach contributes to recent scholarly trends which emphasizes the formation and evolution of culture within the ranks, instead of underscoring exclusively the motivations for enlistment or the reasons for which men remained in the military. See, for example, Charles E. Brooks, “The Social and Cultural Dynamics of Soldiering in
what were the ideological, moral, and tangible effects of war upon Confederate soldiers who rarely saw combat and were largely removed from the war’s principal events and armies? Second, how did their position and reactions to military service compare to Union occupation soldiers? What can these collective responses reveal about the nature and understanding of the nineteenth-century American citizen-soldiering tradition?

The interpretative thrust of this chapter addresses the current literature on Civil War soldiers and offers a comparison to Union occupation, while also engaging the development and existence of national identity in the Confederacy. Recent scholarship suggests that many white southerners identified themselves as Confederate citizens who were committed to the project of nation-building and accepted defeat only after their armies in the field were forced to capitulate to a more powerful foe. This argument largely displaced the old “loss of will” thesis, which posited that the Confederacy collapsed internally, long before the eventual surrender at Appomattox, because of a failure to establish a cohesive identity, civilian resistance to an overbearing government, battlefield defeats, guilt over slavery, and class conflict between elite slaveholders and yeomen. The Confederate soldiering experience converses neatly within this historiographical framework. Many scholars now conclude that, in spite of unfathomable physical hardship and battlefield defeats, Confederate troops were dedicated nationalists who

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Hood’s Texas Brigade,” Journal of Southern History 67 (August 2001): 535-72; Phillips, Diehard Rebels; Glatthaar, General Lee’s Army. McPherson, For Cause and Comrades, is a leading work on soldier motivation. 5 For a cogent summary of this historiographical debate, see Gary W. Gallagher, “Disaffection, Persistence, and Nation: Some Directions in Recent Scholarship on the Confederacy,” Civil War History 55 (September 2009): 329-53. For the purposes of this study, nationalism is defined as the “level of commitment—whether it was through sentiment, expression, action, or deed—that an individual directed toward the Confederate cause,” associated with “an intricate combination of local and state loyalties that functioned simultaneously and were fused together with adherence to the actual nation.” Identity is defined as “the inward and psychological manifestation of the multiple loyalties that Confederate nationalism required. Identity is a unique sense of one’s self combined with the characteristics that distinguish one person or group from another” (Andrew F. Lang, “Upon the Altar of Our Country: Confederate Identity, Nationalism, and Morale in Harrison County, Texas, 1860-1865,” Civil War History 55 [June 2009]: 280).
envisioned themselves as the true guarantors of an independent southern nation. Finally, how did garrison soldiers fit within this nationalistic mold when stationed in relative static isolation and prevented from marching, campaigning, and fighting in the war’s grand battles?

The Texas Gulf Coast serves as an ideal locale in which to test current scholarly theories about the Confederate soldiering experience, military occupation, and wartime nationalism. The region is normally overlooked in existing studies primarily due to the lack of any large-scale invasion. Indeed, with the exception of the brief Union incursions of Galveston in late 1862 and various other points along the coast during the winter of 1863-1864, Texans largely escaped significant influence from United States armies. Instead, small bands of Confederate forces positioned strategically along the coast experienced a unique form of military occupation: enforcing martial law, interacting with civilians, and sitting idly in garrisons, surrounded by citizens of their own nation. Thus, Texas’s coastal defenders, who enlisted to protect the gateway to the state’s interior, did not undergo the war’s grand campaigns and rarely encountered the enemy.

Although localized approaches might not be representative of the wider whole, they do allow the historian to complete an intimate and detailed study over particular dynamics that may be invisible in broader examinations. Indeed, little, if any, room has been dedicated in the current literature to Confederate garrison soldiers. This analysis can potentially reveal new insights into the expectations deeply held by nineteenth-century volunteer citizen-soldiers, the wartime influence on the southern culture of martial honor, and the noteworthy strands of continuity and difference between the experiences of Union occupation and Confederate garrisoning. While

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6 Gary W. Gallagher suggests that Robert E. Lee and the Army of Northern Virginia “functioned as the principle focus of Confederate nationalism for much of the war,” and that southerners used “Lee and his men . . . as the preeminent symbol of the Confederate struggle for independence and liberty” (Gallagher, *Confederate War*, 63, 85). See also, Blair, *Virginia’s Private War*, 56, 82, 133, 145-46, 152.
certainly not displacing, but rather complementing, current historiographical trends, this chapter can possibly point toward a more complicated understanding of military service and nationalism in the Confederacy.⁷

The first Confederate troops who populated the Texas coast were drawn, naturally, from nearby locales, but also from the state’s western communities. These volunteers collectively relished their roles as citizen-soldiers and defenders of Texas’s most important region. Scores of volunteers rushed to the coast in service to the incipient nation, and entered the military with carefully defined expectations. They unequivocally trusted that their service as civilian volunteers necessitated combat, which potentially fulfilled long-held cultural visions of battlefield glory and martial grandeur. The Texas frontier tradition, from which many of the state’s initial Civil War troops were raised, inspired quests to defend home during times of crisis. Texas’s citizen-soldier ideal long centered on the principle that, upon moments of external threat, white male citizens would voluntarily leave their private lives and serve in the military defense of the republic, state, or nation. This trait stressed the belief that men were expected to act individually and spontaneously in their voluntariness, fight aggressively against the region’s foes, and return home immediately upon a completed mission. Thus, implicit cultural qualifications for citizenship—voluntary fighting, demonstrations of physical prowess, and

masculine courage—were placed upon white males who were considered the most reliable and honorable defenders of the republic, and later the state.8

Although Texas now faced a new enemy—the Union army and navy—citizens embraced their voluntary military heritage and hurried into the ranks to withstand any potential coastal invasion. The region’s first defenders initially enjoyed high morale, born primarily out of a strong sense of Confederate nationalism. Much like their counterparts in the larger Confederate armies, these soldiers crafted their immediate wartime identity on a hatred of perceived Yankee invaders, their confidence as defenders of a slaveholding republic, and the knowledge that they protected both home and nation. And, in concert with their citizen-soldier heritage, coastal Confederates expressed their martial enthusiasm and believed that their present position required fighting and, if necessary, dying. A soldier at Galveston observed that many of his comrades wore “red or blue shirt striped [pants] with a revolver stuck to both right and left side and Bowey knife behind and in thare hand musketts shot guns riffles and all kinds of arms practicing and going through minuvers.” Similarly, Elijah Petty, who served in the Seventeenth Texas Infantry, remarked that “We are making cartridges—moulding bullets, rubbing up guns and pistols and sharpening knives for the purpose of welcoming the Lincolnites ‘with bloody hands to hospitable graves.’” He then informed his daughter that “If we fight . . . your father will be found in the front rank, let it cost what it may.” And, an officer acknowledged that his men at Indianola “will fight until there are none left to tell the story.” Troops eagerly anticipated defending the region’s strategic and economic importance to the state and Confederacy, even in spite of the woeful state

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of local defenses, and a volunteer in the Tenth Texas Infantry defiantly intended “to make a permanent stand” in his protection of the coastline.  

Hailing from locales across the state, the soldiers who served in coastal areas were similar to the countless other volunteers in the United States and Confederacy who were motivated out of a profound sense of patriotism, abhorrence of the enemy, and enthusiasm for adventure. In spite of these collective values, however, the protection of home and hearth assumed supreme importance. Whether their families resided in a coastal town or a community in the interior, Confederate defenders of the Texas coast understood that they functioned as a shield against an impending Union invasion. Some soldiers initially refused to serve elsewhere. They had established businesses and livelihoods on the coast and were unwilling to venture away from their antebellum residences. The desire to remain wedded to the coast and form a local defense of the region, however, did not function in isolation. It was instead linked with an acute loyalty to the newly established southern nation. The very essence of Confederate nationalism required multiple layers of loyalty, including ties between home and country, and coastal soldiers explicitly acknowledged this association. P. C. Woods informed his wife that he “endeavor[ed] to do my whole duty to God and my country. Constant duties I hope will make my absence from

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my family associations bearable.” Coastal Confederates, by virtue of their citizen-soldier philosophy, recognized the mutual obligation to protect their families and defend the perceived legitimacy of their new nation.¹⁰

And so they waited. The war’s first year eventually closed with nary a glimpse of Union forces. Of course, coastal Confederates witnessed occasional blockading vessels pass harmlessly along the horizon, yet they rarely drifted into contact with the soldiers who remained anxiously on the shore. Months passed, and as 1862 dawned, and the excitement of secession and military mobilization had long expired, with the prospect of a fight with the enemy growing paler by the day, some volunteers complained of monotony and menial hardship, while others even began to question the rationale of service in such remote locations. Isaiah Harlan, who served in the Tenth Texas Infantry at Fort Hebert near Galveston, wrote in February, “We are not doing anything here. . . . I have nothing to write [of interest]. I don’t know when I’ll be home.” He also grumbled that he had mastered few drill tactics and blamed his officers for being “such gofers [who] can’t learn anything, scarcely and of course the rest of us get along slowly.” Morale along the Texas Gulf Coast thus began to be shaped by the lack of martial activity, and spirits consequently plummeted. Soldiers came to feel unusually detached from the conflict and failed to comprehend their purpose in the Confederate army. Troops typically performed picket duty, strolled along the beach collecting sea shells, or stared at the distant Union blockading fleet. William B. Duncan, an officer in Spaight’s Cavalry Battalion, realized that the blockaders posed little threat, so he permitted small, secret furloughs for his men. He recognized that his command’s spirits were soured because their only visible enemy operated solely in an economic,

¹⁰ P. C. Woods to Dear Wife, March 26, 1862, P. C. Woods Letters, 32nd Texas Cavalry File, THM; Bellville Countryman, October 2, 1861; Charles David Grear, Why Texans Fought in the Civil War (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2010), 47-51; McPherson, For Cause and Comrades, 8, 13, 18-21, 27-28; Sheehan-Dean, Why Confederates Fought, 1-10; Lang, “‘Upon the Altar of Our Country,’” 278-306; David M. Potter, “The Historians’ Use of Nationalism and Vice Versa,” in Potter, The South and the Sectional Conflict (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1968), 34-84, esp. 48-49.
and not militaristic, context. Since “[n]o invasion of Texas is deemed probable,” deduced some Confederate officials, coastal soldiers might be uprooted and transferred to Tennessee and Arkansas, where southern military fortunes had endured significant reverses.\textsuperscript{11}

The obsessive nature of Confederate wartime strategy, however, generally forced soldiers to remain on the Texas coast for the totality of the war. Upon the inauguration of hostilities, President Jefferson Davis outlined his strategic vision: a cordon, or perimeter, defense in which the whole of southern territory would be protected. This approach related crucially to coastal areas, including the Texas shorelines. The inherent flaws, of course, soon became apparent. Confederate forces initially outlined the Southern border from Virginia to Texas, yet they were stretched much too thin and perilously diluted in strength. Federal armies easily penetrated these defenses and effectively neutered the cordon policy. Manpower restrictions soon forced Confederate officials to abandon some garrisons, leave others in place, and even neglect the security and welfare of the soldiers who remained in presumed backwater areas.\textsuperscript{12}

Occupying and defending the entire South simply proved illogical. Thus, in the early spring of 1862, Confederate officials advocated abandoning most points along the Gulf Coast, excluding New Orleans, Mobile, and Pensacola, and sending all available troops to fill the ranks of the armies already in the southern interior. Although policymakers considered removing troops from Texas, the state’s shorelines ultimately remained populated with a military presence.

\textsuperscript{11} Isaiah Harlan to Dear Ma, February 19, 1862, Harlan Letters, 10\textsuperscript{th} Texas Infantry File, THM; Judah P. Benjamin to Paul O. Hebert, February 24, 1862, \textit{OR}, vol. 9, p. 700; M. S. Townsend to Dear Wife, April 11, 1862, Moses Townsend Papers, Nesbitt Memorial Library Archives, Columbus, Texas; Aaron Estes to Deere wife and children, January 5, and February 14, 1862, and to Deere Brother January 29, 1862, and to Dear Friend, January 29, 1862, Estes Letters, 10\textsuperscript{th} Texas Infantry File, THM; Elijah P. Petty to Dear Margaret, April 7 and 8, 1862, in Brown, ed., \textit{Journey to Pleasant Hill}, 48; \textit{Galveston Weekly News}, April 15, November 19, and June 24 1862; Philip Caudill, \textit{Moss Bluff Rebel: A Texas Pioneer in the Civil War} (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2009), 46, 34, 40; James A. Irby \textit{Backdoor at Bagdad: The Civil War on the Rio Grande} (El Paso: Texas Western Press, 1977), 21-24.

However, a fundamental message emanated clearly from the words and actions of the Confederate high command: the war would now be waged in an offensive-defensive fashion, with almost exclusive emphasis placed on mobile field armies. These institutions quickly developed national reputations and intensely vibrant identities, which underscored the white South’s insistence on martial ardor and protection from an encroaching enemy. Nevertheless, garrison forces still served a necessary purpose to protect essential and exposed perimeter positions. Yet those soldiers, who remained behind especially in Texas, faced an unsettling ideological challenge and felt largely alienated from the central basis of their nation’s strategic vision.¹³

Hardly anything in the daily lives of coastal Confederates produced a semblance of national purpose or duty. They had entered the military with clear ambitions and cultural understandings of how victory would be achieved, based almost exclusively on fighting in grand battles. Indeed, James Black, a member of the First Texas Heavy Artillery, “dreamed last night the last Battle was fought on Galveston Island. I thought our Regiment fought with desperation driving the enemy into the Gulf. After the battle was over I thought peace was made.” Yet, after months of drilling, sitting idly, and occupying territory seemingly divorced from the center of war, the likelihood of a fight and perceived contributions to the Confederate cause greatly dissipated. “I am tired of soldiering I assure you,” wrote Thomas Jefferson League, “it is far from being the vocation I should select for a constant occupation.” Another soldier complained from Velasco, “I can see no reason for [being stationed here] myself, for now that we have got here, we can neither see or hear anything of the Yankees.” The Confederacy’s entire existence

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was born out of military events and wartime interaction. Southern soldiers, who volunteered, campaigned, and fought in the conflict’s early, major battles, viewed themselves as the principal agents in the quest for national independence. Service in distant garrisons, however, did not foment the level of morale necessary to buttress an ideological attachment to the southern nation.\textsuperscript{14}

Once it appeared likely that the war would not touch the Texas Gulf Coast, numerous regimental and company commanders articulated the depressed sentiments of their men and requested to be transferred to other theaters. Officers petitioned the state government and argued that their commands were ready to march to Richmond, Virginia, and even Washington, D. C., while others suggested that their services were not even needed on the coast. Captain A. C. McKeon acknowledged that many citizens opposed his unit leaving Galveston in the face of the Union naval blockade, but he noted that “I am satisfied that one solitary company leaving Galveston could make but little difference admitting that there is a ‘probability’ that our services ‘might’ be required here. I am anxious to be in the fight with my Company and ready to take the field.” McKeon’s appeal was not “solitary,” but rather one in a long line of similar requests. Another captain, John Miller, estimated that “the danger to our Gulf Coast has been much exaggerated.” He believed that the potential Union occupation of various coastal locales would not be detrimental to the Confederacy. Arkansas and Missouri, according to Miller, were of

\textsuperscript{14} James Black to Dear Patience, September 26, 1862, James Black Correspondence, 1860-1865, Civil War Times Illustrated Collection, United States Army Military History Institute, Carlisle Barracks, Carlisle, Pennsylvania (hereafter cited USAMHI); Thomas Jefferson League to Mary D. League, November 6, 1862, Thomas Jefferson League Papers, Galveston and Texas History Collection, Rosenberg Library, Galveston, Texas; L. D. Bradley to Little Honey, December 8, 1863, Bradley (L. D.) Papers, PCWC; “A Veteran of the Civil War gives some unpublished History: A Reminiscence,” William Melton Reminiscence, Thirteenth Texas Infantry File, THM; Cotham, Sabine Pass, 41. Gary W. Gallagher writes that Confederate soldiers “often used language highlighting national purpose when writing either just before or after battles—in the former instances predicting that the upcoming clash might bring independence nearer, in the latter either affirming that victory had advanced the Confederacy’s aspirations or, in the case of a defeat, expressing continued resolution to fight on for the Confederacy and its people.” (Gallagher, \textit{Confederate War}, 73-74).
greater strategic importance, even to Texas’s fate. Cavalry officer George W. Durant likewise admitted that his unit threatened to disband if they were not sent to theaters stretching from Arizona to Virginia. He said that his men were “panting for Glory” and were tired of waiting for any action to develop along the Texas Gulf Coast.\(^{15}\)

Soldiers’ spirited ambitions, which were once grounded in confidence and martial passion, became adversely shaped after the realization that coastal military service did not meet the perceived cultural requirements of volunteer duty. Guarding cotton at the mouth of the Brazos, laboring on fortifications at Corpus Christi, or performing constant drill exercises at Sabine Pass, prevented soldiers from comprehending fully the true meaning of their service. In their minds, they were doing too little to contribute to the war effort. William Kuykendall, a soldier in the First Texas Cavalry (Confederate) near Brownsville, considered that “[w]hen we enlisted in the service we expected to be sent to the seat of war where we would at once see active service and thus be able to prove ourselves worthy of the cause we espoused.” In fact, these sentiments extended beyond the region’s defenders. A pair of responses, divergent in tone, yet cut from the same cultural cloth, reflected the internal and ideological pressures faced by coastal Confederates. Gideon Lincecum, a prominent civilian who lived in Washington County, received a downcast letter from a soldier stationed at Virginia Point who related his displeasure with serving in a far-flung corner of the Confederacy. Lincecum expressed his genuine sympathy to the “deep-rooted disaffection at the unnecessary inactivity and useless expenditure of the time and means and strength of the common soldier.” This reaction stemmed from a long-held

\(^{15}\) A. C. McKeon to Edward Clark, July 11, 1861, Clark Papers, Box 301-37, Folder 22, TSLAC; John Miller to Edward Clark, August 4, 1861, Clark Papers, Box 301-37, Folder 25, TSLAC; George W. Durant to Edward Clark, September 3, 1861, Clark Papers, Box 301-38, Folder 29, TSLAC; See also Hal G. Runnels to Edward Clark, May 10, 1861, Clark Papers, Box 301-35, Folder 13, TSLAC; Elijah Petty to Dear Wife, January 13, 1862, in Brown, ed., *Journey to Pleasant Hill*, 36; R. R. Garland to Samuel Boyer Davis, December 6, 1861, *OR*, vol. 4, p. 153; Fitzhugh, “Saluria, Fort Esperanza, and Military Operations on the Texas Coast,” 72, fn. 13.
understanding that troops became demoralized after their expectations, based on the citizen-soldier philosophy, were not met.\textsuperscript{16}

Joseph B. Polley, who served in the Fourth Texas Infantry in Robert E. Lee’s Army of Northern Virginia, and who campaigned and fought virtually all across the eastern theater, adopted a markedly different perspective. He sartorially remarked during the summer of 1862, “who, oh who, wouldn’t gladly risk his life in arduous service on the Texas coast?” Polley judged that garrison troops were lazy and did not appreciate their quality of life and safety: “With nothing to do and a horse to do it on; with every delicacy to tempt the appetite, and with starched linen to wear; with a servant to wait on him, and, while he takes a post-prandial siesta, fan the flies off his noble brow and away from his soft, white hand; with ladies to look at and walk with, listen to and talk to, and dance with and make love to, and with only a lazy gunboat in the hazy distance to affright his heroic soul by an occasional shell.” That type of military life certainly did not meet Polley’s approval. “A stern and unaccommodating fate denies the crown to my ambition that such a service would be,” he wrote. “It is only here in Virginia I may hope to win laurels.”\textsuperscript{17} Both Lincecum’s and Polley’s expressions, although vastly different in attitude, reflected how nineteenth-century contemporaries distinguished the proper roles of citizen-soldiers. And, their statements underscored the negative pronouncements made by coastal garrison troops themselves. Active participation in war, especially one in which national implications were at stake, was required, in their minds, for those who temporarily left their private lives and volunteered their services.

\textsuperscript{16} William Kuykendall, Civil War Diary, Kuykendall Family Papers, 1821-1891, CAH; Gideon Lincecum to J. Hawkins Lewis, February 2, 1862, in Jerry Bryan Lincecum et al., eds., \textit{Gideon Lincecum’s Sword: Civil War Letters from the Texas Home Front} (Denton: University of North Texas Press, 2001), 163.

\textsuperscript{17} J. B. Polley, \textit{A Soldier’s Letters to Charming Nellie: The Correspondence of Joseph B. Polley, Hood’s Texas Brigade}, Richard B. McCaslin, ed. (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2008), 33 (quotation), 114-15, 143, 152.
Meanwhile, in July 1862, John Bankhead Magruder was relieved as a field commander in the Army of Northern Virginia. Confederate authorities then ordered him to direct the District of Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona. Magruder’s arrival in Houston in November 1862 was met with great celebration as local citizens believed “they had at last found a military leader worthy of their support.” Magruder, who was an aggressive fighter, immediately set to work on plans to recapture Galveston, which had been easily occupied by Union military forces nearly a month earlier. Considering that a soldier’s morale and subsequent national identification was affected largely by proximity to military events and activity, Galveston’s recapture by Confederate forces on January 1, 1863, resulted in soaring spirits. In one of the few instances during the war, these soldiers were called upon to engage in military activity and tactics that resembled acts undertaken by comrades in other theaters. J. H. Russell, a private in the Seventh Texas Cavalry, remarked that his captain called for volunteers to retake the city, “and I for one leaped forth with eagerness to respond to the call of my Country.” Following the successful takeover, soldiers’ sentiments and letters home soared with confidence. Coastal troops referred to the battle as a “brilliant affair,” and praised their efforts and commanders. In the battle’s immediate aftermath, soldiers were supremely confident that the city would stay in Confederate control for the rest of the war. Russell informed his wife that he and his unit captured scores of Union prisoners and commandeered much-needed provisions and guns. “But the best of all,” he concluded, “is we retaken Galveston. Run all the feds out, and now possess the City.” Another soldier bragged that “Galveston is now ours & likely to remain.” More important, though, the city’s recapture allowed soldiers to examine larger wartime events in a more positive light and even express an unequivocal commitment to sacrifice and hardship. Thus in the days following the stunning
victory, coastal Confederates celebrated Magruder because he had planned the attack, coordinated the fighting, and was unquestionably victorious.\textsuperscript{18}

Galveston’s recapture functioned as a hugely symbolic event, especially for its coastal defenders. Indeed, the Houston \textit{Telegraph} proclaimed that the soldiers had affected a great shift in the Island City: sentiments markedly improved and the region’s defenses rapidly progressed, as Galveston prepared to become “the Vicksburg of Texas.” Magruder and his men received celebrated praise from the highest levels of the Confederate government, including personal congratulations from Jefferson Davis. Sam Houston also acknowledged that Magruder “breathed new life into everything; you have illustrated to [Texas’s troops] what they can do.” Galveston’s defenders had, in their minds, reconfirmed themselves as citizen-soldiers.\textsuperscript{19}

Nevertheless, the static nature of coastal military life eventually came once more to blanket the garrisons that dotted the Texas Gulf Coast. With the exception of the stunning victory at Sabine Pass, which occurred later in 1863, sentiments quickly resembled the more characteristic tones of indifference, boredom, tedium, and monotony. Whereas troops’ spirits were lifted temporarily in Galveston, those stationed at other coastal locales seemed completely immune to the inspiring news. A soldier wrote from the fortifications at Brazoria County, the


\textsuperscript{19} “Letter from Galveston,” January 6, 1863, Houston \textit{Telegraph}; Jefferson Davis to John B. Magruder, January 28, 1863, \textit{OR}, vol. 15, p. 211; Sam Houston to John B. Magruder, January 7, 1863, \textit{OR}, vol. 15, pp. 933-34.
same day on which the battle occurred, “We are entirely isolated here . . . and you can see nothing around but soldiers. You have no idea how dull it makes it appear. We have [only] to drill, drill, drill, from 7 o’clock in the morning until 9.” And, an officer in the Eighth Texas Infantry near Lavaca admitted two days later that his men were on the verge of severe demoralization. William H. Neblett, who served in the Twentieth Texas Infantry, likewise acknowledged in April 1863, “This is an extremely monotonous and tiresome life. We do not drill any and have nothing to do but answer to our name at roll call which is done at morning and evening and [then] go on dress parade.” These collective responses marked a dearth of military responsibility and aversion to service, which led ultimately to dangerously depressed spirits.\(^{20}\)

Life inside Confederate-occupied garrisons constituted a miserable existence for both civilians and soldiers. Residents who fled Galveston, for instance, at the beginning of the war slowly started to repopulate the city, which led to a tenuous and conflicted relationship with local soldiers. Galveston was, in every sense, an occupied city: martial law was declared, civilians were subjected to the rules of war, and habeas corpus was suspended per Magruder’s authorization. Beginning in the summer of 1863 reports surfaced about troop depredations in which goods and produce were stolen from local merchants, alcohol and tobacco forcibly commandeered at gunpoint from local saloons, and, in one case, a private citizen being hanged for defending himself against a renegade soldier. Meanwhile, troops stationed in garrisons just

\(^{20}\) John Claver Brightman to Dear Brother and Sister, January 1, 1863, Brightman Papers, CAH; D. D. Shea to A. G. Dickinson, January 3, 1863, 8th Texas Infantry General File, THM; William H. Neblett to Dear Lizzie, April 9, 1863, in Erika L. Murr, ed., A Rebel Wife in Texas: The Diary and Letters of Elizabeth Scott Neblett, 1852-1864 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2001), 81-83; E. J. Wright to Dear Sister, March 20, 1863, Alley Family Papers, CAH; M. K. Hunter to Dear Mother, February 19, 1863, Hunter Family Papers, CAH; John W. Lockhart to My Dear Wife, February 14, 1863, Lockhart Papers, Rosenberg Library; “Letter from Galveston,” Houston Telegraph, June 5, 1863; Cotham, Battle on the Bay, 148, 157; Settles, Magruder, 271-72. The battle of Sabine Pass took place on September 8, 1863. The Pass was protected by Company F, First Texas Heavy Artillery, also known as the Davis Guards. For a detailed study of the engagement and its significance, see Cotham, Sabine Pass.
outside the Island City were arrested for desertion after refusing to perform routine work.

Finally, rampant drunkenness and gambling supplied the necessary ingredients for a deteriorating military life. One soldier despondently wrote from Galveston, “I can safely say I do not like [garrison] life. It is true our fate is bad and our living is hard. But that is not the worst. It is the wickedest place I ever saw. It is useless for me to try to describe what sort of wickedness is practiced here. The Devil himself can only do it.”

These, however, were relatively minor episodes. Morale among the coast’s military population finally reached its nadir by the late summer of 1863, and erupted into a series of mutinies. Dozens of soldiers at Galveston revolted against their officers, and complained incessantly about the quality and quantity of their food, which was reportedly “sour, dirty, weevil-eaten, and filled with ants and worms.” Moreover, troops were demoralized about seemingly useless drill on hot summer afternoons, late wage payments by the Confederacy, and especially the recent news of Vicksburg’s surrender. Private James Black reported in August that “There is a great deal of disaffection among the troops here. Many of them are whipped since the fall of Vicksburg.” Consequently, members of the Third Texas Infantry and First Texas Heavy Artillery refused to drill or obey their superiors’ orders. One officer attempted to quell the

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uprising by ordering other soldiers to surround the dissidents with loaded rifles and artillery pieces. Eventually, under the threat of military incarceration and even death, the mutineers hesitantly gave up. This brand of insubordination stemmed not only from soldiers’ obvious disgust with poor provisions. A. Q. Clements, a member of the Third Texas, cited another cause. He reported to his sister a month after the mutiny that he no longer could withstand “seeing the destruction of my country and the misery and destruction of war which prevails throughout the land.” The helpless realization that they could not combat the loss of Vicksburg, combined with their lack of faith in Confederate authorities to provide for their material and financial interests, forced these men to act out of their perceived alienation from both the war effort and their government.22

A pair of similar episodes occurred in September 1863. Scores of soldiers from Terrell’s Texas Cavalry Regiment deserted their unit following Magruder’s order for dismounted garrison service at Galveston. “Under this last order, quite a number of men abandoned the [unit] and returned to their homes,” reported the unit’s captain. The appellants believed that they possessed a right to active field service, which they regarded as an essential component to their enlistment. The captain added that this conviction “may be regarded as the only palliation for desertion,” rather than a pronounced disloyalty. Indeed, the soldiers judged that, unless their definitions and understandings of military service were met, their time was better spent at home with their families. Meanwhile, soldiers at Sabine Pass intended “to leave their colors and go to their homes” due to rumors of invasion by Federal forces and Indians on the northern frontier. Some

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garrison officers, who allegedly “[spoke] disparagingly of the war,” convinced these men that their position on the coast rendered their families vulnerable and defenseless.\(^{23}\)

Reports of large-scale Union incursion indeed informed soldiers of their precarious station. Coastal Confederates perceptively understood that their homes and firesides were left relatively unattended as stories increasingly drifted into their camps about enemy forces possibly entering Texas. Troops reasoned that, if the news ultimately proved accurate, there simply were too few Confederate forces to protect the coast as well as the interior. Magruder certainly found it almost impossible to establish the “relative importance of the different sections of Texas to be defended,” because of the shortage of troops to garrison all of the coast’s vital locales. The region was much too large to defend completely. Magruder eventually selected only a few strategic beachheads, including Fort Esperanza, Sabine Pass, and Galveston, which he concluded were the most important areas to secure. Men and materiel were, therefore, constantly shifted, moved, and repositioned along the coast to meet the threat of a possible Union invasion. However, this compounded the mutinous sentiments already prevalent in some units: soldiers, who knew they were outnumbered, were loath to be stationed at coastal points which they deemed secondary to the safety of their families.\(^{24}\)

The problems were exacerbated when Union Major General Nathaniel P. Banks launched his Rio Grande expedition against Texas in November 1863. Long-held fears of invasion were finally realized when United States forces landed at Brazos Santiago and proceeded northward along the coast. Banks’s campaign, which lasted until the spring of 1864, effectively occupied Brownsville, Corpus Christi, Saluria, Matagorda Island, Indianola, and Port Lavaca. The


Confederates, on the other hand, retained only Velasco, Galveston, and Sabine Pass. Combat rarely occurred as Union forces, which easily outnumbered the coastal defenders, effortlessly established their presence. Confederate Brigadier General Hamilton P. Bee, for instance, commanded less than two hundred men at Brownsville, which was hurriedly evacuated upon first sight of the Union army. Fort Brown, protecting the town, was burned resulting in mass chaos, confusion, and mutiny. Bee later argued that similar episodes would be commonplace as Confederates were forced constantly to retreat from approaching Union troops. Magruder agreed. He continued to receive reports that coastal soldiers, whose morale had declined rapidly, could not be relied upon to remain at their posts. Troops were especially concerned about the increasing number of Union beachheads that could be used to launch invasions into the interior, and thus escaped their units.25

Throughout the winter of 1863-1864, a host of coastal Confederates spread across the region responded explicitly to this disconcerting situation. Jeff Morgan informed his wife that “I have no good news . . . for every thing look very gloomy at this time.” He warned of a potential invasion as far north as Houston, from where he wrote, and admitted that he would not be able to return home any time soon. “There is a good deal of uneasiness here [in Galveston] about the Yankees,” wrote William H. Neblett, who feared that “we have not enough troops to defend the place against a strong force.” Rudolf Coreth, a soldier in the 32nd Texas Cavalry, sent to his family a series of letters which captured the “absolute demoralization” among his comrades. “Confidence in this war has now sunken very much,” he opined. “I talked yesterday with several

and they were all in accord with one another that they would rather have mules than Negroes and Confederate money.” These depressed spirits emanated from a collection of sources, many of which had defined the totality of the coastal soldiering experience. The Rio Grande expedition pushed local Confederates into a string of retreats and countermarches, which prevented outright fighting and adequate defense of the region. Because of shortages in manpower and weaponry, coastal soldiers watched as towns and garrisons fell harmlessly to Union forces.²⁶

Men who had enlisted expressly to guard the coast at all costs were now forced into capitulating or facing the Union military in pseudo-siege warfare. William Neblett again wrote from Galveston, “I think it is the intention of Gen Magruder to prepare the place for a siege . . . This gives us some uneasiness for fear that we may be cut off and starved after a long time into surrender.” Soldiers at Matagorda Bay especially endured a miserable existence as United States gunboats pounded the beachside garrison. “The Feds shell us nearly every day,” related John Claver Brightman, who recorded that infantry and cavalry units were prevented from venturing outward to resist the enemy’s presence. Edward Pye admitted to his wife that the constant shelling sapped his comrades’ morale. It was a “bloodless Campaign,” he noted, yet the men were “mighty gloomy & out of spirits—the most of them—abuse old Magruder & the war—each one considering himself the worst off of any man in The Confederacy.”²⁷

Soldiers simply felt increasingly helpless in a war that they considered to be spiraling quickly out of their control. These responses, though, did not function in isolation. Rather, they

²⁶ Jeff Morgan to Dear Wife, December 7, 1863, Jeff Morgan Letters, 35th TX Cavalry File, THM; William H. Neblett to Dear Lizzie, December 22, 1863, in Murr, ed., Rebel Wife in Texas, 254; Rudolf Coreth to family, February 4, 1864, and December 24, 1863, in Minetta A. Goyne, ed., Lone Star and Double Eagle: Civil War Letters of a German-Texas Family (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press), 118-19, 114-15; Townsend, Yankee Invasion of Texas, 62-64; Kerby, Kirby Smith’s Confederacy, 193.

were compounded, as Edward Pye acknowledged, when some coastal Confederates began to blame John B. Magruder for their deponent condition. Although Magruder had genuinely attempted to remedy the Trans-Mississippi Department’s dearth of supplies and inadequate food, his men largely had become alienated from him. The coastal Confederates under his command hailed largely from rural and frontier portions of Texas, and were noticeably troubled by Magruder’s ostentatious and urbane personality. He had a long-standing reputation for being easily tempted by the bottle, egotistical in his personal appearance, and arrogant to the point of sheer annoyance. In most situations, Magruder stubbornly carried out what he deemed to be correct, regardless of decorum, tradition, or law. Edmund Kirby Smith, the commander of the Trans-Mississippi Department, privately acknowledged that Magruder “has an utter disregard for the law” and that “no reliance [can] be placed upon his obedience to an order unless it chimed in with his own plans and fancies.” He was forced to spend most of his time in seemingly far-away Houston, where he was consumed by administrative and logistical matters for the Trans-Mississippi Department. Thus was partly the nature of garrison life: men were alienated from their commanding general’s presence, which largely eliminated the possibility to be inspired by his potential leadership and example. In reality, quite the opposite was true. Magruder was accused of turning Texas into “a great military camp, subject to military rules,” as he ordered his subordinates to shoot deserters and govern their districts with autocratic authority.28

As the war dragged on, coastal troops became further estranged from their commanding general. One soldier, H. C. Medford, complained that “My life [stationed near Galveston] is but damned little pleasure. . . . This war is beggaring me.” In the early spring of 1864, Medford, like

many of his comrades who served along the coast, again became painfully aware that their provisions and food were deteriorating. He criticized the poor quality of beef rations that he and his companions were given and wrote, “[i]t is an outrage that confederate soldiers should be compelled to live upon what we live upon.” He did not necessarily support the idea of an armed uprising, although tersely noted that “if there are any justifiable causes for such things, it is here in our army.” Men under Magruder’s command were manifestly dispirited, and believed that Confederate authorities, including Magruder himself, actively mistreated soldiers in coastal garrisons. “I am afraid our country will never prosper,” Medford concluded, “when there [is] so much fraud and perfidy practiced upon the private soldier by the functionaries of the government.”29

Indeed, the situation had grown increasingly worse, and in March 1864 the military population’s morale declined sharply, and resulted in another mutiny. Soldiers were particularly distressed because they did not believe that their superiors shared in their wants and hardships. For example, several of Galveston’s prominent socialites hosted a dinner and ball for General Magruder and his staff. News of the event traveled quickly among the various units scattered around the city, and many soldiers became outraged when they learned of the merriment and food to be enjoyed by their officers. One solider estimated that nearly 500 of his comrades stormed the house where the party was taking place, “approaching with arms, and two pieces of artillery, and preparing to raze the house to the ground.” Magruder agreed to talk with the dissidents who demanded that he not enjoy the feasts or dances while they, as well as their families at home, suffered. The general pleaded with the mob to disband on the conditions that they would receive better rations and furloughs. The soldiers reluctantly complied, and probably

assumed that Magruder would uphold his word. Later in the night, however, he and his guests enjoyed their party anyway.30

Coastal Confederates served in a static environment in which they were powerless to remedy an increasingly grim military situation, intensified by a commanding general with whom they could not associate. Soldiers had all but erased the memories of Magruder’s laudable actions during the recapture of Galveston; instead, they viewed their leader with detached skepticism. These dynamics forged within the soldiers a negative and restless mindset by which martial passions could not be explored. L. D. Bradley noted that his post at Mud Island reflected the “dullness and apathy consequent upon Garrison duty,” which encompassed serious consequences. Sentiments remained severely downcast along the coast as continued clashes between soldiers and civilians underscored the stresses of war within occupied garrisons. Discipline declined rapidly as coastal Confederates comprehended their inability to resist defeat and many departed for home, while others plundered remnants of local garrisons. Robberies, fights, and even murders were common throughout the war’s final months, weakening relations between soldiers and local civilians. Some troops in Galveston, for instance, raided local stores and saloons, stealing whatever goods that still remained in the vicinity. Even though Magruder had promised to remedy some of the soldiers’ complaints, and even expressed soaring patriotic rhetoric in hopes of rallying his command, many deserted, plundered, and evaded service between late 1864 and May 1865. Soldiers’ actions undertaken late in the war, and which

reflected their approach to the vast majority of the conflict, signified that they had little control
over the environment that dictated their actions.31

A collection of broad conclusions can be drawn from this examination of wartime
garrison culture along the Texas Gulf Coast. First, coastal Confederates initially celebrated their
positions as volunteer citizen-soldiers who functioned within the nineteenth-century republican
tradition. Temporarily suspending one’s self-interested private life and voluntarily bearing arms
in defense of home and nation operated centrally within the web of republican citizenship. Even
those who rushed to defend Texas’s coast in 1861 appreciated the immediacy of duty and
service. They recognized the critical national predicament and understood that they would return
to private life as soon as the crisis was resolved. One coastal defender wrote in November 1861,
“my Country needs my services and I would be worse than no man and unworthy . . . if I refused
or failed to respond to her call.” The process of volunteering signified the perpetuation of
republican identity, yet it did not perform in isolation. Rather, it functioned in concert with
fighting, the very act which furthered the quest of obtaining broader national objectives. Thus, as
one soldier acknowledged upon reaching Galveston, “we expect to engage in a hand to hand
struggle for the defence of our Country.”32

The evolution of garrison life, however, greatly challenged these conceptions of
republican duty and expectations of military service. Soldiers stationed in coastal outfits were

31 L. D. Bradley to Little Honey, August 25, 1864, Bradley Papers, PCWC; Galveston Weekly News, January 6,
April 27, 1864, and January 4, 1865; Hayes, History of the Island and the City of Galveston, 616, 617, 612-21;
Cotham, Battle on the Bay, 160-67; Brad R. Clampitt, “The Breakup: The Collapse of the Confederate Trans-
Mississippi Army in Texas, 1865,” Southwestern Historical Quarterly 108 (April, 2005): 499-534; Kerby, Kirby
Smith’s Confederacy, 424.

32 Ricardo A. Herrera, “Guarantors of Liberty and Republic: The American Citizen as Soldier and the Military Ethos
Radicalism of the American Revolution (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992), 104-6; Elijah P. Petty to Wife,
December 5, 1861 in Brown, ed., Journey to Pleasant Hill, 12; H. W. McLeod to Edward Clark, May 19 and 21,
1861, and E. B. Nichols to Edward Clark, July 27, 1861—both in Clark Papers, TSLAC; John Johnson to Dear
Cousin, April 25, 1861, Johnson (John) Letter, PCWC.
largely prevented from temporarily sacrificing self-interest for the sake of the nation’s cause. Confederates in the large campaigning armies and coastal units both endured unfathomable physical hardships, yet only active service, in their minds, met the necessary demands of republican duty. Indeed, early in the war, several junior officers notified the governor that their coastal units threatened to desert if they were not deployed to the front lines. A soldier in the Twentieth Texas Infantry likewise wrote, “things go on in the same uninterrupted course leaving us here as mere spectators of that great drama of the war[,] with now and then some stirring report of our going into active service[,] but so far it has all been mere idle rumor.” Personal interest soon surpassed the citizen-soldier philosophy once garrisoned Confederates realized that they were not being used to advance a national objective. In the spring of 1863 one soldier opined that, because he was not doing anything of military value, “[m]y honest opinion is that I ought to be discharged from the Confederate service,” while another acknowledged the difficulty of being “confined in camps for years when [we] should be at home to assist [our] familys & instruct [our] children.” The stagnant milieu of garrison life precluded these men from seeing beyond their poor provisions, lack of pay, and concern for home; they came to believe that their role as citizens could be used more effectively to further private and domestic interests.³³

Second and directly related, the static conditions of garrison service eliminated the opportunity to participate in the Civil War’s grand campaigns, which prevented soldiers from establishing an authentic *esprit de corps* and an ideological attachment to the Confederacy. Confederate soldiers’ exposure to the war, in the form of mobilization, campaigning and fighting, and collective sacrifice in the field, served as essential ingredients within the cauldron

of national dedication. One soldier, William Neblett, wrote just after the 1863 mutiny, “[t]here is a great amount of demoralization in the Regiments here. From what I can hear such is not the case with the troops East of the Mississippi or those who have been in active service.” His statement reflected the diverging nature of military duty experienced by Confederate soldiers. Active participation in the war stimulated a mindset among troops in the principal southern armies that they were the true guarantors of an independent Confederacy. Confederates who fought and campaigned in Virginia, Tennessee, and Georgia, maintained endurance and cultivated an enthusiasm for Confederate independence through interaction and fighting with Union forces in which battlefield victories, and even defeats, superseded revolting hardships, mass bloodshed, bad food, inclement weather, little pay, and periods of dull camp life. Those who were assigned to garrisons along the Gulf Coast, however, rarely echoed these sentiments due to uninspiring feelings of uselessness and ill worth.34

Even John B. Magruder recognized these influences when, following the 1863 Galveston mutiny, he admitted shockingly that his own soldiers would “be so unmindful of their high obligations and so unjust to themselves and the fair fame of their regiments as to exhibit a spirit of insubordination from such petty motives as dissatisfaction with their rations and indisposition to drill or a desire for furloughs.” He then declared that fellow Confederate soldiers on distant

34 Wm. H. Neblett to Dear Lizzie, August 18, 1863, in Murr, ed., Rebel Wife in Texas, 138; Diary entry, March 12, 1864, “Diary of H. C. Medford,” 132; J. Tracy Power, Lee’s Miserables: Life in the Army of Northern Virginia from the Wilderness to Appomattox (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 46; Susannah U. Bruce, “The Fierce Pride of the Texas Brigade,” Civil War Times Illustrated XLVI, No. 7 (September 2007): 32-39; Gallagher, Confederate War, 73-74; McPherson, For Cause and Comrades, 94-102; Phillips, Diehard Rebels, passim; Bertram Wyatt-Brown, Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 39; Henry M. Trueheart to Dear Tom, February 6, and April 14, 1864, in Edward B. Williams, ed., Rebel Brothers: The Civil War Letters of the Truehearts (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1995), 187; Diary entry, April 21, and May 6, 1864, McCarty (Thomas L.), Papers, 1864-65, CAH; George Lee Robertson to Dear Julia, April 15, 1864, Robertson (George Lee) Papers, 1839-69, CAH. These negative dynamics were especially pronounced in the fall of 1863 when Confederate forces along the Texas coast were forced constantly to move, retreat, and scatter portions of regiments at various locales for defense (Fitzhugh, “Saluria, Fort Esperanza, and Military Operations on the Texas Coast,” 93).
battlefields, who had suffered the same hardships as those on the coast, “will hear with incredulity, and then believe with anguish, the tale which reflects such dishonor and disgrace upon their comrades left behind to defend their beloved State.” Although Magruder’s words were characteristically flamboyant, he understood the inherent disparities between garrison and campaigning service. Nonetheless, the dynamic and static forces of garrison life were much too strong for Magruder’s men to overcome.35

Third, service in garrisons conflicted with notions of antebellum honor. The principles of defending home and hearth, or simply procuring battlefield valor induced untold numbers of northerners and southerners to volunteer, yet the idle customs of coastal military life prevented the realization of such expectations. Honor was, in many cases, a key concept that inspired enlistment, tied directly to views of courage and masculinity, and reflected the martial passions cherished by countless white southern males. At the beginning of the war, Confederate President Jefferson Davis noted to a foreign observer that “we are a military people,” which suggested the wartime volunteer’s institutional centerpiece within society. The common soldier was thus elevated onto a popular, cultural pedestal which dictated his exclusive role in defending the honor of his family, region, and nation, especially during times of immediate crisis. However, these deeply cherished traits simply could not be explored or tested within wartime garrisons. White southern men felt constricted within the static spaces of occupied zones, particularly those that were far-removed from the seat of war. With their families still exposed and the cultural

35 General Orders No. 139, August 24, 1863, OR, Ser. 1, Vol. 26, Pt. 1, p. 246. Magruder was actually unusually correct in his assessment. Jason Phillips suggests that by “enduring hunger, Confederates deepened the true military spirit of their armies. The hardships that induced some to desert united other sufferers and raised their pride. Diehards supplemented their diet and sustained their spirits by foraging together and sharing food from home.” (Phillips, Diehard Rebels, 78-79).
contract of their voluntariness supposedly unfulfilled, garrisoned Confederates endured the painful reality that they very well might fall short of their society’s expectations.\(^{36}\)

Once the prized attachments to honor were stripped away by the strictures of garrison life, soldiers often reverted to another determinant of antebellum culture: violence. Southern society especially inculcated violence as a mechanism by which to right wrongs or remedy fallen expectations. Indeed, Confederate soldiers stationed in remote garrisons who had originally enlisted to fight, and subsequently sat on their arms, watched as the war exploded around them. Their restlessness turned into petty misbehavior, then to mutiny, and ultimately into outright violence against fellow soldiers as well as civilians. Garrison culture was devoid of battlefield combat, which pushed soldiers to enact their bellicose tendencies upon their immediate surroundings. The internal pressures of garrison life thus created the dark setting in which unorganized violence flourished.\(^{37}\)

Fourth, sentiments articulated by this small group of Confederate soldiers did not function in isolation. Not only did they mirror those of Union occupation troops, but they also echoed those of countless other comrades who served in comparable positions across the

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\(^{37}\) Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, 165; Linderman, *Embattled Courage*, 35-47; John Hope Franklin, *The Militant South, 1800-1861* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1956), 4-13, 34-36, 90-91; R. Don Higginbotham, “The Martial Spirit in the Antebellum South: Some Further Speculations in a National Context,” *Journal of Southern History* 58 (February 1992): 3-26, esp. 13-15. Many Americans volunteered for the Mexican War, for example, but “were doomed to guard territory already won by their predecessors, a duty made more odious by the fact that they had signed up for an indefinite period of time.” And, [m]any discipline problems resulted from the fact that volunteers came to Mexico ready to fight and were in no mood to tolerate offense from anyone, Mexican or American. These men longed for battle, but the majority of volunteers who arrived after the initial rush to the front were destined to serve out their entire enlistments without participating in a single engagement.” Thus, disenchantment and simple boredom often turned into misbehavior and crimes committed against civilians. (Winders, *Mr. Polk’s Army*, 70-71, 86-87, 198-99.)
Confederate landscape. Stretching from Vicksburg to the South Carolina coast, and even to Virginia, the culture of garrison service simply did not conform to Confederate soldiers’ expectations, especially as the war progressed and southern battlefield fortunes became increasingly uncertain. At the outset, Confederate strategy necessitated the presence of garrisons for myriad modes of defense, yet it morphed ultimately into an emphasis on mobile field armies, on which the vast swath of the Confederate populace placed their hopes and dreams of national independence. Thus, garrison soldiers who remained behind grew alienated, both ideologically and substantively, from the cause.\textsuperscript{38}

For instance, John Thomas Lewis Preston, who resided in the Tidewater of Virginia, volunteered in the Ninth Virginia Infantry soon after the Old Dominion seceded from the Union. His unit was ordered immediately to the defenses of Norfolk and Portsmouth, where it manned coastal batteries through most of the war’s first year. Preston tried desperately to remain focused on his mission. However, many of the regiment’s companies were scattered haphazardly to ensure protection of all vulnerable points, and discipline and \textit{esprit de corps} became inevitably threatened. Preston then heard stirring news of the Confederate victory at Manassas for which he articulated mixed emotions. “Why will we continue to feel discontentment when by allotment of Providence our wishes are disappointed,” he wrote in August 1861. “I cannot read an account in the newspapers of the battle at Manassas without realizing that being so near it I should not have

\textsuperscript{38} The evolution of Confederate garrisoning strategy likely contributed to the South’s defeat in 1865. Historian Alfred Young suggests that despite recognition of the cordon strategy’s flaws, Confederate authorities still sought to retain sizeable numbers of soldiers in garrisons, namely those surrounding Charleston, South Carolina, and Richmond, Virginia. This decision, Young points out, was based on “non-military factors,” in which “popular or political issues at the expense of military matters,” informed poor decision-making on how best to use a limited pool of soldiers. Troops on the Texas coast fit this mold, because commanders such as John B. Magruder focused too much on local concerns, rather than seeing the broader wartime vision. Young’s assessment raises a pertinent hypothetical: what if garrison soldiers on the Texas coast had been transferred in full to the major Confederate armies in the East and West, consolidating strength and imposing a more formidable martial presence in the final year of the war? (Alfred Young, “Perhaps There Was a Confederate Strategy,” \textit{North and South} 14 [November 2012]: 30, 22-30).
been there. I may wish my life again and again for my country, and most willingly will I do it if duty at any time calls me, but there will occur no . . . such an opportunity to be present at a great historic battle, so successful and so decisive.”

Preston confided similar sentiments to his diary through much of his service on the Virginia coast, and believed that his duty remained unfulfilled in this seemingly remote area of the Confederacy. He “enter[ed] the service . . . so that I might share the hardships of the campaign with my countrymen, and here we find ourselves comparatively secure, in the enjoyment of many comforts, while the battle of Manassas has been fought, and while in the west our fellow soldiers are beset by foes and endangered by traitors.” Preston clearly expressed the simple reasons for his enlistment, yet he believed his station prevented the advancement of any cause. Nevertheless, Preston did not remain permanently at this post. Two years later, he found himself a member of Lewis Armistead’s Brigade, charging the Angle at Gettysburg. He survived the war. 39

The constrained spaces of occupied garrisons elicited similar responses from soldiers across the Confederacy. Even during moments in which the Union army waited nearby, garrisoned Confederates felt the limitations of their seemingly helpless positions. Willie Wingate, a volunteer who served on the South Carolina coast wrote during the summer of 1862, “I only wish I was with Stonewall Jackson,” doubtlessly alluding to the general’s famed campaign through the Shenandoah Valley only a few months prior. And, in markedly similar

tones to his comrades in Texas, Wingate sighed, “I hear nothing of our being moved. I wonder what they want us in service for, when we are doing no good at all.”

Even within besieged Vicksburg, soldiers struggled to remain optimistic despite the knowledge of impending surrender. Complaints of tedium, the careless loss of life, and periodic desertion to enemy lines plagued the Confederacy’s most formidable garrison, rendering its defenders apprehensive and hopeless. “Monotony does not convey all that the sameness of these days imposes on one,” wrote a Mississippi lieutenant in June 1863. “There is a tension of the nerves,” he explained to his wife, “an extreme anxiety like you have felt that you had to endure it long that it would craze you. I fear a spell of some nervous fever as soon as the excitement is over – and it certainly will be over soon.” Feelings of uselessness permeated his mind as he recalled the apprehension felt within the English garrison at Delhi during its siege by the Sepoys. Nevertheless, he could relate to “the joy when they heard [British General Sir Henry] Havelock coming to their rescue. Strong men shed tears and women overcome with joy fainted. I can now realize how they felt – and could we hear the guns of Genl. [Joseph E.] Johnson [sic] in the Enemies rear, it would arouse similar feelings.” He instinctively knew, however, that such hopes were merely fleeting.

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40 Willie Wingate to Mr. and Mrs. Wingate, June 9, 1862, and to My dear Pa, August 10, 1862, Wingate Family Papers, 1835-1887, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina
41 William Augustus Drennan to My dear Wife, June 9, 1863, in Matt Atkinson, ed., Lieutenant Drennan’s Letter: A Confederate Officer’s Account of the Battle of Champion Hill and the Siege of Vicksburg (Gettysburg, Pennsylvania: Thomas Publications, 2009), 41; Michael B. Ballard, Vicksburg: The Campaign that Opened the Mississippi (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 381-88. Similar aspects pertaining to the importance of campaigning, formation of esprit de corps, and sentiments garnered from soldiering in garrisons emanated across the Confederacy. For example, Evans’ South Carolina Brigade, which had fought at Second Manassas, South Mountain, Antietam, Kinston, Jackson, Petersburg, and Five Forks, performed garrison duty in the defenses of Charleston from August 1863 to April 1864. During that time, the brigade’s regiments were scattered across the coastal locales around Charleston. Reports indicated a significant decline in discipline, adherence to orders, and a generally monotonous life. The soldiers themselves complained of the drudgery of fatigue work and one commented, “Our occupation was felling timber, building corduroy roads and breastworks, at points up and down the coast. It was hard, irksome and very disagreeable work for volunteer soldiers. This kind of work all should have been done by the negro men of the South. What fools we mortals be! If the negro men had been enlisted to do all this hard manual labor, there would have been more white soldiers living at the close of the war” (DeWitt Boyd Stone, Jr., Wandering
Because they operated within an environment that was detached from republican military expectations, ultimately absent a nationalistic ideology, and removed from conceptions of antebellum honor, garrisoned Confederates were forced into an ideological ambivalence both to the southern nation and its wartime cause. The culture of coastal garrison life offers a significant departure from recent Confederate historiography which emphasizes that many white southerners possessed the will to win *despite* low morale, disgust with the Confederate government, or battlefield reverses. The vignettes and episodes cited in this chapter appear, at first glance, to be in stark contrast to this mode of inquiry. Indeed, a look at the lives and experiences of coastal Confederates opens a window onto the war’s often-forgotten underside. However, garrison soldiers did not explicitly call for the Confederacy’s demise nor yearn for a Union victory in spite of their immense distaste with military life and desperate hope for the war’s conclusion. Coastal troops became disaffected largely by uncontrollable circumstances within a style of military service that did not conform to particular cultural understandings. However, overt disloyalty rarely influenced their actions. Even during the 1863 mutinies, in which soldiers defiantly resisted their superiors and abandoned their units in droves, official reports routinely
claimed that “we do not believe those who have deserted the ranks are disloyal to the
Government or unfriendly to our cause.”

Garrisoned Confederates’ peculiar position within the broader wartime landscape forced
them into a middle-ground of ambivalence in which they reconciled their military assignments
against concerns for family and home. It simply was not worth the sacrifice, in their minds, to
perform mindless picket duty, execute seemingly pointless drill maneuvers, or combat the
unpromising character of siege warfare, when they could do nothing simultaneously to contribute
to the cause of Confederate independence. These sentiments remained fixed throughout the
totality of the war. Aaron Estes penned from Galveston in 1862 that “We are getting tired of
sitting here without a fight. It is hard that a man must stay away from his family and all, and no
fighting going on.” A soldier in the Twentieth Texas Infantry later complemented this
perspective, when he wrote during the summer of 1863, “the life we lead here could hardly be
considered camp life at all except for the galling and damnable military restraint which calls all a
man[’]s patriotism in to reconcile him to it.” Thus, the absence of consistent and traditional
engagement with Union military forces served as the centerpiece to this brand of ambivalence. A
growing chorus of prominent historians recently advised scholars to investigate the depths of
Confederate ambivalence and to move beyond the current intellectual binary which pits diehard

One of the colonels who helped suppress the 1863 Galveston mutiny wrote that it was “[t]he opinion of a large
majority of the officers being given that there was really no disloyal sentiment amongst the men,” and was rather
“an expression of disaffection at the quality of their food, and the amount of duty required of them during the
extreme hot weather, and was not prompted by any disloyalty to our cause.” (Report of Col. P. N. Luckett, August
and Row, 1979), 223; Gallagher, Confederate War, 5-12, 50, 63, 73, 75-80; Blair, Virginia’s Private War, 140-50;
Jacqueline Glass Campbell, When Sherman March North from the Sea: Resistance on the Confederate Home Front
(Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 71-74; Anne Sarah Rubin, A Shattered Nation: The Rise
and Fall of the Confederacy, 1861-1868 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 1, 50-52, 90, 127-31,
138, 146, 204; Carmichael, Last Generation, 121-78; Phillips, Diehard Rebels, 9-75; Sheehan-Dean, Why
Confederates Fought, 1-10, 132-37, 190-91.
nationalists against internal defeatists. Perhaps further investigations into the culture of Confederate military service behind the lines can promote this objective.43

Confederate soldiers, like their Union counterparts, responded to the ideological and cultural challenges of the garrison ethos in varied ways. Their sentiments revealed striking continuity between North and South, while also offering significant avenues of change, especially in regard to the problem of nationalism. Racial similarity, though, formed an overarching link between the Union and Confederate garrisoning experiences. White soldiers who donned the blue and gray responded to the garrison ethos in comparable ways because they both spoke the language of nineteenth-century republicanism, which defined the citizen-soldier tradition.

By 1863, however, the culture of garrisoning evolved to encompass a black element, creating a unique difference between the Union and Confederate experiences. As countless Union occupiers attempted to solve the dilemmas of occupation and citizen-soldiering, a new class of occupying troops emerged. The mass enlistment of black soldiers into the ranks of United States armies was one answer to the question of who, in a republican army, would serve as a backline occupation force. Rather than resolving the matter definitively, this “solution” for military occupation in the Union’s war only exacerbated the problem.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE LANGUAGE OF EMANCIPATION:
BLACK UNION SOLDIERS AND THE RACIAL CULTURE OF WARTIME OCCUPATION

Thomas Wentworth Higginson was an idealistic man. Born in 1823 and reared in the abolitionist enclave of Cambridge, Massachusetts, he subscribed wholly to the notions of social reform, emancipation, and racial equality. He embodied these beliefs with regular contributions to the Atlantic Monthly and in service during the Civil War, in which he commanded the 1st South Carolina Volunteers (Colored), the first African American regiment authorized by the United States’ government. Although he served briefly as a captain in the 51st Massachusetts Infantry, Higginson spent the bulk of his wartime experience as an officer of black troops. He arrived in the Department of the South in November 1862 and immediately began organizing a unit of formerly enslaved men. Higginson quickly learned, though, that black troops might not always be used in the front lines of battle, a situation he considered an insult to their manhood and martial worth. His soldiers had proved their ability in minor combat operations along the riverbanks of South Carolina and in the swamps of Florida, yet they were kept indefinitely behind the lines to serve as occupiers. “Of one thing I am sure,” he worried in January 1863, “that their best qualities will be wasted keeping them for garrison duty. They seem perfectly fitted for offensive operations, and especially for partisan warfare, they have so much dash and such abundant resources, combined with such Indian-like knowledge of the country and its ways.”

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Several months later, Higginson confronted another challenging circumstance: the intermingling of black and white Union occupation troops at Jacksonville, Florida. “It was the first time in the war,” he surmised, “that white and black soldiers had served together on regular duty.” Higginson anticipated the tensions that might naturally arise from such a situation. “[T]he first twelve hours of this mixed command were to me a more anxious period than any outward alarms had created.” He even hoped that his soldiers would be allowed to resume campaigning against local guerrilla bands, and he desired “[t]o take posts, and then let white troops garrison them,—that is my programme.” At one point, a group of white scouts located a nearby rebel encampment, which the 1st South Carolina was ordered to attack. The white soldiers were brought back despite “the appeals of [their] own eager officers.” “Poor fellows!” Higginson exclaimed, “I never shall forget the longing eyes they cast on us, as we marched forth to the field of glory, from which they were debarred.”

Higginson and his soldiers were later transferred to Beaufort, South Carolina, which they occupied from March 1863 to January 1864. The Massachusetts colonel remembered that his men enjoyed their time in Beaufort, primarily because they had been born into slavery on nearby plantations but now served as free men in an army of liberation. “It was the only military service [provost-guard duty] which they had ever shared within the town, and it moreover gave a sense of self-respect to be keeping the peace of their own streets,” Higginson recalled after the war. The men embraced their freedom and displayed a sense of pride while wearing the Union blue. Higginson relished the sight of his soldiers and welcomed the sense of independence that they exuded. Yet he remained concerned. Higginson came to understand that, although his black soldiers had performed admirably in the face of the enemy, white military culture largely

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mandated that black troops remain behind the lines as a garrison force. Higginson wrote that the black soldering experience was distinguished by “an undue share of fatigue duty, which is not only exhausting but demoralizing to a soldier.” Nevertheless, he sought to define the African American soldier’s role in positive terms. “The operations on the South Atlantic coast, which long seemed a merely subordinate and incidental part of the great contest,” he argued, “proved to be one of the final pivots on which it turned.” Higginson suggested that Sherman’s famed March to the Sea never would have occurred if the “Department of the South, when he reached it, [had not been] held exclusively by colored troops.”

Although Thomas Wentworth Higginson expressed idealistic impressions and unceasing dedication to one of the Civil War’s great experiments—the Union’s enlistment of African American soldiers—he regretted the limited military role allowed black soldiers. Higginson’s experiences from Jacksonville to Beaufort revealed that he was acutely aware of a particular cultural concept that attempted to check, and then subordinate, black soldiering. To counter this impulse, he always attempted to move his troops to the front lines of combat; he purposely sought to relegate white soldiers to occupied garrisons; and he endeavored to elevate black soldiers’ contributions alongside the war’s principal events. In short, Higginson’s rhetoric and actions revealed how the entrance of black soldiers into the Union’s war unleashed an explicit racial tension onto the fabric of wartime occupation. Higginson struggled to lead his troops in the face of a broad cultural assumption among whites that African American soldiers should be used primarily as backline garrison forces. Black troops did mostly serve in this role, but, as

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3 Ibid., 178 [first quotation], 203 [second, third, and fourth quotations].
Higginson desired, they often sought active combat responsibilities so they could feel they were earning their freedom and right to citizenship.4

Higginson’s Civil War was waged not only against the Confederacy, but also against the language of emancipation and the white cultural assumptions that attempted to define the “proper” wartime role for African American soldiers. As Union armies swept forward and occupied greater portions of the Confederate South, increasing numbers of troops were required to hold the vast swaths of enemy territory. By 1863, policy makers, military commanders, and soldiers all recognized the crisis inherent in the United States’ war of occupation: too few troops existed to remain posted perpetually in conquered regions. Simultaneously, emancipation emerged as a major weapon in the War for the Union, providing a solution, in part, to the manpower problem. In accordance with the existing nature of wartime occupation, emancipation and the enlistment of thousands of African American soldiers became defined by the explicit constraints of the garrison ethos. Higginson knew this, and he despised it. He represented the distinct minority of Americans who believed that black soldiers were equal to their white counterparts and should be treated accordingly. Conversely, most white society believed that newly enlisted African American troops should be segregated along the lines of race and service; garrisoning provided the perfect avenue for delineating those distinctions.

The white Union soldier’s negative response to wartime occupation helped dictate the course by which emancipation and black soldiering would be introduced to American society. The ideological and cultural challenges posed by wartime occupation affected Union soldiers in a host of profound ways. The garrison ethos spawned frustration and evoked myriad responses

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4 For a recent interpretation on the relationship of citizenship to black battlefield contributions, see Carole Emberton, “‘Only Murder Makes Men’: Reconsidering the Black Military Experience,” *Journal of the Civil War Era* 2 (September 2012): 368-93;
from the occupiers, who expressed concern about their status as honorable men, republican citizen-soldiers, and adequate defenders of the nation. Even as they struggled with occupation-related trials that they worried would not allow them to meet the republican citizen-soldier ideal, occupiers still remained focused on the ultimate reason for which they enlisted: preservation of the Union. Yet, Union occupiers remained troubled throughout the war about the nature of their duties and the conflict inherent within garrisons. They feared that their service in occupied zones was detached from the broader purposes of the war, and they viewed military occupation as secondary, and even unrelated, to the principal reasons for which they volunteered.\(^5\)

It was within this ideological environment that the seeds of black soldiering, in part, were planted. As military occupation grew to encompass more and more of the conflict, prominent members of American society embraced white soldiers’ grievances and worries about garrison culture. President Abraham Lincoln, other policy makers, high-ranking military authorities, and white soldiers together attempted to solve the crisis of wartime occupation through the use of black soldiers. The Emancipation Proclamation in particular offered one of the first official policy pronouncements about black troops, yet it did so according to white America’s cultural definitions of volunteer military service. Lincoln crafted the language of emancipation to address white soldiers’ complaints about the garrison ethos, thereby weaving a distinct racial component into the web of wartime occupation. Although some African American soldiers defied the limits of emancipation and proved that they would fight and die equally and bravely alongside white men, the vast majority of black troops were relegated behind the lines in garrison units. Emancipation and black soldiering, as envisioned by the white wartime generation, were limited by distinctions between “genuine” citizen-soldiers and “second-class” auxiliary forces. By 1863, garrisoning no longer could be defined exclusively by white grievance; it now included a distinct

\(^5\) See Chapter 3 for a detailed explanation of the garrison ethos.
black element. The language of emancipation assigned African American soldiers to garrison duty in order to free white troops from such service so they—white soldiers—could participate in the central and decisive theaters of the war, thus fulfilling the requirements of the citizen-soldier ideal.

Emancipation and black military service have received expansive scholarly treatment; these twin objectives are now integrated centrally into any serious study of the War for the Union. The current literature largely emphasizes black troops’ heroic battlefield performances at Milliken’s Bend, Port Hudson, Fort Wagner, the Crater, and Nashville, as well as the expanded political struggles to obtain equal pay and dignified military treatment. Historians wisely position these events at the heart of many narratives, mainly because African American soldiers’ experiences explicitly undermined the wartime generation’s racist assumptions that blacks were too docile, cowardly, and unwilling to engage in combat. Scholars have thus successfully elevated the black military experience to its rightful place in history, which underscores the importance of black agency in forcing fundamental change. In short, the literature proves that black troops were not merely secondary pawns within an exclusively white struggle.6

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But in telling the heroic story of black troops during the Civil War, historians sometimes overlook the relationships of the garrison ethos and occupation to emancipation and race. It is thus necessary to refocus the interpretive lens onto the ways in which white society placed limits on black soldiering. From the issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation through the end of the war and into post-bellum occupation, black soldiers were mostly intended to remain behind the lines primarily as a garrison presence. This assumption should be taken seriously and studied on its own terms. Indeed, the vast majority of United States Colored Troops (USCT) regiments never saw formal combat; rather, they garrisoned important and strategic locales throughout the Confederacy, thus fulfilling their military roles as assigned by white military culture. There is no question as to the significance, both tangible and symbolic, of black soldiers’ enlistments and battlefield contributions. Yet moments of martial glory were exceptions to the broader culture of black military service.\(^7\)

United States armies, and the citizen-soldiers who populated their ranks, faced a crisis that they could not easily resolve. On the one hand, white northern males volunteered in huge numbers, believing in the citizen-soldier ideal and their obligation to serve. Garrisoning and indefinite occupation simply did not conform to their cultural expectations of quick, active service. As Union armies penetrated into the Confederacy and droves of enslaved people actively escaped to freedom, civilian and military authorities correctly determined that the enlistment of African American soldiers could provide the additional manpower needed to crush the rebellion. Southern and northern black men poured into the Union army and, by war’s end, composed about 10 percent of all United States forces. Their terms of service, however, were determined by particular factors. Race demarcated the differences between “authentic” (white) citizen-soldiers

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\(^7\) For a recent triumphal narrative that positions emancipation and black soldiering at the center of Union victory, see Eric Foner, *The Fiery Trial: Abraham Lincoln and American Slavery* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 2010), 248-55, esp. 253.
and “supplementary” (black) backline troops. White soldiers despised the challenges of garrison duty, so this unwanted assignment was forced on black soldiers. Nevertheless, African American soldiers did not passively accept such definitions. They too struggled continuously against the constraints of the garrison ethos; yet the vast majority of them were never removed from static zones of occupation.

This chapter seeks to answer a series of questions. First, how and why did numerous elements of white society—including Abraham Lincoln, policy makers, the popular press, and white soldiers—incorporate the language of occupation and garrisoning service into the language of emancipation? Second, why did white Americans genuinely praise black soldiers’ battlefield bravery and effectiveness yet simultaneously believe that the majority of USCT units should be assigned to garrisoning behind the lines? Finally, how did black troops respond to their duties as occupation soldiers? How did they interact with both white southerners and fellow Union soldiers? Most importantly, how did they characterize and challenge the negative, and oftentimes racial, connotations of the garrison ethos? How did they use occupation to their advantage, thereby fundamentally altering the structure of southern society?

White Union soldiers used negative language when characterizing their static positions in occupied zones. They had enlisted voluntarily with expectations that garrison duty, in their minds, did not permit them to meet. Thus, the Union’s war entered a moment of crisis in which too many white troops were used indefinitely to occupy the Confederacy. By 1863, moreover, many regiments’ terms of enlistment were about to expire, thousands of soldiers in the field were
absent without leave, and volunteering had slowed to a near halt. The manpower emergency required immediate attention.\(^8\)

Simultaneously, abolitionists in the North had long pleaded with President Lincoln to embrace immediate emancipation and black soldiering as principal war aims. Always the astute politician, Lincoln continually evaded the issue, and instead floated the idea of gradual, compensated emancipation, even suggesting that blacks should be colonized outside of the United States. He feared that emancipation might disrupt the Border States’ tenuous commitment to the Union, and he also worried that arming former slaves and free blacks might have a two-fold negative impact. On the one hand, in accordance with antebellum tradition, he feared a massive slave revolt; on the other, he worried that many of his own white soldiers would abandon the fight if the United States altered its war aims to encompass abolition. Early in the war, Lincoln consistently placed the concept of Union, and not emancipation, at the center of the conflict. As he wrote to Horace Greely in August 1862, “My paramount object in this struggle is to save the Union, and is not either to save or to destroy slavery. If I could save the Union without freeing any slave I would do it, and if I could save it by freeing all the slaves I would do it; and if I could save it by freeing some and leaving others alone I would also do that. What I do about slavery, and the colored race, I do because I believe it helps to save the Union.”\(^9\)

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\(^8\) The United States government authorized a conscription act in March 1863 also to address the manpower shortage in Union armies, caused by military occupation, battlefield deaths, disease, and a shortage of volunteers. See James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 600-1.

By the summer of 1862, however, Lincoln and many white northerners could no longer ignore the realities of war. Union armies in the West were bogged down in stalemate, while those in the East had suffered numerous defeats at the hands of a determined Confederate foe. Moreover, thousands of runaway populated United States military camps, forcing local commanders and politicians to recognize their presence and humanity. Runaway slaves who flocked to Union lines were considered “contraband of war” and were hired as army laborers to build fortifications, unload cargo transports, and work as teamsters. The contraband policy, first introduced in 1861 by Major General Benjamin F. Butler at Fortress Monroe, Virginia, functioned as the federal government’s initial recognition of wartime emancipation and set the precedent for military employment. As United States armies engulfed increasing areas of the rebellious South, freed blacks labored for the liberating army, which deprived the Confederacy of their services and allowed white Union troops to be repositioned elsewhere on the front lines of service.  

Faced with manpower shortages, battlefield reverses, and increasing masses of freed people within army lines, Lincoln turned to emancipation as a matter of military necessity, in hopes that it would assist his primary purpose of preserving the Union. On September 22, 1862, Lincoln issued a preliminary proclamation of emancipation that took effect on January 1, 1863. The document, which enshrined the United States’ official commitment to abolition, stated that “all persons held as slaves within any State or designated part of a State, the people whereof shall then be in rebellion against the United States, shall be then, thenceforward, and forever free.” In

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addition to its bold assertions of universal freedom, the Proclamation also invited African
American males to enlist in the military of the United States. This dramatic pronouncement
fundamentally changed the war’s complexion. No longer would the Union’s battles be waged
only by white soldiers; black men would now share in the nation’s martial struggles and solidify
their claims to citizenship with their service. 11

At first glance, Lincoln’s thoughtful call for African American troops can be interpreted
as an enlightened and even radical doctrine. Blacks had served in various military capacities
throughout the colonial and early republic periods, yet rarely were they integrated into official
government policy, and they rarely served equally with white soldiers. Early in the Civil War, a
few Union generals had attempted to raise black regiments; however, Lincoln quietly ordered
that they be disbanded. The Emancipation Proclamation, it can be argued, marked a profound
turning point in the American military tradition by officially incorporating black troops into the
ranks of United States armies. The definition of the citizen-soldier ideal, it appeared, was now
expanded and extended to those previously excluded, shattering long-established racial barriers
to military service. 12

11 “By the President of the United States: A Proclamation,” January 1, 1863, U.S. Statutes at Large, Treaties, and
Proclamations, vol. 12 (1859-1863), 1268-69 (hereafter cited as Statutes at Large). Space constraints prevent an
analysis of the entire Emancipation Proclamation. See, for example, John Hope Franklin, The Emancipation
Proclamation (New York: Doubleday, 1963); Allen C. Guelzo, Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation: The End of
Slavery in America (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2004); Harold Holzer, Edna Greene Medford, and Frank J.
Williams, The Emancipation Proclamation: Three Views (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006);
William A. Blair and Karen Fisher Younger, Lincoln’s Proclamation: Emancipation Reconsidered (Chapel Hill:
University of North Carolina Press, 2009); Gallagher, Union War, 50-53, 75-76, 79-81, 82-86, 106-9, 116-18;
Fredrickson, Big Enough to be Inconsistent, 99-103, 107, 114, 119; Herman Hattaway and Archer Jones, How the

12 Martin Binkin and Mark J. Eitelberg, Blacks and the Military (Washington, D. C.: The Brookings Institution,
University Press, 2006), 1-68; Hollandsworth, Louisiana Native Guards, 1-11; BME, 6-9. For a recent interpretation
of emancipation proclamations issues by John C. Fremont in Missouri in 1861 and David Hunter in 1862, see
Lincoln’s intentions, though, were not so idealistic, and instead reflected a conservative and limiting approach to black soldiering, the consequences of which were profound and far-reaching. Although his call for black troops encompassed only a single sentence, its symbolic and tangible effects sought to cure one of the Union war effort’s central crises. “And I further declare and make known,” the Proclamation read, “that such persons of suitable condition, will be received into the armed service of the United States to garrison forts, positions, stations, and other places, and to man vessels of all sorts in said service.” The document remained silent on all other issues pertaining to African American soldiers, yet its meaning was abundantly clear.\(^{13}\)

Lincoln, writing within the tradition of the garrison ethos, used the Emancipation Proclamation to actively divide black soldiers from white. Union troops who had long served in occupied zones and believed that they held second-class positions within the broader wartime landscape, desperately sought removal from a mode of military service that they thought contradicted the citizen-soldier ideal. While military occupation served as a central component to the Union’s war, Lincoln’s careful wording reveals that he was acutely aware of the unpopularity of garrisoning service. He was forced to determine how to incorporate black men—considered inferior by most white northerners—into the military, while accommodating the racism prevalent in the Union ranks. White Union soldiers had long been predominately hostile to the notions of emancipation and black soldiering. Lincoln’s phrasing, however, made a way for his troops to accept such revolutionary pronouncements. The term “garrison” already held intense cultural connotations, especially during a war of occupation. It now acquired an explicit racial undertone. As historian William W. Freehling writes of the Emancipation Proclamation, “‘garrisoning’

\(^{13}\) Statutes at Large, 12:1269.
leached racial equality from black soldiering, relegating blacks to guarding behind the lines while whites strode to the front.”

Lincoln’s limitation of the ways in which black soldiers would be utilized in the United States armies revealed how he empathized with the assumed contradictions between citizen-soldiering and garrison duty. For two years white Union occupiers did not hide their feelings about the constraints of garrisoning. It did not correspond, they believed, with the republican ideal of volunteer military service, to which they directly associated their identities as free men and citizens. Lincoln’s simple, inconspicuous phrasing implicitly told white soldiers that their duties as occupying forces were now complete. Newly enlisted black men, because of their supposed status as second-class persons, would now assume second-class military assignments. Although the Emancipation Proclamation loudly announced black freedom, it also limited the scope of how that freedom could be enacted within the ranks of republican citizen-armies. In this instance, race functioned as an overwhelming determinant of the citizen-soldier ideal. Lincoln envisioned that the Union’s military occupation assignments for the remainder of the Civil War would then, thenceforward, and forever be divided according to race.

Whereas Lincoln purposely couched the invitation to black soldiering within the constraints of the garrison ethos, he also operated from an established precedent of using African Americans as laborers in Union-occupied zones. A collection of three significant pieces of legislation passed at the beginning of the war helped define blacks’ military functions, sharing language that nearly mirrored that of the Emancipation Proclamation. Building on Butler’s

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14 William W. Freehling, The South vs. The South: How Anti-Confederate Southerners Shaped the Course of the Civil War (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 119. For differing analyses on the ways in which white Union soldiers understood and interpreted emancipation, see Manning, What This Cruel War Was Over, 118-19, 121, 150-55, 191-92; and Gallagher, Union War, 40-41, 72-78, 80-82, 101-6, 113-14. For a recent interpretation of Lincoln’s call for black troops, see Foner, Fiery Trial, 249-55.

15 For similar conclusions, see Ibid., 119-20.
“contraband” order, the First Confiscation Act (1861) declared that property used “in aid of the rebellion” was subject to seizure by the Union military. Contrabands were especially important “property” because they had been assisting the Confederate war effort. The Second Confiscation Act (1862) expanded this notion and announced that enslaved people who entered Union lines “shall be forever free of their servitude, and not again held as slaves.” Building on African Americans’ demonstrated capacity for self-emancipation, the Confiscation Acts underscored blacks’ willingness to shatter the structures of slavery. Once they were behind Union lines, the Militia Act (1862) authorized the president “to receive into the service of the United States, for the purpose of constructing intrenchments, or performing camp service or any other labor, or any military or naval service for which they may be found competent, persons of African descent, and such persons shall be enrolled and organized under such regulations, not inconsistent with the Constitution and laws, as the President may prescribe.”16

Lincoln used the flexible phrasing of the Militia Act to integrate the concept of garrisoning neatly within the framework of emancipation. The die was now cast. Formerly enslaved black men would be welcomed as soldiers into the Union army, but only under limits established by American military culture. The paradigm of garrisoning determined that African American soldiers would labor behind the lines, effectively neutering their claim to equality with white troops. The language of emancipation clearly defined the black role; it implicitly shaped the white role as well. The Proclamation quietly instructed white troops that they now could focus exclusively on the principal elements of the war, rather than the distractions of occupation.

Conversely, black soldiers, although they now held muskets and displayed the accoutrements of war, were directed into performing modes of labor and work strikingly reminiscent of their days as “contraband of war.”

These ideas were not lost on white northerners. Indeed, the rhetoric of Lincoln’s Proclamation built on the sentiments of one Union officer who wrote to Iowa governor Samuel J. Kirkwood in August 1862. “I hope under the confiscation and emancipation bill just passed by Congress to supply my regiment with a sufficient number of ‘contrabands’ to do all the ‘extra duty’ labor of my camp,” he suggested. “I have now sixty men on extra duty as teamsters &c. whose places could just as well be filled with niggers – We do not need a single negro in the army to fight but we could use to good advantage about one hundred & fifty with a regiment as teamsters & for making roads, chopping wood, policing the camp &c. There are enough soldiers on extra duty in the army to take Richmond or any other rebel city if they were in the ranks instead of doing negro work.” This soldier’s words expanded quite explicitly on Lincoln’s more subtle tones in the Emancipation Proclamation. The garrisoning model was used to introduce the idea of black soldiery to white troops who already recognized distinctly racial roles in the army. Yes, African American men will be soldiers, Lincoln instructed his white warriors. But they would be limited, he assured them, to supplementary forms of service, determined by race, and divorced from the citizen-soldier ideal.17

Although a few units of African American soldiers occasionally demonstrated to white society that they would fight and die, black troops still remained defined by most white Americans as the ideal occupation force. The president supplied throughout the war the intellectual structure of this supposition. Lincoln consistently described emancipation and black

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soldiering as principal military measures, which he considered crucial to Union successes. Shortly after the Emancipation Proclamation went into effect, he wrote to one of his generals, “[w]e were not succeeding—at best, were progressing too slowly—without it. . . . [W]e must also take some benefit from it, if practicable. . . . I therefore will thank you for your well considered opinion whether Fortress-Monroe, and York-Town, one or both, could not, in whole or in part, be garrisoned by colored troops, leaving the white forces now necessary at those places, to be employed elsewhere.” Lincoln further developed these sentiments when he informed Andrew Johnson, the military governor of Tennessee, that “[t]he colored population is the great available and yet unavailed of, force for restoring the Union. The bare sight of fifty thousand armed, and drilled black soldiers on the banks of the Mississippi, would end the rebellion at once.”

Integrating the language of emancipation into the garrison ethos allowed Lincoln to explain to white America how black soldiers should be used, in spite of a handful of exceptional moments in which they proved themselves on the front lines of battle. Black troops “act upon motives,” he explained to Illinois politician James C. Conkling. “If they stake their lives for us, they must be prompted by the strongest motive—even the promise of freedom. And the promise being made, must be kept.” Lincoln well understood what was at stake for African Americans: a Union victory ensured freedom, while defeat threatened a return to slavery. Although he happily received reports of black men fighting on distant fields of battle, he hesitated to rescue black Union troops from the Proclamation’s prescription of garrisoning. Lincoln wrote in the same

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18 Lincoln to Major General John A. Dix, January 14, 1863, and Lincoln to Andrew Johnson, March 26, 1863, both in CWL, 6:56, 149-50.
letter to Conkling, “I thought that whatever negroes can be got to do as soldiers, leaves just so much less for white soldiers to do, in saving the Union.”

Lincoln explained this concept in greater detail to Ulysses S. Grant, shortly after Vicksburg fell in July 1863. The president understood that the massive gains made in the Mississippi Valley might well be lost without a substantial occupation presence to guard rail lines, regulate depots, garrison strategic locales, and battle guerrillas. Moreover, he believed that white, battle-hardened veterans should be absolved of such responsibilities (which they detested) and sent to more decisive theaters. Thus Lincoln described to Grant the racial components of garrison service as he saw it. “I have no reason to doubt that you are doing what you reasonably can [to raise black regiments],” Lincoln expressed. “I believe it is a resource which, if vigorously applied now, will soon close the contest. It works doubly, weakening the enemy and strengthening us. We were not fully ripe for it until the river was opened. Now, I think at least a hundred thousand can, and ought to be rapidly organized along it’s [sic] shores, relieving all the white troops to serve elsewhere.” Lincoln’s suggestion came two months after African American soldiers played a prominent role at the battle of Milliken’s Bend in which they successfully fought off numerous Confederate advances. It was abundantly clear to any observer that black men who donned the Union blue would fight. However, the garrison ethos and its new racial arrangements were too seductive not to be exploited during the Union’s war of occupation.

Indeed, Grant responded by garrisoning portions of the Mississippi Valley with black troops. “I did not want white men to do any work that can possibly be avoided during the hot months,” he

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explained. By March 1865, 18,299 African American soldiers garrisoned various locales along
the Mississippi River.  

Throughout the war Lincoln consistently positioned race and garrisoning at the center of
military occupation. In December 1863, during his third annual message to Congress, he praised
the more than 100,000 African American men who volunteered for military service, thereby
helping destroy the institution of slavery in the Confederacy. These soldiers, Lincoln added,
give “the double advantage of taking so much labor from the insurgent cause, and supplying the
places which otherwise must be filled with so many white men.” Lincoln publically
acknowledged that his garrisoning plan, as outlined in the Emancipation Proclamation, worked
as he envisioned. By the winter of 1863-1864, though, black troops had been tried on the fields
of battle and judged with new-found respect. And the president accordingly celebrated their
efforts. “So far as tested, it is difficult to say they are not as good soldiers as any. No servile
insurrection, or tendency to violence of cruelty, has marked the measures of emancipation and
arming of the blacks.” These latter notions surprised white society and partly mollified their
concerns about African American soldiery.  

In spite of his overtures and celebration of African American combat troops’ valor,
Lincoln remained wedded to the concept of black garrisoning. He acknowledged during a private
interview in August 1864 that emancipation was perhaps crucial in determining the outcome of
the war. The enslaved people of the South, he explained, had to be used against the Confederacy
in order to supply a Union victory. He then explicitly noted how the conflict had quickly evolved

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20 Lincoln to Grant, August 9, 1863, CWL, 6:374; Grant to Henry W. Halleck, July 24, 1863, in John Y. Simon, ed.,
The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant, Volume 9, July 7-December 31, 1863 (31 vols.; Carbondale: Southern Illinois
University Press, 1982), 9:110 (hereafter cited as PUSG); Cornish, Sable Arm, 266-67; Freehling, South vs. the
South, 150-51. For black soldiers’ role at Milliken’s Bend, see Richard Lowe, “Battle on the Levee: The Fight at

into a war of occupation. The Civil War, Lincoln recognized, was not exclusively a series of encounters between two opposing armies on distant battlefields; quite the contrary. It was a struggle between two *peoples*. Occupation assumed a consequential role in guiding the war to a successful conclusion, and black soldiers, Lincoln clarified, played a central part in that quest.

“Abandon all the posts now possessed by black men[,] surrender all these advantages to the enemy,” Lincoln argued, “& we would be compelled to abandon the war in 3 weeks. We have to hold territory.” Similar to his 1863 message to Congress, Lincoln did not ignore the black “warriors of Port Hudson and Olustee,” yet he made clear that “no human power can subdue this rebellion without using the Emancipation lever as I have done.” The “emancipation lever” of which he spoke was clearly delineated in the famous Proclamation, and he rarely wavered from the document’s original intent for black soldiers.22

Various elements of American society, convinced by Lincoln’s conservative phrasing and cautious introduction of black men into United States armies, supported emancipation as a useful instrument for preserving the Union. White northerners understood that wartime abolition and black soldiering were necessary to dismantle the Confederacy and its oligarchic, slaveholding structure. Although they celebrated black soldiers’ courageous conduct on the battlefield, whites continued to associate black troops with garrisoning. How did Lincoln’s racial assumptions about garrisoning and black occupation translate into practice, and why did the American public continue to interpret African American troops as supplementary pieces in the larger tapestry of the Union war effort?23

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23 Gallagher, *Union War*, 76-77.
Union generals who led armies of occupation that stretched from New Orleans, up the Mississippi River to Vicksburg, and all the way to the South Carolina coast, largely adopted and implemented Lincoln’s garrisoning strategy. Even before the president used the Emancipation Proclamation to officially designate blacks for garrison service, some Union commanders had experimented with black troops as auxiliary forces. The first African American soldiers in New Orleans, for instance, were mustered into the army in September 1862, several months after the Crescent City surrendered. Benjamin F. Butler, who managed the city’s occupation, believed that his white soldiers were much too unfit to “stand the climate, and therefore the negroes must be freed and armed as an acclimated force.” Butler sought to go no further than using African American troops as labor battalions based on the supposition that their experiences in slavery proved that they were much more acclimatized than white troops for service in the swampy, hot marshlands of Louisiana.24

Nathaniel P. Banks, who later replaced Butler as the commander of the Department of the Gulf, was even more skeptical about the use of black troops in active combat roles. In March 1863 he authorized eighteen black regiments, which he termed the Corps d’Afrique. Banks did not intend to use these men in battle. “The Government makes use of mules, horses, uneducated and educated white men, in the defense of its institutions,” he argued. “Why should not the negro contribute whatever is in his power for the cause in which he is as deeply interested as other men? We may properly demand from him whatever service he can render.” However, he felt the need to employ two black regiments, the 1st and 3rd Louisiana Native Guards, in the assaults on Port Hudson in May 1863. The attacks were unsuccessful, yet the episode removed all doubts

about black men’s fighting ability. Although they displayed a brave martial spirit, the Corps d’Afrique units were not engaged in any further military action. Instead, black troops garrisoned New Orleans and the lower Gulf Coast for the remainder of the war.  

While Butler, Banks, and the Corps d’Afrique played significant roles in occupying portions of the Gulf, Ulysses S. Grant sought to make Lincoln’s vision of “fifty thousand armed, and drilled black soldiers on the banks of the Mississippi” a reality. In March 1863, General-in-Chief Henry W. Halleck informed Grant of the new garrisoning initiative:

[I]t is the policy of the government to use the negroes of the South so far as practicable as a military force for the defence of forts, depots, &c. If the experience of Genl Banks near New Orleans should be satisfactory, a much larger force will be organized during the coming summer; and if they can be used to hold points on the Mississippi during the sickly season, it will afford much relief to our armies. They certainly can be used with advantage as laborers, teamsters, cooks, &c. And it is the opinion of many who have examined the question without passion or prejudice, that they can be used as a military force. It certainly is good policy to use them to the very best advantage we can.  

Grant embraced the premise of black soldiering and understood its profound impact on wrecking the Confederacy. “You may rely on my carrying out any policy ordered by proper authority,” he replied to Halleck. In a letter to Lincoln a few months later, Grant acknowledged that the war had greatly changed. “I have given the subject of arming the negro my hearty support,” he proclaimed. “This, with emancipation of the negro, is the heavyest blow yet to the Confederacy. . . . [B]y arming the negro, we have added a powerful ally. They will make good soldiers and taking them from the enemy weaken him in the same proportion they strengthen us. I am therefore most decidedly in favor of pushing this policy to the enlistment of a force sufficient to hold all the South falling into our hands and to aid in capturing more.” Although he


26 Halleck to Grant, March 30, 1863, Simon, ed., PUSG, 8:93.
did not repudiate the employment of black troops in combat, Grant clearly believed that they were better fitted for service behind the lines. He could not ignore the very real black battlefield contributions, but he also could not discount white Union troops’ responses to the rigors of indefinite occupation. He thus adopted the increasingly racial language of the garrison ethos and concluded that African American troops were best suited for service along the Mississippi.27

Grant long insisted that garrisoning in the Mississippi Valley be constructed along racial lines. For example, shortly after Vicksburg fell, he was “particularly desirous of organizing a regiment of Heavy Artillerists from the negroes to garrison this place, and shall do so as soon as possible.” And, to ensure that the Valley would remain secure, Grant instructed Major General William T. Sherman in March 1864 to “[u]se the negroes, or negro troops, more particularly for guarding plantations and for the defense of the West bank of the river.” Grant remained consistent in his belief that African American soldiers served as ideal occupation forces and wrote satisfactorily one month later, “the district of Vicksburg [contains] such a large proportion of colored troops.” Grant subscribed to the garrisoning philosophy outlined in Lincoln’s Proclamation. He, like the president, understood that emancipation would be a key ingredient to Union victory.28

In short, Ulysses S. Grant dutifully complied with the president’s vision of garrisoning the Mississippi Valley with African American soldiers. This initiative, though, likely never

27 Grant to Halleck, April 19, 1863, Simon, ed., PUSG, 8:91-92; Grant to Lincoln, August 23, 1863, Grant to Halleck, July 24, 1863, Simon, ed., PUSG, 9:196-97, 110.

would have grown to fruition without the efforts of Adjutant-General Lorenzo Thomas, whom Lincoln instructed to administer the raising of black regiments. Thomas’s task was difficult. On the one hand, he had to safeguard black freedom and ensure that African American males successfully enlisted into the service. On the other hand, he had the prickly assignment of convincing white troops in the region to accept their new black military comrades. Thomas suggested that, in language that mirrored the Emancipation Proclamation, recently freed African American males “be employed with our armies as laborers and teamsters, and those who could be induced to do so, or conscripted if necessary, be mustered as soldiers.” He further suggested that “[t]he negro Regiments could give protection to these plantations [on which freed people labored for the United States military], and also operate effectively against the guerrillas. They could garrison positions, and thus additional regiments could be sent to the front.” Although modest, Thomas’s intentions were clear: black regiments would assume positions in the rear, while white soldiers moved to more “honorable” positions.29

Thomas’s efforts were successful. By the end of 1863, he effectively established twenty black regiments; fifty more were organized at the close of 1864; and, by the war’s conclusion, his efforts had raised 76,000 black troops, comprising nearly 41 percent of the total number of African American soldiers in Union armies. Black men poured into the service; Thomas now had to convince white soldiers to accept this reality. He toured all across the Mississippi Valley, met with scores of white troops, and explained how black men would be integrated into the military. In direct accordance with Lincoln’s vision, Thomas pledged that black regiments would replace white troops who would be transferred to “face the foe in the field.” “This, fellow soldiers, is the determined policy of the administration.” Thomas used the racial rhetoric of garrisoning to

29 Lorenzo Thomas to Edwin M. Stanton, April 1, 1863, BME, 489.
assuage white troops’ fears that they might be forced into inferior military positions alongside blacks. This was a language that white soldiers understood all too well, and they “greeted the concept of arming slaves with muted protest.” Most soldiers celebrated the proposition, however, out of respect and admiration for President Lincoln and in hopes that the new strategy would secure a Union victory.\footnote{OR, ser. 3, pt. 3, p. 103, pt. 4, p. 921, pt. 5, p. 124; The American Annual Cyclopaedia and Register of Important Events . . . 1863 (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1869), 26; Earl J. Hess, The Civil War in the West: Victory and Defeat from the Appalachians to the Mississippi (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 142-44; Cornish, Sable Arm, 112-20. By the end of the war, African American troops comprised nearly two-thirds of the soldiers “serving on the Mississippi River.” See OR, 48, pt. 1, pp. 1107-10. Military authorities also forced many black men into the army, so eager were they to increase manpower.}

Other generals and military commanders from across the wartime landscape integrated the garrisoning into their plans for black occupation. Even Major General David Hunter, an abolitionist who commanded United States forces at Hilton Head, South Carolina, accepted Lincoln’s premise that emancipation functioned as an ideal war measure, an additional weapon in the Union’s growing arsenal. He fully endorsed the garrisoning role for newly enlisted black soldiers and acknowledged that their service was crucial to the overall war effort. Yet he explained that race demarcated forms of volunteer service:

In the organization of this garrison force, the major-general commanding would appeal earnestly to the patriotism and common sense [sic] of the officers and men of this command, while asking that every facility be afforded to the raising of these subordinate troops, who will be of service to the country, not merely by such soldierly proficiency as they may themselves attain under the tutelage of white officers in the various details of garrison duty, but who will also, man for man and regiment for regiment, have the practical effect of doubling the white forces at the command of Government for the more active operations in the field, by releasing an equal number of white men and regiments from the weary and often pestilential, though indispensable, duty of manning the works along the Southern sea-coast.\footnote{General Orders, No. 17, Department of the South, March 6, 1863, OR, 26, pt. 1, 1020-21; Edward A. Miller, Lincoln’s Abolitionist General: The Biography of David Hunter (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1997), 99-101, 104-7, 109-15, 122, 130, 136-38, 141-45, 155-56, 159-61, 260-65.}
Whereas Butler, Banks, Grant, Thomas, and Hunter all valued the prospective utility of African American soldiering, William Tecumseh Sherman was perhaps the most virulently racist of the United States’ senior field commanders. As the Union War evolved to assimilate blacks into supplementary martial roles, Sherman believed that black men possessed no claim or ability to the privilege of volunteer soldiering. His sentiments extended much deeper than a mere belief that blacks could not fight. Sherman believed the absence of black citizenship was the main reason they should not populate volunteer armies. As late as July 1864, Sherman wrote, “It is unjust to the [white] Soldiers and Volunteers who are fighting as those who compose this army are doing to place on a par with the class of [black] recruits . . . The negro is in a transition state and is not the equal of the white man.” Sherman did acknowledge that, since his armies had helped liberate blacks from bondage, he “prefer[red] some negroes as pioneers, teamsters, cooks, and servants, others gradually to experiment in the art of the Soldier, beginning with the duties of local garrison such as we had to Memphis, Vicksburg, Natchez—Nashville and Chattanooga.” With this statement, Sherman assigned blacks to modes of military service that he considered far beneath the description of “citizen”-soldiers. These were the duties that often characterized the occupation and garrison experience, with which white soldiers had long taken issue. Whether he knew it not, Sherman touched on the central feature of emancipation and the garrisoning concept: (white) citizens, who voluntarily left their private lives to assist the nation, did not believe themselves meant to occupy and labor behind the lines. Such work should be allocated to a clearly supplementary people, even if they carried muskets and wore a blue uniform.32

Although the prospects for black soldiering, as envisioned by Abraham Lincoln and leading military commanders, assumed that African American troops would relieve white

soldiers from the constraints of occupation, events proved otherwise. Certainly scores of black regiments garrisoned behind the lines. They were accompanied, however, by white troops who continued to occupy large, conquered regions. In fact, both white and black Union troops were called upon to garrison swaths of the South, thus molding a tenuous and strained bond. White soldiers continued to express anger about their challenging positions within the garrison ethos. Emancipation was supposed to rectify this impasse, yet it only exacerbated the problem. White troops now had to negotiate the agitating contradictions between the garrisoning concept and the citizen-soldier ideal, while also confronting difficult relationships with black soldiers, whom most whites considered inferior. The philosophy of garrisoning, outlined in the Emancipation Proclamation and intended to delineate the racial differences between citizen-soldiering and supplementary service, was challenged by the mixed-race occupation presence. White occupation troops thus launched a campaign to distinguish between themselves and newly enlisted African American soldiers.

Once it became clear to white soldiers that the Union’s occupation presence would grow to encompass African American troops, white occupiers attempted to minimize black men’s possible contributions. Minos Miller, who served with the 36th Iowa Infantry, which garrisoned Helena and Little Rock, Arkansas, for nearly two years, exclaimed on January 9, 1863, “We are rejoicing to day over . . . old Abes proclamation[.] we got the news last night at 8 oclock that all the negroes was free and them that was able for servis was to be armed and set to guarding foarts. I think now the union is safe and all will be over by the forth of July. I feel like fighting now for we something to fight for. I say on to Vicksburg or any other place we are needed.” Miller took seriously the language of emancipation and interpreted it as an essential military measure and also as a method to facilitate his fulfillment of the citizen-soldier ideal. He and his
white comrades were now free, he believed, to participate in the grand, decisive campaigns of the war. Charles Hill, of the 5th Massachusetts, agreed. “The colored men here,” he explained from New Bern, North Carolina, “would make splendid soldiers and I long to see the time when they will be used . . . to hold these places in the warm months.”

It was clear that Lincoln’s phrasing catered to the sensibilities of white Union troops who believed that they, as occupiers, maintained secondary positions within the army. Myriad white soldiers willingly incorporated the language of garrisoning into the language of emancipation, even if they remained behind the lines never to be replaced by black soldiers. There existed, in their minds, a difference between black and white soldiering, regardless of whether both operated together as garrison comrades. John William DeForest, a who served at New Orleans, asked his wife if she “fanc[ied] the idea of my applying for a colonelcy of a colored regiment?” His strongly encouraged him to pursue such a promotion, “but there are some obvious serious disadvantages,” he explained. “The colored troops will probably be kept here and used to garrison unhealthy positions; they will be called on for fatigue duty, such as making roads, building bridges and draining marshes; they will be seldom put into battle, and will afford small chance of distinction.”

Charles Harding Cox, of the 70th Indiana Volunteers, built on DeForest’s themes, writing in August 1863 from Nashville, “I saw a Nigger Brigade this morning . . . clothed and armed. they made a splendid appearance (for niggers) and will probably fight. I do not like the niggers, and desire to see them all ‘put away’ at first opportunity. I do not believe it right to make soldiers of them and class & rank with our white soldiers. It makes them feel and act as our equals.”

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33 Minos Miller to Dear Mother, January 9, 1863, Minos Miller Papers, 1860-1865, UA; Charles Hill to My Very Dear Martha, April 19, 1863, DL0383, Charles Hill Letters, JLNC.

Other white soldiers were not quite as harsh, yet they remained fixed on differentiating modes of service behind the lines. “[T]hey say the Darkies are to hold this country and will do Provost Guard Duty here—among the Secesh. I am glad if this is true,” Amos S. Collins surmised from Alexandria, Louisiana. “I am tired of this Red River region and want to get away from it, if possible,” he concluded.35

Other white soldiers, who served side-by-side with African American troops in occupied garrisons, constructed meticulous arguments in hopes of differentiating the racial classifications. They believed that black soldiering meant only garrison duties: fatigue labor, provost guard, battling guerrillas, and policing towns. White occupiers argued that citizen-volunteers did not perform such auxiliary tasks; rather, military labor was defined exclusively by race. “They are getting up another regt of blacks here,” Daniel W. Sawtelle of the 8th Maine Volunteers wrote from Beaufort, South Carolina. He observed that, perhaps, African American soldiers might fight, but he also considered that it would be difficult to “make negroes fight their own masters.” Sawtelle thus concluded that “I am willing for one but I don’t want to be made a nigger of anyway. I come out here to fight not work” doing garrison duty. He articulated the diverging military roles assumed for each race. Fighting in the field, to Sawtelle and scores of other white troops, was far different from laboring behind the lines, the work for which black soldiers had been enlisted.36

Benjamin F. McIntyre, who served in the 19th Iowa Infantry, dedicated much more thought to the issue, yet he reached similar conclusions. After his regiment participated in the siege of Vicksburg, McIntyre was transferred to Port Hudson, where the occupation presence

was both black and white. “To say they had not a soldierly appearance would be doing them great injustice,” McIntyre remarked in August 1863 about the numerous African American regiments at the formidable river garrison, “and I cannot say they are not brave, for the three charges they made here in one day loosing half their number would stamp it a false hood.” Although his sentiments seemed genuine, McIntyre expanded on what he considered the proper military roles for black troops. Writing several months later from Brownsville, Texas, which the Union occupied for nearly eight months, he noted “[s]everal Corps d’Afrique regiments that came over with us have been employed in unloading vessels, assisting the Pioneers in constructing pontoon bridges, and various other arduous duties that would have compelled our own boys to have performed had no negro regiments been in the service to the government.” “They are the laborers of the Army,” he continued in April 1864, “there was daily labor for hundreds of men and which of necessity must have been performed by soldiers had not we had negroes with us.” According to McIntyre, black occupiers were soldiers merely in principle. “Streets are to be swept and cleaned daily [as well as fortifications erected] and this is work of a very disagreeable character and for one I thank the originators of the Corps d’Afrique for taking from us such labor as belong to menials.” Although McIntyre still celebrated black troops as “a fine looking set of men,” he concluded that “while our soldiers pride themselves on the nice condition of their arms, the Corps d’Afrique are proud of the condition of their picks and spades.”

Sawtelle and McIntyre both equated blacks with noncombatant garrison labor, even when they fully recognized African American soldiers’ battlefield contributions. Fighting, they concluded, was simply an exception to the black military experience. Harrison Soule, an officer

37 Diary entries, August 6 and November 6, 1863, April 9, 1864, in Nannie M. Tilley, Federals on the Frontier: The Diary of Benjamin F. McIntyre, 1862-1864 (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1963), 202, 253, 326.
in the 6th Michigan Volunteers who garrisoned portions of the Mississippi Valley, summarized this belief in 1864. “All the reports about the exploits of the colored troops their derring marches through the swamps [of southeast Louisiana] &c are no doubt true,” Soule explained to his wife, “they have no doubt performed all and possibly more than they have credit for.” Soule nevertheless concluded, in explicit terms, “A nigger makes a good enough Soldier for garrison and guard duty but for Field Service a Hundred [white] men is worth a Thousand of them.” Soule acknowledged that African American soldiers could perhaps confront guerrillas, mainly since white soldiers despised it so much. But, “they are only fit to help us in the capacity of Laborers and watchmen they can’t be trusted when there is the least danger.”

African American soldiers wore the same uniforms, carried the same muskets, and fought for the same Union. Yet the language of emancipation and the ethos of garrisoning established patterns of thought among white occupation soldiers who struggled to distinguish themselves from their black counterparts. Although it was assumed that black troops would undertake exclusive responsibility for service behind the lines, the scope of war dictated that white soldiers continue to garrison positions as they had done since the conflict began. Thus white occupiers had to manage the difficult task of differentiating their sense of self-worth from that of the African Americans alongside whom they served. The lengths to which white society went in struggling to determine and define the scope of black soldiering might suggest that black troops were passive actors in the larger drama of wartime occupation. This was not the case. How did

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38 Harrison Soule to Dear Father, January 26, 1864, Harrison Soule Papers, 1832-1922, BL. See also William A. Sabin to Friend Benjamin, May 5, 1863, in Nina Silber and Mary Beth Sievens, eds., Yankee Correspondence: Civil War Letters between New Englanders and the Home Front (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1996), 102.
black soldiers respond to white prescriptions, how did he interpret the garrisoning concept, and how did he play his part in the Union’s war of occupation?\(^{39}\)

Although African American men in arms buttressed their claims to manhood and citizenship by fighting, bleeding, and dying in scores of battles and skirmishes, the bulk of their wartime experience was dedicated to life behind the lines in garrisons and occupied zones. Black military service was constrained not only by the codes of the garrison ethos, but also by the discrimination imbedded within nineteenth-century American society. Evidence of their martial worth notwithstanding, black soldiers, because of their presumed status as laborers, were paid less than white soldiers, violently impressed into the army, forbidden to be officers of their own units, deprived of essential medical care, and injured by the rigors of fatigue duty.\(^{40}\) Ironies abounded. Within a short time, black men had escaped the bondage of slavery and entered the promised land of freedom, where they proudly donned the Union blue, to which they ascribed so much symbolic and tangible promise. It seemed, though, that their military lives came to reflect the institutional racism of American culture. In some ways, little had changed. In others, a lot had changed. Black men, although largely constrained by the garrison ethos, determined to make a substantial wartime contribution as an instrument of occupation. And they certainly possessed the numbers to do so.

By the end of the conflict, black soldiers in USCT units comprised nearly 10 percent (178,975) of all United States forces. They populated 166 regiments, 145 of which were infantry, in addition to serving in the Navy. Regardless of the ways in which they served, the numbers

\(^{39}\) This chapter deals exclusively with the African American Union soldier’s role as an occupier. Front line combat is not discussed. See Trudeau, *Like Men of War*, passim, for a comprehensive examination of black units’ military history.

\(^{40}\) Historians have successfully positioned much of the literature on African American soldiers around these topics. See, for example, Berlin, et al., eds., *BME*, 1-34, 37-251, 303-361, and 483-516. Margaret Humphreys, *Intensely Human: The Health of the Black Soldier in the American Civil War* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 57-79.
alone attest to the profound destruction of slavery, occasioned by the war and black enlistment. Lincoln’s philosophy, outlined in the Emancipation Proclamation, largely worked as planned. Of the 166 USCT units, more than 100 (64 percent) performed exclusive garrison duty. The majority of black troops occupied posts, positions, and regions long ago conquered by Union armies. A minority of other regiments witnessed and participated in formal combat and field operations, yet very few were engaged in more than one battle. Indeed, only three black units, the 8\textsuperscript{th} and 79\textsuperscript{th} USCT and the 54\textsuperscript{th} Massachusetts, were classified among the Union Army’s 300 “fighting regiments.” In interpreting these numbers, historian Gary W. Gallagher, in his recent history of the Union war effort, wrote that “[m]ost USCT regiments performed valuable but not decisive service.”\footnote{Gallagher, \textit{Union War}, 92; William F. Fox, \textit{Regimental Losses in the American Civil War, 1861-1865} (Albany, N.Y.: Albany Publishing Co., 1889), 17-22, 53.}

Throughout the war, white America interpreted black units as better suited for noncombatant roles.\footnote{The popular media reflected mainstream opinions about emancipation and black soldiering, interpreting both elements in a moderate tone. Although outlets such as the \textit{New York Times}, \textit{Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper}, and \textit{Harper’s Weekly}, gave due credit to black battlefield contributions, their overall interpretation focused on African American soldiers as laborers, static garrison forces, and noncombatant troops. These periodicals reflected the views of much of the white American population. See Gallagher, \textit{Union War}, 93-100.} Nevertheless, the mass of African American troops established themselves as a formidable and unique occupying presence. Their first challenge was to negotiate and interact with white soldiers who also served in occupied garrisons. White Union troops hated their roles as occupation forces; they despised almost as much the black soldiers who wore the same uniform and served in the same capacity. White soldiers saw blacks in this role as further demonstration of the unworthiness of garrison duty. “There is a Brigade of ‘Niggers . . . here in town,’” Silas Doolittle, of the 75\textsuperscript{th} New York, wrote from Savannah, Georgia. “You ought to see the style they put on, with their white gloves, a ‘la militaire’ I think it is an insult to U.S. soldiers
to put the uniform on Orang-ou-tangs.” Tension and distrust largely governed the ways in which both groups related to one another, oftentimes resulting in violence and discriminatory means to justify the biracial garrison presence. At Port Hudson, white soldiers defied the authority of black patrolmen; at Folly Island, South Carolina, white officers verbally abused black soldiers who guarded the town; at Ship Island, Mississippi, a Maine regiment refused to participate in drill exercises with soldiers of the Corps d’Afrique; near Point Lookout, North Carolina, New Hampshire cavalrmen attacked a company of black troops returning from picket duty; and at Morganza, Louisiana, white soldiers rested in the shade of trees while black troops labored and guarded the vicinity.43

These episodes characterized much of the interaction between black and white occupation troops. George M. Turner, a white New England volunteer, summarized one of the central points of contention within biracial garrisons. “The plan of having negro soldiers is very well in some cases,” he acknowledged from Jacksonville, Florida, “but when it comes to putting the whites and blacks on the same footin, I come to the conclusion it is about time to quit soldiering . . . it is rather hard for us white boys to have to bow to them, when we are fighting for them. . . . I want to see the war come to a close, this rebellion, crushed, and the Stars and Stripes waving over a united country once more, I am willing to fight for it, but I am not willing to fight shoulder to shoulder with a black dirty nigger.” Turner alluded to white concerns that, as occupying forces, they were doing much too little in their quest to preserve the Union. Backline service, he implied, should be reserved for black soldiers. But he found himself performing

disagreeable duties alongside a class of men whom he greatly disliked. African American soldiers, however, did not submit to such insults; they actively sought ways to exert their independence and legitimacy within Union armies of occupation.44

James F. Jones, a black soldier and hospital ward master in the 14th Rhode Island Heavy Artillery (Colored), underscored the existing racial tensions. The black artillerymen arrived in New Orleans in the spring of 1864, where they would remain for the duration of the conflict. “We could see signs of smothered hate and prejudice to both our color and present character as Union soldiers,” Jones explained. The white regiments also stationed at the Crescent City, he continued, “thought to deride us and disrespect us as soldiers because we were colored.” Jones and his fellow soldiers were not halted by such insults, though. The 14th Rhode Island comprised northern free blacks who travelled south to occupy conquered regions of the Confederacy, and they savored the significance and symbolism of the moment. “[F]or once in his life,” Jones wrote, “your humble correspondent walked fearlessly and boldly through the streets of a southern city! And he did this without being required to take off his cap at every step, or give all the side walks to those lordly princes of the sunny south, the planter’s sons! Oh, chivalry! how hast thou lost thy potent power and charms!”45

Black soldiers were tasked with important positions of authority behind the lines, especially serving as provost guard, which was the military police force in garrisoned zones. Members of the 100th New York Volunteers, a white regiment stationed at Hilton Head, South Carolina, took great issue in April 1864 when African American troops on provost duty arrested a white soldier. A large, violent riot ensued between both sets of troops in which the New

44 George M. Turner to My dear aunt Susan, May 2, 1864, in Silber and Sievens, eds., Yankee Correspondence, 87.
Yorkers “thr[e]w brick bats at the guard” and even attempted to load their weapons. Although “[t]hey yet refused to conform to law and order,” the black soldiers eventually took control of the rebellious circumstance, calmed the situation, and proceeded to guard the unruly white troops. A similar episode occurred at Alexandria, Virginia. A fight broke out in the town between black and white troops, and “I brought the men into my tent and had a sort of trial, h[e]aring the evidence,” wrote Benjamin C. Lincoln, an officer in the 2nd USCT, “and doing justice as far as I could.” Lincoln decided that the white soldier should be removed outside of the camp, while “the col’ man handcuffed and put in confinement.” This “created a breeze,” Lincoln explained, “and pretty soon there was a crowd of about two or three hundred threatening vengeance, wild with excitement[,] some actually crying & weeping, as if some great affliction had come upon them.” Members of the USCT regiment had good reason for concern, for they equated this episode with past transgressions and unfair treatment distinguished by race. They had lived most of their lives according to this system; in their minds, the Union blue represented a marked departure from the ways of the old slaveholding regime. Their protests were effective. Lincoln smoothed the situation and placated both parties. 46

Strained and tense emotions largely governed black and white interactions within zones of occupation. Oftentimes, white troops would heap unfair, dangerous, and unhealthy duties on their African American counterparts, leaving black troops with manual work that harkened back to the days of slavery. In 1863, once the Mississippi Valley was firmly in Union control, newly raised black regiments were dispersed as labor battalions, relieving white troops from the hot, sticky Delta summer. The 50th USCT, for instance, organized at Vicksburg and populated by

46 Diary entry, April 15, 1864, in David D. Roe, ed., *A Civil War Soldier’s Diary: Valentine C. Rudolph, 39th Illinois Regiment* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2006), 196-97; Benjamin C. Lincoln to My own little Wife, September 13, 1863, Benjamin C. Lincoln Papers, 1861-1865, SCHOFF.
former slaves primarily from nearby Natchez, was tasked with moving ordnance material, unloading river transports, and working in deplorable conditions. They were soldiers in name only. White troops who had won the glory of capturing the prized Mississippi River fortress were sent to other theaters in hopes of claiming similar laurels. Those who remained behind watched as black men’s bodies broke under the weight of disproportionate fatigue responsibilities. Julian E. Bryant, a white abolitionist in command of the 46th USCT, wrote angrily from Vicksburg in January 1864, “For the past three months the colored regiments here have been constantly at work upon the fortifications, doing common laborers duty at the landings, loading and unloading boats and barges, or policing the streets of the town, while white regiments are laying idle in camp, or are occupied only in soldierly duties.”

Similar episodes dotted the wartime landscape. White soldiers sought to define USCT regiments exclusively by noncombatant roles, especially those relating to guard, labor, and fatigue work. They interpreted the organization of black units, in part, as a sign that they no longer would have to toil behind the lines doing work they considered antithetical to the mark of a true citizen-volunteer. Oftentimes, excessive and continuous labor prevented black regiments from drilling and practicing the duties of legitimate soldiers. A soldier in the 11th USC Heavy Artillery wrote that their “routine duty consists mostly of guard and picket duty, of which we enjoy a liberal supply. We are quite proficient at drill, but have never yet had a chance to exercise our knowledge of the use of arms with the enemies of our country and race.” An inspection in August 1864 of the Port Hudson and Morganza, Louisiana, garrisons stated that “all the fatigue duty on fortifications is performed by colored troops and prisoners sentenced to hard

labor. This duty is reported to be incessant to the exclusion of all opportunities for drill or inspection. The difficulty of making soldiers of these men, in the face of the constant practical assertion of their unfitness for anything but that labor . . . is self evident.” The commander of the 21st USCT likewise wrote from Seabrook, South Carolina, that his men worked literally around the clock “drawing sand; loading wood; water and pumping out vessels assisting the crews of the vessel. The duty performed is the hardest kind, in some instances trimming the ‘bunkers’ on board vessels. My men are nearly used up,” he confessed, and added, “The labor is so arduous and constant that it will be impossible to perform it much longer.”

The racial components of garrisoning, it appeared, worked as whites intended it. White soldiers simply passed along their duties as laborers to a class of troops presumed to be more appropriate for work and sweat in the drudgery of occupied zones. Although they wore the Union blue, racial difference dictated that African Americans were merely hired hands in arenas long ago conquered by the “true” warriors. The commander of a North Carolina black regiment summarized this troubling notion. “They have been slaves and are just learning to be men[.] It is a draw-back that they are regarded as, and called ‘d- - -d Niggers’ by so-called ‘gentleman’ in uniform of U.S. Officers, but when they are set to menial work doing for white regiments what those Regiments are entitled to do for themselves, it simply throws them back where they were before and reduces them to the position of slaves again.”

Even members of the 54th Massachusetts Infantry, Robert Gould Shaw’s famed black regiment that stormed Fort Wagner, South Carolina, and proved to the world that African

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American soldiers would fight and die, endured the discrimination inherent within the culture of garrisoning. Long after its celebrated battlefield exploits, the 54th found itself occupying Jacksonville, Florida. Thomas D. Freeman, a soldier in the unit, wrote that, although his comrades enjoyed good health, they were “in Low Spirits and no reason why for they have all to a man done [their] duty as a soldier.” The troops were disgusted, Freeman explained, because “we are not Soldiers but Laborers working for Uncle Sam for nothing but our board and clothes. . . we never can be elevated in this country while such rascality is Performed.” He then exclaimed, “Slavery with all its horrors can not Equalise this for it is nothing but work from morning till night Building Batteries Hauling Guns Cleaning Bricks clearing up land for other Regiments.” If such duties were not enough, Freeman resumed, “if you cannot work then you are sent to the Guard House Bucked Gagged and stay so till they see for to relieve You and if you dont like that some white man will Give you a crack on the Head with his sword. now do you call this Equality[?]”

Other black occupation troops, though, did not consider themselves enslaved. Rather, they used their newly obtained positions of freedom, and in some cases authority, to protest their condition and treatment within the army. James Henry Gooding, an African American corporal also in the 54th Massachusetts, wrote to Abraham Lincoln in September 1863, decrying the unfair and even inhumane treatment endured by black soldiers behind the lines. Using almost identical language as Freeman, he bluntly asked the president, “Are we Soldiers, or are we LABOURERS. We are fully armed, and equipped, have done all the various Duties, pertaining to a Soldiers life.” He asked why he and his fellow volunteers, who had sacrificed just as much, were paid less than white men, and questioned the general policies of demarcating modes of military service

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50 Thomas D. Freeman to Dear William, March 26, 1864, in Silber and Sievens, eds., Yankee Correspondence, 47-48.
along lines of race. His most profound claim, though, revolved around the particular meaning of
“citizen-soldier.” Gooding argued that, because he and his brethren were born in the United
States and selflessly left their private lives and to enter the army, they possessed a claim to the
full rights, privileges, and responsibilities of republican soldiers. He declared that they should be
treated “as american SOLDIERS, not as menial hirelings.” The difference in pay, he concluded,
symbolized so much about the black and white soldiering experiences, the starkest difference of
which was rooted in the presumed capabilities and tasks assigned by race.51

James Henry Gooding engaged in peaceful but forceful objection to the racial
assumptions underlying the garrison ethos, occupation, and black military service. Other African
American soldiers resorted to more violent means of protest in which they resisted callous
treatment from white troops. One such incident occurred in December 1863 at Fort Jackson,
Louisiana, which guarded the entrance to New Orleans. The 4th Regiment, Corps d’Afrique was
stationed with white troops on the river garrison. The men were isolated, far-removed from the
seat of war, yet as was the case with most occupied zones, they held an essential Union outpost.
After months of escalating tensions between both groups of soldiers, a white officer, Augustus
Benedict, whipped two of his men multiple times, eliciting a passionate response from the black
troops. This episode was one in a long series in which Benedict had verbally abused and even
flogged members of the regiment. The African American troops could no longer stand idly by
and mutinied against their commanding officers. The soldiers seized their weapons and started
firing into the air, while dozens of other men escaped the fort and started for the river. After calm
was restored, Nathaniel P. Banks, who commanded the Department of the Gulf, reported that the
black men possessed a genuine grievance, which he assured would be addressed. “It must be
considered, however, that they are unable immediately to comprehend to its full extent the

51 James Henry Gooding to Abraham Lincoln, September 28, 1863, BME, 386-87.
necessity of strict military discipline; that a great many of the duties of citizens which are readily understood and accepted by white men are not by them understood and appreciated.” Banks concluded that “[i]t is unreasonable to expect that men who have never handled a musket, who have never been admitted to civil or individual rights, can instantaneously become perfect soldiers.”

Banks’s language underscored the racial foundation of the garrison ethos. Black men, because of their presumed inferiority within American society, were expected to perform secondary tasks during their time in the military. The limits of their service indicated that they were not entitled to the full privileges and responsibilities of citizen-soldiering. Although some African American regiments proved these claims unequivocally false through voluntary enlistment and battlefield contributions, the bulk of USCT units remained relegated behind the lines. The language of emancipation was intended to confine black troops to restricted roles, which often entailed the “dishonorable” duties of occupation. However, similar to their resistance against pay inequities, abusive treatment by white troops, and dangerous forms of labor, black soldiers used emancipation to their advantage despite its perceived wartime boundaries. As forces of occupation, they unbalanced traditional power dynamics in the South; formerly enslaved men now held positions of martial authority in their home towns and states, effectively shattering the institution of slavery.

In spite of the racist assumptions that sought to limit black soldiering, the very presence of African American troops represented a unique moment within the broader tradition of military

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52 “December 9, 1863—Mutiny at Fort Jackson, La.,” OR, vol. 26, pt. 1, 456-479. Thirteen black troops were tried before a Court Martial, nine of whom were found guilty of conspiring mutiny. Benedict was found guilty of “inflicting cruel and unusual punishment, to the prejudice of good order and military discipline.” Although it was illegal and subject to court martial and even death, black soldiers practiced mutiny as a means to protest pay discrimination, ill treatment by white officers, and generally deplorable conditions behind the lines. See Charles Rice, “The Bullwhip Mutiny,” Civil War Times Illustrated 40 (February 2002):38-43, 62; and, Howard C. Westwood, “The Cause and Consequence of a Union Black Soldier's Mutiny and Execution,” Civil War History 31 (September, 1985): 222-36; BME, 439-40.
occupation. Few periods in human history had witnessed occupying forces comprised of elements from the very population it sought to regulate and control. The American Civil War evolved into such an exceptional circumstance. An invading army did not exclusively occupy the Confederate South. The region came to be occupied in large measure by black southerners-turned-soldiers who were homegrown, enlisted internally, and deployed to areas of their childhood. This stunning reality reflected the overwhelming impact of slavery’s destruction. Emancipation quietly sought to place African American soldiers in the back of the army; instead, it inadvertently positioned them in the front lines of occupation. This profound truth, both to newly freed black men and the white citizens whom they occupied, offered a striking reversal to traditional societal roles and power arrangements that long defined the southern past. Most black soldiers may have been deprived of the glory of formal battle. Yet their emblematic and demonstrable roles as occupiers revealed a fundamental change occasioned by the war. Whereas garrisons seemed to squelch independence, black troops used occupation as a means to consolidate newfound modes of freedom and authority. As an occupier black Union soldiers challenged the status quo and impressed his dominance on the very people guilty of enslaving him. Nathaniel P. Banks and many other white Americans missed this point when they considered it unreasonable to assume that black men, because they had been deprived of citizenship, would be ineffective soldiers. On the contrary, it was their former enslavement that inspired African American troops in their occupation of the former lands of slavery to perform surprisingly well.

Although this realization may not initially have permeated many elements of American society, black and white abolitionists—and especially the soldiers—understood and celebrated this new role. African American troops used military occupation as an instrument to control a
segment of society that had long controlled them. And the transition was quite effortless. Black men had long endured slavery through myriad avenues of resistance, which sometimes helped them negotiate their terms of servitude. As historian Eugene D. Genovese writes, resistance “enabled them to assert rights, which by their very nature not only set limits to their surrender of self, but actually constituted an implicit rejection of slavery.” African American men struggled to affirm their manhood under the weight of enslavement, and the very act of resistance implied a degree of masculine autonomy. Freedom allowed these natural qualities to flourish, and the United States uniform officially sanctioned explicit displays of masculinity. They had long resisted slavery; they now had a certified endorsement to destroy it. Military occupation presented the ideal vehicle by which to accomplish this goal.  

Black Union soldiers relished the opportunities presented by occupation. They possessed divergent motives from white soldiers, who also experienced life behind the lines, by expanding the role of occupier in their favor, thus transforming the nature of southern society. The discriminatory practice of excluding black people from the mainstream of American life would characterize much of the next century, but for a brief moment, black soldiers in blue uniforms formally confronted, and ultimately defied, the South’s longstanding racial hierarchy. As a black soldier marched by a cluster of Confederate prisoners, he noticed his former master among the group. “Hello, massa,” the soldier exclaimed, “bottom rail on top dis time!” Indeed it was. The sudden shift in power and authority shocked many white southerners as they witnessed firsthand the manifestation of their worst nightmare: black soldiers with muskets, marching in organized

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ranks, policing towns, all with the consent from the very government that once sanctioned their enslavement. This was the essence of black occupation.54

White southerners feared the presence of a Yankee occupation force; they dreaded even more the black Union soldiers whom they once used to own. The reactions of southern whites testified to the effectiveness of African American occupation. “Yankee men are the order of the day,” Mary Semmes wrote about Alexandria, Virginia. “We have a negro here as Capt in the quarter master’s department and who goes around in great style. It is thought that we will have [more] negro soldiers here to guard the town so that the white soldiers may go in the field.” She concluded that their existence was “perfectly intolerable.” Harriet Ellen Moore likewise confided to her diary from Nashville, “A brigade of negroes uniformed and equipped paraded our streets to day. Oh how humiliating. What have we come too,” she wondered. “I would willingly live on bread & water in the south, where there is liberty and society such as we once enjoyed than to dwell in luxury among people who consider ‘niggers’ their superiors and raise them up in our midst to kill and destroy.” Such fears extended into states that had not even seceded. Residents of Baltimore, Maryland, pleaded to the governor “that a negro regiment which they threaten to . . . quarter in our neighborhood may not be allowed to come. Our people are in a state of utter Consternation at the prospect of such a thing.” A white woman in occupied Vicksburg summarized all of these sentiments, after she encountered “a negro officer and a Yankee! hitherto two of the crowning hating pieces of creation.”55


55 Mary Semmes to Sallie Hoxton, March 3, [1863], Randolph Family Papers, 1786-1970, Mss1 R1586 b, Item 15, VHS; Diary entry, July 3, 1863, Harriet Ellen Moore Diary, 1863, Collection No., 02485, The Southern Historical Collection, Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (hereafter cited as SHC); A. W. Blair to Montgomery Blair, September 11, 1863, BME, 209; Diary entry, October 24, 1864,
Other white observers interpreted the situation in different ways. Thomas Wentworth
Higginson observed that the 1\textsuperscript{st} South Carolina Volunteers, shortly after they captured
Jacksonville, Florida, “were to endure another test, as to their demeanor as victors.” The town
was populated with “five hundred citizens, nearly all white, at the mercy of their former slaves.”
The Massachusetts abolitionist proudly explained that “[t]o some of these whites it was the last
crowning humiliation, and they were, or professed to be, in perpetual fear.” Higginson, though,
noticed another development that unfolded with the Union occupation. “[T]he most intelligent
and lady-like woman I saw, the wife of Rebel captain, rather surprised me,” he acknowledged,
“by saying that it seemed pleasanter to have these men stationed there, whom they had known all
their lives, and who had generally borne a good character, than to be in the power of entire
strangers.” Higginson touched on one of the central characteristics of the black occupation
experience. These men had not marched into the Confederacy as agents of an invading army;
they were local residents, already living in the midst of the very regions that they would occupy.
Indeed, Higginson recognized that “they thoroughly felt that their honor and dignity were
concerned in the matter, and took too much pride in their character as soldiers.” The crucible of
war had irrevocably altered black soldiers’ relationship to the South.\textsuperscript{56}

African American soldiers used their presence within occupied garrisons to liberate
themselves from the previous strictures of racial bondage, while also bending white southerners
to their will. Standing picket, challenging passersby, demanding passes, embarking on
expeditions into the southern countryside, and destroying slavery wherever Union armies
travelled, elevated black soldiers to positions of authority. They did not sit passively in occupied

\textsuperscript{56} Higginson, \textit{Army Life in a Black Regiment}, 80-83.
zones. Instead, they embraced the requirements, and especially opportunities, of occupation.

Joseph T. Wilson, a black soldier, and later a prominent historian of nineteenth-century African American troops, was ordered in November 1863 to organize the 14th USCT at Gallatin, Tennessee. When he arrived, he noticed “several hundred negro men in camp” who “were a motley crowd,—old young, middle aged. Some wore the United States uniform, but most of them had on the clothes in which they had left the plantations, or had worn during periods of hard service as laborers in the army.”

Wilson recognized the challenge before him. These men had not passed a medical exam, never been formally trained or drilled, and their weapons, if they had any at all, were old and battered. “The colored men knew nothing of the duties of a soldier,” he explained, “except a little they had picked up as camp-followers.” Over the subsequent weeks, Wilson and his subordinates drilled the new troops and instructed them on the import of discipline and soldierly virtue. By January, the 14th USCT reflected a marked change in appearance and attitude. Although a few white troops garrisoned Gallatin, the bulk of the occupation force comprised black soldiers, who “acted as pickets, and no citizen was allowed to pass our lines either into the village or out, without a proper permit.” Local residents who were found without documentation were sent promptly to headquarters. “Thus many proud Southern slave-holders,” Wilson recounted, “found themselves marched through the street, guarded by those who three months before had been slaves.” The black troops especially noticed the fundamental change that had occurred, and injected themselves into the new societal roles. “The negroes often laughed over these changed relations as they sat around their camp fires, or chatted together while off duty.”

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58 Ibid.
Similar to the soldiers at Gallatin, black troops who consistently occupied the Confederate South garnered relative respect from white troops. Indeed, one white colonel explained the success of an expedition near Morganza, Louisiana, in September 1864. “The people along the road of this raid and the one previous seemed terror stricken at the sight of black troops and in future if every raid is answered by black troops you will Soon not hear of one this side of the Atchafalaya river yet they behaved in a soldierly manner and was at all times under strict discipline.” White soldiers generally came to appreciate the notable effect African American occupiers had on local Confederate populations. “You had better believe the citizens are mad because the town [Jacksonville, Florida] is to be occupied by colored troops,” J. Blake, an officer in the 35th USCT, explained. “The citizens hate the sight of the blacks it hurts them to think that these fellows who were once their slaves can walk about the town as big as any body now.”

African American soldiers indeed savored the opportunity to occupy Confederate towns and wield their authority among white southerners. Rufus Sibb Jones, of the 8th USCT, and part of the occupying forces at Jacksonville, Florida, was troubled by the inordinate about of fatigue labor that his regiment performed. Yet he reported satisfactorily that “[i]t must be humiliating to those who once lived in style and owned slaves, to see their property and that of others occupied as hospitals by Negro soldiers.” Jones further revealed how the white southern class system had been broken by war: “It often happens here that the mistress and servant eat together in Sutler stores.” A black soldier from Maryland, who served in the 7th USCT also at Jacksonville, appreciated the opportunity to characterize the appearance of local civilians. “The people here are less a people than any I have seen; they do not seem to understand anything but they are the

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59 Col. H. N. Frisbie to Liuet. O. A. Rice, September 24, 1864, in BME, 512; J. Blake to unknown, October 18, [1864], DL1029, J. Blake Letters, JLNC.
most God-forsaken looking animals on earth, and all miserable accordingly. They look mean; they live *meanly*, act *meanly*, and they don’t mean anything but *mean*. . . . To think that these fellows voted Florida out of the Union without the aid of the primitive inhabitants – alligators – is simply preposterous.”

John C. Brock, a commissary sergeant in the 43rd USCT, celebrated from Alexandria, Virginia, “[h]ow horrible it must have been to the rebels that their ‘sacred soil should have been polluted by the footsteps of colored Union soldiers!” The local residents, he continued, “looked at us with astonishment, as if we were some great monsters risen up out of the ground. They looked bewildered,” he related, “yet it seemed to be too true and apparent to them that they really beheld nearly 10,000 colored soldiers filing by, armed to the teeth, with bayonets bristling in the sun.” Brock described that, while his men welcomed the shocked looks upon the countenances of white Virginians, the striking symbolism of the moment was not lost on his black comrades. “I tell you our boys seemed to fully appreciate the importance of marching through a secesh town. On, on we came, regiment after regiment, pouring in, as it seemed to their bewildered optics, by countless thousands – with colors flying and the bands playing.” “I must say,” Brock continued, “that the 43d looked truly grand.” The regiment was assigned to guard the rail lines near the old battlefields at Manassas. “We have been regularly drilled for picket duty both day and night since we came here,” Brock wrote. “The boys halt a man very quick, and if he does not answer quick, he gets a ball sent through him.”

The interactions between white southerners and African American occupiers oftentimes erupted into violence. On the one hand, Confederate civilians endeavored to resist the forces of

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60 Rufus Sibb Jones Letter [8th USCT], April 13, 1864 and “Rufus” Letter [7th USCT], May 17, 1864, both cited in Redkey, ed., *Grand Army of Black Men*, 50, 54-55.

61 John C. Brock Letter, July 30, 1864, Ibid., 100-1.
black military incursion, while on the other, the enslaved-turned-soldier attempted to exert his martial authority on southern society. This unsettling situation resulted in murder and grisly viciousness, characteristic of the broader culture of wartime occupation. J. Blake correctly judged that violence between both groups was likely. White civilians, he said, “hate all the blacks but the black soldier worst of all.” He recounted an incident in which “some of the citizens met a couple of black soldiers on the sidewalk last night[,] they could not pass each other with out a quarrel and in the end one of the blacks got cut so badly with a knife that he is not expected to live[,] I expect there will be open war between them after we leave.” Blake’s appraisal was generally sound, as was proved by another episode at Portsmouth, Virginia, in October 1863. A local doctor, David M. Wright, was accused of “a deliberate and cold-blooded murder” of an African American soldier, Alanson Sanborn. Wright was promptly arrested by the provost marshal who “asked him if he had anything to say.” He responded that “he was excited when he did the deed.” The military authorities did not hesitate to act. Wright received a quick trial, was sentenced to hang, and was promptly executed a week after he committed the act.  

African American soldiers quickly adapted to the violent environment of occupation, which possessed few of the boundaries of “civilized” combat. Indeed, occupied zones functioned as arenas of irregular and informal warfare. Union occupiers engaged in a particular mode of unconventional martial struggle that matched the ways in which southern civilians and guerrillas responded to the ethos of occupation. Because white southerners purposely refused to place limits on how they contested black soldiers—oftentimes black troops received no quarter simply because of their skin color—African American occupiers were forced to respond in like manner, 

62 Ibid; OR, series II, vol. 6, pt. 1, p. 323; Henry F. Gladding to Dear Mother, October 26, 1863, Henry F. Gladding Letter, Mss2 G4513 a 1, VHS. See also, OR, series II, vol. 6, pt. 1, pp. 245, 360-61.
testing the strength of wartime civility in the occupied Confederacy.\textsuperscript{63} An officer in the 28\textsuperscript{th} USCT recounted how soldiers in his regiment were guarding a group of Confederate prisoners of war, many of whom “being the old Masters of some of the Darkies.” The officer explained how the soldiers were formerly enslaved in Kentucky and took “greate pride in pointing them [the former masters] out to us. I assure you it is gauling to the feelings of [the] prisoners to be guarded by [black men]. Yesterday was there first day of duty, one of the prisoners threw a stone at one of them [and he was] shot dead on the spot.”\textsuperscript{64}

Other incidents reflected a more violent, explicit quality. African American soldiers killed a white citizen in Vicksburg, making amends for a past grievance. The resident had violated local martial law by aiding the enemy; the black occupiers responded accordingly. This episode prompted authorities to issue a general order decrying such methods. “The recent murder of a citizen by colored soldiers in open day in the streets of this city,” it read, “should arouse the attention of every officer serving with the troops to be absolute necessity of preventing their soldiers from attempting a redress of their own grievances.” Local commanders understood not only the precarious environment of occupation, but also the tenuous relationship between black soldiers and white civilians. “If the spirit which led to this act of violence is not at once repressed, consequences of the most terrible nature must follow.” Unfortunately, additional acts of vengeance, largely motivated out of past grievance, governed the actions of some African American occupiers.

\textsuperscript{63} See Chapter 5 of this dissertation for an expanded interpretation of violence in occupied zones. Both white and black soldiers engaged in the same type of irregular combat against southern civilians and guerrillas. For an interpretation on the broader implications of violence and African American soldiering, see Emberton, “Only Murder Makes Men,” 368-93.

\textsuperscript{64} [B. F. Trail] to Dear Wife and Mother, September 27, 1864, B. F. Trail Correspondence, William Gladstone Collection, USAMHI;
While stationed in May 1864 along the James River in southern Virginia, soldiers in the 1st USCT embarked on a foraging expedition to nearby plantations. George W. Hatton, a sergeant in the regiment, described how the war brought forth great change and wrecked the institution of slavery. “But behold what has been revealed in the past three or four years; why the colored men have ascended upon a platform of equality, and the slave can now apply the lash to the tender flesh of his master, for this day I am now an eyewitness of the fact.” Many of the soldiers who filled the ranks of the 1st USCT were originally enslaved by the region’s local planters. The soldiers “captured a Mr. Clayton, a noted reb in this part of the country,” who had a reputation of meting out the “most unmerciful whipping[s] to enslaved women.” When Clayton was brought into the black soldiers’ camp, William Harris, another soldier in the 1st USCT, who was formerly enslaved to Clayton, was ordered to undress the white captive. “Mr. Harris played his part conspicuously, bringing the blood from his loins at every stroke, and not forgetting to remind the gentlemen of the days gone by.” The women whom Clayton used to beat were also present, and they proceeded to “giving him some fifteen or twenty well-directed strokes . . . [and] reminded him that they were no longer his.” “Oh, that I had the tongue to express my feelings,” George Hatton wrote of the episode, “while standing upon the banks of the James River, on the soil of Virginia, the mother state of slavery, as a witness of such a sudden reverse!”

These episodes suggested a conflicting prospect for African American occupiers. On the one hand, the language of emancipation presumed that black soldiers would act as docile laborers within occupied garrisons. On the other, black troops sometimes went to the opposite extreme in testing the limits of occupation and engaging the realm of irregular violence typical of occupied zones. Black soldiers at Helena, Arkansas, for instance, “notwithstanding the utmost

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vigilance, go beyond the lines, and insult and depredate on peaceful citizens. The last case was of
16 black soldiers who insulted Mr. Turner and stole some of his property.” In addition, African
American occupiers belonging to the garrison at Fort Fischer, North Carolina, were accused of
killing a local white family. How were they supposed to prove to contemporary whites that they
were not passive soldiers, but also not appear as bloodthirsty killers who sought revenge? This
problem presented a central challenge to the black occupation experience.66

African American occupiers did not employ violent tactics merely for the sake of being
fiercely warlike. Political motives were attached intimately to such devices. Black troops had to
demonstrate to white northerners that they had embraced and expanded the language of
emancipation; they also had to illustrate for white southerners that traditional power structures
were officially shattered. Thus, they were not exclusively laborers, nor were they permanently
enslaved. Military occupation presented an opportunity to discard both outmoded assumptions,
while forging new relationships with various segments of American society. Moreover, black
occupiers did not operate within a limited scope of violence; myriad episodes reflected varying
degrees of violence sanctioned by the ethos of occupation. The testimony of Benjamin F. Butler
rings true. He assured a woman from Northampton County, Virginia, that “I have yet to learn of
a single outrage by a colored soldier committed upon any of the people of Norfolk or Yorktown.
. . and I can bear the same testimony of the negro regiments” stationed at various garrisons
throughout the Old Dominion. Butler, along with other white commanders, had learned that
African American occupiers actively used occupation to alter southern society, while expanding

66 N. B. Buford to W. D. Green, March 23, 1864, OR, vol. 34, pt.2, p. 705; Unknown to My Ever dear Relatives,
February 14, [1864], Pickett Family Papers, William Gladstone Collection, USAMHI.
the definitions of black soldiering. Thus, Butler interpreted “a single outrage” far different from
the woman in Virginia.\footnote{Benjamin F. Butler to Elizabeth T. Upshur, January 10, 1864, \textit{OR}, vol. 33, pt. 1, p. 371.}

Black occupiers incorporated violence in a host of additional areas: expeditions into the
southern countryside, battling guerrillas and civilian combatants, and systematically destroying
slavery. Expeditions functioned as central elements of the occupation experience. Bands of
Union soldiers typically fanned out from strategically placed garrisons and raided the
surrounding area, foraging for food and supplies, providing haven for runaway slaves, and
destroying Confederate war-making abilities. African American occupiers demonstrated their
capacity for expeditions and convinced white officers of occupation’s expanded scope. Black
soldiers, who once were enslaved on the very lands they now occupied, were intimately familiar
with the landscape and its surroundings. “These [men] are better than white soldiers for this
service,” a white officer wrote from the swamps of South Carolina, “on account of the greater
facility with which they can effect landings through the marshes and thick woods which line the
banks of streams.” Once the raiding parties were dispersed throughout the area, the officer

African American occupiers demonstrated their utility on expeditions to the common
white soldier, who traditionally harbored racist assumptions about black troops’ effectiveness in
the field. The 5\textsuperscript{th} and 6\textsuperscript{th} USC Cavalry departed from Lexington, Kentucky, with horsemen from
the 20\textsuperscript{th} Ohio Volunteers in October 1864. “On the march the colored soldiers as well as their
white officers, were made the subject of much ridicule and many insulting remarks by the white
troops and in some instances petty outrages, such as the pulling off the caps of colored soldiers,
stealing their horses, &c.,” wrote James S. Brisbin, a colonel in one of the black regiments. The white troopers taunted the black soldiers, claiming that they would not fight. The expedition eventually came upon a rebel detachment, “and finding the enemy in force preparations were made for battle.” The bulk of the Union cavalrmymen charged “and the negroes rushed upon the [salt] works with a yell, and after a desperate, struggle carried the entire line, killing and wounding a large number of the enemy and capturing some prisoners.” Of the 400 black soldiers engaged, slightly more than one-quarter “fell killed or wounded.” The official report stated that these men “could not have behaved more bravely.” The white troops, who had fought alongside the black soldiers, appreciated their comrades’ martial bravery and violent tactics in dislodging the enemy. “On the return of the forces those who had scoffed at the colored troops on the march out were silent.”

African American occupiers did not always engage in such conventional methods while raiding the southern countryside. For instance, black and white regiments encountered a band of guerrillas on an expedition near Little Rock, Arkansas. Understanding full well the Confederate policy of giving no quarter to black troops and their white officers, the black soldiers employed the same tactics on their rebel enemies. One white soldier, Milton P. Chambers of the 29th Iowa Volunteers, acknowledged that “our negro regiments fight bravely and stand rite up to the work.” He decried the policy of no-quarter, but mentioned that “the negroes want to kill every wounded reb they come to.” After the skirmish, Chambers noticed one of his black comrades “pounding a wounded reb in the head with the but of his gun and asked him what he was doing.” The solider

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responded, “he is not dead yet!” “I tell you,” Chambers concluded, “they won’t give it up as long as they can kick if they would have their way about it.”  

African American occupiers shaped their attitudes toward the enemy based on the ways in which the enemy shaped its interpretation of black troops. Thus, black Union soldiers channeled a particular brand of violence toward Confederates, whether on raids, encounters along the road, or as guards in camp. Direct forms of action were taken especially against rebel guerrillas. Their very existence implied that guerrillas willfully flaunted the traditional restraints of civilized warfare; black occupiers responded in kind. Guerrillas, and their civilian-allies on the home front, were especially embittered about how the war inverted the traditional structure of white society, and they rarely limited how they responded to black soldiers. Moreover, African American occupiers viewed irregular guerrilla bands as a shield, blocking access to their families still enslaved behind the lines. If they could break the guerrilla presence, their friends and loved ones would have easier access to freedom. Thus, black troops gladly utilized irregular tactics in hopes of ridding the guerrilla presence from occupied zones. Indeed, a soldier in the 13th USCT believed that his comrades were “the bravest set of men on the Western Continent. They think nothing of routing the guerrillas, that roam at large in the wilds of Tennessee.”

Reflecting the culture of wartime occupation, African American soldiers battled guerrillas far more than they fought on the front lines. Lorenzo Thomas noted in 1864 that “colored troops . . . act most efficiently against guerrillas.” Although Thomas’s words subtly hinted that black soldiers were better fitted for irregular service than “formal” combat, they nonetheless performed the duty demanded of them. In doing so, their actions represented how

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70 Milton P. Chambers to Dear brother, May 7, 1864, in Milton P. Chambers Papers, 1863-1864, UA. On the policy of no quarter, see George S. Burkhardt, Confederate Rage, Yankee Wrath: No Quarter in the Civil War (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2007), 5, 93, 96, 157-58, 164, 169.

71 Quoted in Trudeau, Like Men of War, 336; Reid, Freedom for Themselves, 114-15.
Union soldiers changed the particular definitions of the citizen-soldier ideal. Both black and white troops conformed to the irregular environment of occupation, adopted guerrillas’ tactics, and thus employed near limitless tactics in waging war behind the lines. The 51st USCT, for instance, was victim of a massive guerrilla attack in September 1864. Stationed at Goodrich’s Landing, located in northeast Louisiana, a party of 200 guerrillas raided local plantations, murdered black laborers, and “commit[ted] the most abominable atrocities.” The 3rd USC Cavalry was immediately detached as “a retaliatory expedition.” When the black cavalrymen reached the guerrillas’ presumed rendezvous point, they burned “every building” in the vicinity, and promptly killed the surprised, ill-prepared, and fleeing guerrillas.  

Perhaps the most famous incident of black soldiers dislodging the guerrilla presence occurred nearly a year prior in December 1863, in Colonel Edward A. Wild’s raid across the marshlands of eastern North Carolina. Wild led nearly two thousand men from the 1st and 2nd USCT, 1st and 2nd North Carolina Colored, 55th Massachusetts Infantry (Colored), and a small collection of white regiments, hoping to regain control of the Dismal Swamp Canal, annihilate local guerrillas, and recruit formerly enslaved men into the Union army. Wild, because he served in occupied zones and sought complete alteration of the southern home front, operated independently from conventional wartime standards; he expected his soldiers to do the same. Wild reported that his men lived off the land, “judiciously discriminating in favor of the worst rebels.” A wartime correspondent for the *New York Times* traveling with the expedition confirmed that the “inhabitants being almost exclusively ‘Secesh,’ the colored boys were allowed to forage at will along the road.” The men foraged not only for food. The region contained large, wealthy plantations and an abundance of slaves, whom the African American

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occupiers invited into their lines. Oftentimes, groups of black soldiers entered the mansions and found locked behind closed doors numerous enslaved people who were promptly set free, the white planters taken prisoner, and scores of personal property confiscated.73

The raid was marked by relentless interaction with guerrillas who swarmed the Dismal Swamp region. “The guerrillas pestered us,” Wild wrote. “They crept on our pickets at night, waylaid our expeditions and our cavalry scouts, firing upon us whenever they could.” Wild’s men responded with force. They burned houses and barns, consumed livestock, and captured family members of local guerrillas. In one instance, Wild ordered the hanging of one of the bushwhackers, Daniel Bright, as a sign of ultimate retribution. Building on Wild’s example, African American occupiers initiated a powerful and effective response to the guerrilla presence. They “adopted a more rigorous style of warfare,” which knew few bounds. As a result, some of the guerrillas became disaffected, “some wishing to quit the business,” and even considered joining the regular Confederate army. As the raid progressed, however, violence persisted. “They are virtually bandits,” Wild wrote, and “can only harass us by stealing, murdering, and burning.” Thus that “enemy I would now engage to exterminate in two months by means of my colored infantry.” Black soldiers on the raid reflected Wild’s assertion that the guerrilla presence barred the region from enjoying peace and stability, and also hampered enslaved families from escaping to Union lines.74

The black troops embraced Wild’s approach and successfully executed irregular modes of combat against their guerrilla adversary. Milton M. Holland, a sergeant in the 5th USCT, wrote, shortly after the raid, of an episode in which he and his comrades “faced the cowardly foe


74 Ibid., 912. 915; Barton A. Myers, The Execution of Daniel Bright: Race, Loyalty, and Guerrilla Violence in a Coastal Carolina Community, 1861-1865 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2009), 76-98.
when they were hid in the swamp firing upon them. They stood like men, and when ordered to charge, went in with a yell, and came out victorious.” Holland expressed utter contempt for the violence perpetuated on his men by guerrillas. One of their fellow soldiers was captured and hanged by the southern bandits; the black troops responded in equal manner. “We hold one of their ‘fair daughters,’” Holland reported, in return for the guerrillas’ behavior. But their motivations extended much deeper. Their murdered comrade “was found with a note pinned to his flesh,” and Holland promised that “[b]efore this war ends we will pin their sentences to them with Uncle Sam’s leaden pills.” He then celebrated the symbolism of Daniel Bright’s execution, writing simply “[w]e hung [the] guerrilla dead, by the neck.”

The most significant aspect of the expedition, and others like it, was the manner in which black soldiers used violence to destroy slavery in the region. Milton Holland estimated that “thousands of slaves belonging to rebel masters were liberated.” Wild, in his official report, calculated that the raid freed 2,500 enslaved people. Burning plantations, capturing white civilians, freeing slaves who literally were chained in closets, and ridding the countryside of guerrillas, unlocked the gates of freedom. At one point, the expedition passed through one of the black soldier’s neighborhoods. He “came running to the General in breathless haste [and] wished permission to go to the house of his former master, a half a mile from the road, and get his son.” Similar episodes marked the character of the raid. “On arriving at [any given] house, the front windows and doors would invariably be found closed, when the men would rush at once to the rear, and overrun the premises like so many ants,” claiming goods, supplies, white prisoners, and especially enslaved blacks.  

75 Milton M. Holland Letter, January 19, 1864, in Redkey, ed., Grand Army of Black Men, 94.

The North Carolina raid did not operate in isolation. In helping to liberate their enslaved families and friends from bondage, African American occupiers turned civilians into enemy combatants and engaged them on violent grounds. In their minds, white southerners, regardless of whether they were enlisted soldiers, residents on the home front, or guerrillas, sanctioned slavery and thus should be defeated through any means. This was the fundamental assumption behind Wild’s expedition, and this mindset also characterized the actions from other black soldiers throughout the occupied Confederacy. In St. Bernard Parish, Louisiana, for example, several soldiers from the 1st Louisiana Native Guards, entered local plantations, allegedly for purposes of recruiting. Arriving in August 1863, the soldiers put guards over various houses, “threatening to shoot any white person attempting to leave the houses and there seizing horse carts & mules for the purpose of transporting men women & children from the plantations to the city of New Orleans.” The Native Guard troops effectively liberated 75 black people. A few days later, more black soldiers arrived at the front door of a prominent planter, “loaded their muskets in front of his door and demanded some colored women whom they called their wives.”

Black soldiers did not always have to commit violence to strike a blow to against slavery. Their mere presence as blue-clad soldiers in an army of liberation inspired the enslaved to runaway and join the ranks of the Union army. James M. Jones, a black soldier in the 14th Rhode Island Heavy Artillery, related how his unit’s presence near New Orleans was received with “every demonstration of joy and gladness.” The contrabands,” he wrote, “look for more certain help, and a more speedy termination of the war, at the hands of the colored soldiers than from any other source; hence their delight at seeing us.” Likewise, as a detachment of soldiers from the 8th Louisiana Infantry (Union, African Descent, later the 47th USCT), traversed the swamps

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77 George L. Davis to James Bowen, August 21, 1863, Provost Marshal General Records, RG 393, Part 1, Department of the Gulf, #1845, Box 1, Letters Received, 1863, NARA.
and bayous that crisscrossed the Mississippi Valley, they came upon a relatively hidden plantation populated by slaves who were “over worked and had but little to eat.” One soldier reported that the enslaved men’s “greatest desire appeared to be, to get with the Union army, and were willing and even anxious to go with it any capacity they could be useful.” Although the men believed that service in the army offered the best mode of refuge, they expressed their fear “of being worked [only] on the canals.” The troops in the 8th Louisiana provided “our promise and assurance that they were to be soldiers, and that all would be done for their families that could, be they all come willingly.” Several of the enslaved men responded to the request, put down their tools, and walked away with the black Union soldiers, almost certainly to be enfolded into the very force of liberation that had just liberated them.  

The ethos of black occupation, similar to the experience of Union occupation generally, was fraught with challenges and confusion. The racial component of wartime occupation assumed a central position within the evolution of the Union’s war; it sought to cure the problem of white citizen-soldiers’ grievances concerning the garrison ethos. The language of emancipation, as articulated by Abraham Lincoln, leading military commanders, and white troops, demarcated “appropriate” military assignments for (white) citizen-volunteers and (black) auxiliary troops. Indeed, much of the white North presumed that the enlistment of African American soldiers would solve the Union’s manpower crisis, as black soldiers could garrison strategic positions currently held by white troops and complete labor assignments in occupied zones. The majority of USCT units did, in fact, remain stationed behind the lines, but they actively performed necessary service in the Union’s expanding war of occupation. They did not passively accept their assumed secondary positions within the army. Rather, they used their

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78 James M. Jones Letter, May 28, 1864, in Redkey, ed., Grand Army of Black Men, 142; Testimony from Captain Joseph L. Coppoc, July 18, 1863, and Edward F. Brown to Col. Scofield, July 18, 1863, both in RG 393, Part 1, Department of the Tennessee, #, Box 1, Letters Received, 1862-1866, NARA.
power as occupation forces to overturn centuries-long social arrangements in the South, demonstrate their martial authority on expeditions and raids, and, when necessary, engaged in violent tactics to shatter the institution of slavery. Tensions and distrust governed the relationships between white and African American occupiers, and discrimination and pseudo forms of slavery sometimes tainted black military assignments. Yet through it all, black soldiers demonstrated that the duties of occupation did not connote only supplementary modes of service. Their words and actions revealed how occupation provided the ideal vehicle by which to reorder a segment of American society that had long defined the racial hierarchy.

Frederick Douglass summarized the African American soldiering experience when he declared in 1863 that black troops “themselves must strike the blow, and they long for the opportunity to strike that blow.” He contended that the racial assumptions of the garrison ethos were false because the enlistment of black troops was not “only a military necessity.” It had “a higher significance,” he claimed, “It is a great moral necessity.” Douglass defined the ultimate purpose of the African American soldier’s role. The black occupier in particular embodied these sentiments and permanently altered the culture of wartime occupation.79

CHAPTER SIX
THE INDISCRETIONS OF OCCUPATION:
DISCIPLINE, BEHAVIOR, AND THE TRIALS OF INDIVIDUAL VIRTUE

Private Rankin P. McPheeters probably did not realize just how perceptive he was. As a volunteer in the 126th Illinois Infantry, he and his fellow soldiers had spent most of the war occupying various portions of the Western Confederacy, from Middle Tennessee to Vicksburg, and finally De Vall’s Bluff, Arkansas, where by March 1864, they had remained static for the previous five months. McPheeters, like countless other occupation soldiers, grumbled about his duties, the stale existence of garrison life, and the degraded appearance of white southerners. He had many months ago learned that long-term military occupation clearly did not conform to the citizen-soldier ideal. Indeed, his duties as a wartime occupier fostered great discouragement.

But McPheeters revealed another peculiar problem that he confronted during his time in occupied zones. While at De Vall’s Bluff, he noticed that his men increasingly resisted their officers’ orders, displaying an evident sense of apathy and distraction. Such traits had long defined the character of volunteer armies, especially those composed of fiercely individualistic American males. McPheeters, though, made a careful distinction. “A large army laying idle, as long as we have been,” he informed his wife Anne, “becomes demoralized in spite of rigid discipline.” The problematic symbolism of serving in a standing army of occupation, he reasoned, was not reserved only for the realm of ideological disillusionment. Rather, this problem was manifested in soldiers’ behavior, carrying destructive consequences. “I see and hear things that are going on by men in high position, which it is not prudent for me to say anything about,” he acknowledged. “Licentiousness and every other evil vice of which man is heir to, is prevailing here to an alarming extent.” For McPheeters, the occupied garrison of De Vall’s Bluff
was much more than a strategically placed Union outpost. It was a zone of ethical depravity, a corrupted space that altered the moral virtues of republican citizens-turned-soldiers.¹

McPheeters revealed how the ethos of occupation bred decadence, functioning as the ultimate culprit in soldiers’ inattention to detail and detachment from the moral conditions of civilized society. His confusion, complaints, and worries collectively resonated, highlighting a fundamental dilemma about the experience of wartime occupation. In addition to ideological, cultural, and racial challenges, nineteenth-century American military occupation also unleashed a powerful wave of discipline problems and modes of behavior that would not be acceptable in peacetime society, all of which threatened the virtue attached to the citizen-soldier ideal. The garrison ethos stood at the center of this conundrum. Although McPheeters struggled to locate the precise source and cause of the specific crisis, he implicitly acknowledged that the unusual environment of occupied garrisons played a decisive role in soldiers’ marked alteration of behavior.

This chapter builds on Rankin McPheeters’s revelations and seeks to answer a series of questions. What was the nature of discipline within the Union’s armies of occupation? How were soldiers, who passionately valued their individual freedom, controlled, regulated, and restrained by their officers? How and why did the culture of occupied garrisons contribute to, and even accentuate, immoral patterns of behavior traditionally scorned by nineteenth-century American society? Finally, how did the collective challenges to discipline and behavior confront the citizen-soldier model?

Historians have authored an excellent literature on the problem of discipline and behavior within Civil War armies. The scholarly consensus maintains that soldiers, because they were

¹ Rankin P. McPheeters to Anne McPheeters, March 2, 1864, McPheeters Family Collection, United States Army Military History Institute, Carlisle Barracks, Carlisle, Pennsylvania (hereafter cited USAMHI).
drawn from the broad spectrum of nineteenth-century American society, displayed an unceasing dedication to democratic individualism, resisted the hierarchical structure of military life, and chafed at the rigid discipline required by their officers. In essence, American volunteers demanded that their cherished attachments to democracy and equality be respected and upheld in the ranks. Indeed, an implicit component to their contracts of service stipulated that their identities as free men and citizens would not be suppressed by the army’s bureaucratizing tendencies. Soldiers expected military life to function as an extension of the society from which they came, where all of the trappings of white-male American citizenship were protected. The volunteer soldier insisted on the right to govern himself and direct his own affairs, just as he did as a private citizen during peacetime. The regimented nature of military culture could not fully oblige this mandate, yet officers, many of whom were also citizen-soldiers, tried to accommodate their men’s desires, effectively forming a citizen army. Even so, the many volunteers who embraced notions of freedom and individualism often challenged the army’s strict brand of discipline, resulting in a constant struggle between military order and personal autonomy.2

Although the current literature successfully catalogs the ways in which volunteer American soldiers expected to be treated by their officers, their resistance to the constraints of military life, and the manner in which they were punished, scholars generally overlook the role of long-term military occupation in shaping the problem of behavior and discipline within the Union army. Soldiers who served in occupied Memphis, for example, were, in many ways, no different from those who served in the Army of the Potomac. Both expressed boredom, grumbled about their commanders, and desired to go home. And both groups struggled against the strictures of army culture. But historian Bell Irvin Wiley’s words ring true: “As a general rule, discipline was considerably worse among troops far removed from fighting areas and having little hope of [combat]. . . . Units assigned to garrison duty, especially in remote areas, were notably inclined to disciplinary deficiency.” Wiley, though, did not explore precisely why this was the case, nor has the literature built upon his contention.  

Union soldiers who served in the major campaigning armies and who garrisoned regions of the Confederacy each experienced notable breakdowns in discipline, reflecting the unruly disposition of volunteers. Misbehavior in both arenas appeared widespread, suggesting that disciplinary breakdowns were not unique to garrisons, armies paused momentarily near cities, or mobile forces on active campaigns. The wartime generation recognized that behavioral issues were common across all forms of citizen-soldier military service.

Although garrisons did not inspire unique behavioral transgressions, the root *causes* of such disciplinary breakdowns were distinctive to the culture of occupation. Indeed, soldiers in occupied zones had few outlets from which to channel pent-up boredom and mounting laziness, reflecting the permanence of garrison life. Soldiers in the mobile field armies, by contrast, were

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comforted by the understanding that their time spent in certain regions would be temporary. Occupied zones were far removed from the central theaters of the war, detaching garrison soldiers from their martial obligations. Psychiatrist Nathaniel Warner, who wrote in the aftermath of World War II, explained that occupation challenged a soldier’s focus, oftentimes instilling depressed morale. “As soon as the drab character of occupation duty manifested itself,” he suggested, “the termination of hostilities [and] the incentives which had appealed to and stimulated the main drives to continue at duty during the war now ceased to apply in force.”

Whereas military service required all soldiers to relinquish aspects of personal independence, the culture of occupation filled troops with a belief that they had become disconnected from all military commitments and identity. Their behavior, therefore, reflected a desperate search to reclaim cherished notions of individualism, which volunteer duty had erased. Citizen-officers, who had few ways to distinguish their leadership, confronted this lack of an outlet by poring over the actions of their men, searching for even the smallest infractions. Thus, discipline became particularly severe, and soldiers chafed at such close scrutiny. The result was anything but an ideal, organized, or efficient military environment.

All volunteer soldiers were expected to set aside self-interest in pursuit of a collective mission. Stationed in garrisons, which seemed completely removed from that shared undertaking, and where their officers took unwelcome interest in daily affairs, the occupiers slid easily back into the individualism that had characterized their civilian lives. Ironically, though, in their quest to reclaim personal liberty, discharge pent-up aggression, and relieve their boredom,

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5 Steven J. Ramold writes that “[g]arrison duty in occupied areas of the Confederacy also produced boredom, as the war had seemed to pass the soldiers by” (Ramold, *Baring the Iron Hand*, 54); Judkin Browning, *Shifting Loyalties: The Union Occupation of Eastern North Carolina* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 141.
soldiers’ actions oftentimes deteriorated into conduct deemed unethical by nineteenth-century society. Occupied garrisons were embroiled in this binary, pitting the need for continued military discipline against soldiers’ deteriorating feelings of attachment to the larger war. The absence of battlefield exploit added an additional, troubling layer to this dichotomy: men were forced to enact their bellicose tendencies elsewhere within the constrained spaces of wartime garrisons.

And therein lay the reasons for which Union soldiers feared the symbolism of a standing army of occupation. The wartime generation, based on antebellum experiences, and lessons learned in the war against Mexico, directly equated garrison culture to inattention and questionable conduct. Such institutions, they claimed, concentrated sources of corruption, discouraged proper conduct, and clouded the distinctions between moral citizenship and individualism. Sustained life in garrisoned towns lent itself to undignified behavior. Republican morality, a cherished aspect of American culture, which encouraged citizens to stand against such moral wrongs as greed and corruption, came under assault. Garrisons, therefore, functioning in the American mind like standing armies of occupation, were seen as breeding grounds for immoral behavior that was antithetical to republican virtue.6

Behavior within the garrison ethos thus stemmed from a paradoxical problem. Soldiers came of age in an era that valued both individualism and a strong dedication to republican virtue. However, garrison life placed these traditional American traits, which in civilian life went hand-in-hand, in opposition to each other. In order to function effectively, garrison troops needed to maintain martial discipline. Yet the malaise of garrison culture lulled soldiers into a sense of remoteness from the war, which prompted them to revert back to the individualism of their civilian lives. Unfortunately, this individualism manifested itself in ways that corrupted their

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6 On the problem of morality, masculinity, and individualism within the Union army, see Foote, Gentlemen and the Roughs, 1-16, 17-20, 25-29, 31, 33, 36-39, 176.
understanding of republican ideals. Private citizens could find outlets for their individualistic impulses in healthy pursuits, such as enterprise or education. Bereft of the opportunities they had enjoyed as civilians during peacetime, garrison soldiers expressed their individualism through the corrupting temptations so readily available to static, permanent armies: petty theft, visits to prostitutes, drinking, inattention on picket duty, or engaging in informal (and illicit) economies. Garrisoned communities, therefore, evolved into spaces of ethical depravity in which soldiers succumbed to numerous enticements, developed indolent and uninterested attitudes toward their wartime commitments, and behaved in ways unbecoming of moral republican citizens. The garrison ethos reflected the dark underside of war, as illicit behavior came to be the rule, rather than the exception, among the Union’s armies of occupation.

This chapter progresses in linear fashion, beginning with the relationships between officers and enlisted men in occupied garrisons and the various types of discipline that were instituted. It then investigates the numerous forms of misbehavior in which occupation soldiers engaged, challenging the republican virtue expected of nineteenth-century volunteers. In addition, although African American soldiers had been enlisted largely to cure the Union army’s manpower crisis, supplying needed garrison forces, white soldiers also continued to occupy the Confederacy. Thus the chapter compares and contrasts the racial components of behavior in occupied zones, detailing how black and white men navigated the challenges of garrison conduct.

Officers embodied the character of the regiments that they led. Since many units were composed of men from the same community, officers were generally elected on the basis of social standing, respect, and leadership. They were expected to guide their soldiers through the tumult of war while also catering to their men’s fierce individualism and reluctance to be
governed strictly. Many officers successfully navigated these complicated tasks, oftentimes improvising inventive and resourceful styles of leadership. August V. Kautz, a long-time soldier in both the German and American armies, as well as an officer of Union volunteers during the Civil War, wrote extensively on the proper ways in which officers should perform their duties. Kautz was especially interested in behavior and demeanor. He urged company-level and regimental leaders to provide an upstanding, imitable example for their men. Focusing on the twin requisites of “government and administration,” he stressed “force of character, judgment and discretion,” in addition to “a certain amount of knowledge absolutely indispensable to a discharge of the duty.” Kautz ultimately endorsed a professional approach to officering, which would result in efficient command and respect. Moreover, officers should exhibit “the preservation of order and subordination, and the cultivation of a military spirit and pride.”

Morality, though, assumed central importance. “Manner and deportment have a great influence on the men,” he instructed, “and to be attractive in this respect is not within the power of every man, and those who can be so without genuine merit, are rare indeed.” Embrace one’s moral compass, he counseled, “and be guided by [it] in the control of the company, that will command respect and obedience, much more so than personal manner.” Kautz added an important stipulation to his views on officer morality. “A strict attention to duty, an honest regard for the men, and a constant self-respect, guided by equal justice to all,” he explained, “will command the most insubordinate set of men, provided it is accompanied by sufficient knowledge of the duties of the position.” Kautz concluded by warning, “[i]gnorance in this respect cannot be compensated for by any talent for other things, however capable.” It was

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7 For an in-depth study of the Union and Confederate junior officer corps, their ideological compositions, and their challenges and successes of leadership, see Bledsoe, “Citizen-Officers,” passim.

8 August V. Kautz, The 1865 Customs of Service for Officers of the Army (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott and Co., 1866), 225.
insufficient to understand and implement only tactics and drill. Officers should perpetually display moral leadership, establish courage of conviction, and embrace the obligations bestowed upon their position.\(^9\)

Not all officers lived up to Kautz’s prescriptions. The environment of occupation and the garrison ethos challenged officers’ attempts at effective leadership and honorable example. Some officers, simply because they remained stationed indefinitely in occupied zones, used their authority to live opulent, privileged lifestyles, much to their troops’ chagrin. Enlisted men expressed great contempt at such comfortable, fortunate lives. Officers had the pleasure of living in houses, effectively replicating their domestic peacetime homes, while their men were relegated to dirty, claustrophobic encampments. The soldiers accordingly focused their irritation on what they considered to be gross inequality. “I have been looking into the way of life of our garrison in this city,” John William De Forest wrote in October 1862 about occupied New Orleans. He had been stationed in the Crescent City ever since it fell to Union forces earlier in the year. After months of learning about how officers responded to their circumstances in occupied zones, De Forest was noticeably dejected. He was shocked to learn that a mere adjutant and lieutenant shared “a treasure box,” which was outfitted with expensive furnishings. De Forest discovered “that the furniture, all of Parisian make, cost fifteen thousand dollars. The bedsteads are lofty four-posters, elaborately carved and of solid mahogany. The washing set . . . is a cream-colored ground glass, very pretty and curious if not expensive. One of the most valuable articles is a small bureau encrusted with patterns of gilt enamel set in tortoise shell.”

The elegant home once belonged to a prominent New Orleans resident who enlisted in the Confederate army. De Forest’s tour continued, as he recounted wood carvings, engravings, dress

\(^9\) Ibid., 225-26.
swords, an elaborate smoking room, a wine cellar, and “leather-covered lounges.” He struggled to process this luxurious military life enjoyed by officers while he and his men “have been stick-in-the-muds for months, badly fed and so vilely lodged that I would have been grateful for a stable to sleep in.”

Other soldiers agreed that their officers unfairly enjoyed the spoils of war present in occupied garrisons. Samuel Root, of the 24th Massachusetts Volunteers, which occupied New Bern, North Carolina, during the autumn of 1862, explained how “[t]he men are anxious to fight; to make decisive attacks that shall annihilate the foe.” Their desires, though, were frustrated by officers who “quarter by themselves & have two contrabands to wait on them.” He admitted that “the officers are lukewarm, as they never had such authority before.” It seemed quite easy to be an officer, Root suggested, when “many of the [them] are allowed to lay back, doing little duty but drawing pay, keeping the posts that others should while doing no work.” Root acknowledged that his leaders’ behavior and quest for a lavish, lazy lifestyle created tension in the ranks. “There is a great deal of selfishness out here in the army,” he claimed, “it is not all pure blue patriotism that leads men out to the war.”

Undeserved privilege was scorned within the Union army’s democratic culture. Yet acquiring wealth and potentially luxurious accommodations in garrisoned cities, simply by virtue of one’s status as an officer, was sometimes much too tempting to resist. Some officers, though, withstood these urges, keenly aware that their men always judged their actions. There was little need, some officers reasoned, to appear aristocratic and advantaged. William Montague Ferry, a captain and commissary of subsistence who served at Memphis, rarely socialized, seldom

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11 Samuel H. Root to Dear Wife, September 20, 1862, Samuel H. Root Letters, Civil War Miscellaneous Collection, USAMHI (hereafter cited as CWMC).
attended large parties thrown by the local elite, and ventured primarily to church. The nature of his position necessitated that he interact frequently with the enlisted men currently occupying the city. Although Ferry wore shoulder straps, which distinguished him from the common soldier, “you see I am not much given to visiting or riding about. [M]ost of the Officers here that are on duty make some showing of style, carriage buggy horses &c.” Ferry believed it to be much more responsible to “plod around on foot and only along the road that leads to & from work – not play.” The enlisted men probably agreed.12

Many other officers, though, did not share Ferry’s judgment. Rather, the dull experience of occupation, the lack of opportunity to live up to the expectations of their office, and the inherent temptations within garrisons compelled officers into setting a bad example for their men. Leaders ranging from company-level captains to regimental colonels and even brigadier generals displayed a lack of awareness for the ways in which they behaved, coupled with the adverse implications of their actions. Occupation soldiers did not withhold opinions about their officers’ conduct. They sensed a double-standard in which military commanders used their privilege to neglect duty, rest idly, and access liquor. Drunken officers were a common sight within occupied garrisons, eliciting vocal criticism and disgust from the men under their command. “[T]he officers are very thick in the city,” Alfred Holcomb of the 27th Massachusetts wrote from New Bern, North Carolina. “[T]here is more officers than privates. we see them drunk and carousing about the streets evry day[,] some times a half dozen at a time[,] but if a private get a little down he is turned over to the provost marshal and his pay taken away.” Holcomb became increasingly vexed as he wrote. “[O]ne day when I was on guard the Lieutenant of the guard was so tite that he did not no what he was about,” Holcomb recalled.

12 William Montague Ferry to My dear Sister, August 10, 1864, Ferry Family (William Montague Ferry) Papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan (hereafter cited as BL).
“[T]here was nothing said to him about it. he was an officer[.] he had a perfect right to drink as much as he is a mind to. [I]f it had been a poor private,” Holcomb concluded, “he had to go to fort totton with a bolt and chain for four months and his pay taken away.” For Holcomb, the perceived double-standard for officer conduct extended well beyond drinking. “I wish we was out of the city,” he wrote more than a year and a half later. “This is not a fit place for enny thing but nigers and officers to live in and thare is a plenty of them here to. [A] niger is thought more of here than a private,” he concluded.13

Drunkenness among officers was a serious problem, and enlisted men were clearly affected by their leaders’ behavior. The common soldier looked to his commanders for guidance, leadership, and, in many cases, a moral standard to emulate. Yet occupation officers generally failed to meet these expectations. Charles O. Musser, a young private in the 29th Iowa Volunteers, spent the vast majority of the war occupying Helena and Little Rock, Arkansas, where he witnessed what he perceived to be the deterioration of his officers’ morals. Musser became profoundly disillusioned. He was raised during an age that feared the moral decay of society; leaders were expected to exemplify a principled character to combat the ills of cultural depravity. But now, Musser’s superiors were guilty of breaking the ethical codes that they were elected to embody. “The Army is the place to find out the weak and strong points of a man’s Character,” he wrote after spending more than a year at Little Rock. “[E]very trait will Show itself in Spite of all deceit and cloaking.” Musser cited the abundance of alcohol in the city as the source of most problems. “[T]he use of intoxicating liquors is abused awfully. it is used to excess,” he revealed to his father. Musser, though, was concerned more by the implications of his officers’ alcohol abuse. He estimated that “[t]here is not one Officer in our regiment but what

13 Alfred Holcomb to Dear Parents, April 25, 1862, and August 4, 1863, Alfred Holcomb Letters, CWMC, USAMHI.
I have Seen under the influence of Strong drink,” and suggested that “[s]everal of the officers now in the regt ought to be out. they are nuisanceses. they do no duty, are sick all the time, and their sickness was brought on by their own irregular habits. it is a disgrace to all their families and friends at home.” The problem was much greater than simply drinking in confined garrisons. “[T]he outward world may not know anything about such matters,” Musser concluded, “but we of the regt do, and we will at some future period form a portion of the civil world.” He perceptively understood what was at stake, by adding, “you can judge the moral Character of our leaders, and just imagine the men under them to follow partially their example.” Ultimately, Musser implied, the common soldier, later turned veteran, would continue to emulate his officer’s immoral behavior once he returned home from the war.14

Occupation troops focused on officer drunkenness as a symbol of the ineffective leadership and poor examples exhibited by their commanders. Soldiers grew weary of watching their lieutenants, captains, and generals drink endlessly, parade around garrisoned communities with an air of privilege, and use their status as officers to abandon their martial responsibilities. Indeed, officers were sometimes referred to as “shoulder strap[p]ed gentry,” or labeled “too anxious to exhibit their gold lace.” In some cases, enlisted men flat out refused to follow their elected leaders. “Our Orderly is drunk again today,” wrote Charles G. Blake of the 34th Massachusetts from Fort Lyon, Virginia. “Men cannot and will not obey such an officer as that.” The war felt very much removed from zones of occupation, and officers accordingly relaxed and discarded their duties. Soldiers’ morale suffered as a result. They already felt dishonored and underused by serving as a garrison force. Now they had to negotiate the murky contours of derelict leadership. The results were appalling. William Wiley, a volunteer in the 77th Illinois

Infantry, explained how his unit’s daily drill exercises suffered from inept command. “Major [Memoir V.] Hotchkiss would get the 77 out each afternoon and try to drill us,” Wiley wrote in January 1864 from the Union garrisons along the Texas coast, “but soon would get us all mixed up and get mad and abuse the men.” This situation continued day after day “until the men began to loose all respect for the major and discipline was getting to a pretty low ebb in the regiment.” The Illinoisans promptly erased any deference they once may have held for Hotchkiss. “When the major would go dashing off towards one end of the regiment to give some luckless officer or company a blessing,” Wiley continued, “some of the more reckless men of the other wing would hollow out here Major.” The practice continued repeatedly as an enraged Hotchkiss demanded to know who the disrespectful soldiers were, but to little avail. The 77th’s drill exercises became so absurd that they were discontinued.15

By virtue of their elected positions, officers were expected to be effective leaders, models of successful and inspiring direction. The lassitude of occupied garrisons, though, threatened this task. Struggling against the static character of occupation, officers failed to embody the leadership qualities necessary to lead volunteers. An inspection report in March 1863 from the Union outpost at Beaufort, South Carolina, testified to this problem. Officers were accused of not paying “strict attention to polic[ing the camps] so necessary to the health of their commands.” Battalion drills, moreover, were “very well attended to, but the ‘Instruction for Skirmishes’ and ‘Bayonet Exercise’ are almost entirely neglected.” The report suggested that officers simply did

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not consider such exercises to be important. In addition, common soldiers were regularly absent without leave or sometimes seen lounging about the garrison. The implications of this situation were clear: the “salutary effects on discipline, instruction, and cleanliness of the different regiments” would most certainly impact the ways in which soldiers defined and understood their duties. The burden, naturally, was placed upon officers to occasion crucial change.¹⁶

The circumstances at Beaufort were echoed in occupied New Orleans. Enlisted men were concerned about their officers’ general absence of leadership, especially during times of crisis or emergency. After remaining stationed in the Crescent City for two months, Francis Skillin, a private in the 15th Maine Volunteers, noticed the adverse effect of his regimental commander’s poor governing capabilities. A band of guerrillas had attacked a Union picket line, which caused some soldiers to be “half scared to death” because the “[colonel] come without cap or Coat yelling like hell so [anyone] could here him [for] 2 or 3 miles.” Skillen explained that “thare was a go[o]d many would like to have seen the rebels not myself excepted.” And he did not even worry about engaging in a battle against the local guerrillas. But “the most I should fear,” he admitted, “is that the officers could not manoever us for [they] dont know how.” Skillen acknowledged that his leaders had not properly instructed the regiment on drill exercises, which certainly did not inspire confidence. “[H]e could not repeat his commands right,” Skillen recalled of his drill officer, “and the other[s] dont know as much as some of the privates.” Under normal

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¹⁶ P. W. Jackson to Truman Seymour, March 11, 1863, Letters Received, 1862-1867, Record Group 393, Part 1, Department of the South, #4109, Box 3, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D. C. (hereafter cited as NARA).
circumstances enlisted men probably would not have minded such lax drill training. But they were understandably concerned when their lives and safety were threatened as a result.17

Such insufficient attention to leadership plagued both officers and enlisted men. The garrison ethos inspired a lax mindset, which lulled commanders into letting down their guard, retreating from required duties, and establishing patterns of behavior that did not conform to proper military culture. Judging that occupied garrisons were far removed from the focus of war, officers decided that they were removed from their stipulated obligations. This did not go unnoticed by men such as Rankin P. McPheeters; he clearly witnessed the negative effects of occupation on his officers. While stationed at LaGrange, Tennessee, in December 1862, McPheeters recounted an episode in which a captain, much to his surprise, was relieved of command. The officer asked why he was being demoted, only to learn that he was considered “incompetent.” McPheeters explained in private, though, that the captain’s tendency for alcohol influenced the garrison commander’s decision for removal. Another officer was appointed who, McPheeters explained, “is as roten as he is himself [and] gets drunk whenever he can get whiskey.”18

Even one year after McPheeters’ regiment, the 126th Illinois, moved from LaGrange to De Vall’s Bluff, Arkansas, this undesirable situation had not been resolved. In fact, it only got worse. McPheeters illustrated how the officers had become increasingly lazy, in addition to their liberal imbibing. Thus, the regiment’s colonel “has written on to the war department to have 8 commissioned officers of our reg[iment] mustered out of service,” McPheeters acknowledged, “because they are worthless and have not done any duty for six months past.” McPheeters’

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17 Francis Skillin to Dear Brother, July 13, 1862, Francis M. Skillin Letters, 1862-1863, Mss. 4667, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana (hereafter cited as LLMVC, LSU).

18 Rankin P. McPheeters to Dear Anne, August 3, 1862, McPheeters Family Papers, USAMHI.
disgusted tone was part of a broader chorus of complaints articulated by Union soldiers who came to understand that their officers’ behavior corresponded directly to the environment in which they served. They were accordingly dispirited, and sometimes disillusioned, at the lack of example and sullied character embodied by their superiors.¹⁹

The level of disgust shown by enlisted men toward their officers extended much deeper than merely grumbling about unfair privilege, drinking, and inattention to detail. Although these elements contributed to the larger issue of unfavorable leadership, the common soldier ultimately sensed that his officers lacked the cherished values of fairness and equality, widely considered essential for effective command. Officers were tasked with perpetuating the military’s hierarchical structure, yet the culture of occupation erected numerous barriers against this condition. The very nature of the garrison ethos presented little opportunity for officers to direct their martial attention. They were given few occasions to lead on the battlefield, leaving them struggling to distinguish themselves from the common soldier. The latter came to view garrisons as the antithesis of their peacetime society in which all white men were supposed to be equal. Occupied zones sanctioned officers to force their will on those they commanded, in acts which enlisted men oftentimes interpreted as unfair admonishment and arbitrary scrutiny.²⁰

Officers and enlisted men sometimes lived in close proximity, fostering tense and suspicious relationships. Employing numerous methods of capricious authority, officers attempted to construct strict divisions within occupied garrisons. The common soldier accordingly resisted. “At times things move on so harmoniously that it makes me contended yea almost happy in my present lot,” Courtland G. Stanton of the 21st Connecticut wrote from coastal


North Carolina. “But there comes some act of petty tyrann[y] from men that though I have taken a solemn oath to obey and respect them, ‘they being my superiors,’ I can but in some things see them my inferiors.” Stanton was upset because he had recently acquired a prized new coat. However, new orders prevented enlisted men from wearing any clothing other than that furnished by the Quartermaster Department. Stanton defied the directive, “for I can ill afford to wear better,” deciding that he could sell his coat if the order was enforced.21

Although Courtland Stanton’s episode may seem minor, his use of the phrase “petty tyranny” hits on a common theme echoed by his brothers in arms. Union soldiers scattered across the occupied Confederacy would have agreed fully with Stanton’s wording. Hoping to bend enlisted men to their will, while also attempting to consolidate their own power and authority, officers enacted a host of disciplinary measures that did not conform to common soldiers’ notions of justice and fairness. Joseph Emery Fiske, a Massachusetts volunteer serving at Plymouth, North Carolina, recounted that one of his officers was under arrest for drunkenness, while two others were in custody for cowardice and deserting their post. Fiske, though, was troubled with the ways in which the remaining officers handled the enlisted men, whom he believed were “treated with great cruelty.” He illustrated that a typical day included soldiers being “tied to iron yokes, put on knapsack drill without compunction; things that no one but brutes are capable of doing.” Differentiating himself from his commanders, Fiske concluded, “I thank Heaven that I am not capable of treating another man as some of these heartless officers do.”22

21 Courtland G. Stanton to Wife, April 15, 1864, item DL0011.070, Courtland G. Stanton Letters, JLNC.

George W. Newcomb, a sergeant in the 19th Connecticut, related a similar occurrence at Alexandria, Virginia, in May 1864. An enlisted man got into an argument with one of the regimental lieutenants, which caused quite a stir in camp. The officer “drawed him up on a big wheel, so that he hung, by his rists and ankles and told him d__m you, I will make you ask my forgiveness before you are let down.” Newcomb, who was on guard duty, attempted to help the defenseless soldier, but the lieutenant said, “Sergeant, dont you tuch that man, or let any boddy els, untill you have orders from me.” After the lieutenant left, Newcomb informed a major about the situation, who promptly halted the punishment. But the lieutenant returned, furious that his will had been challenged. He “made a rush toward me,” Newcomb wrote, “and wanted to know, who in the h__l let that man down.” Newcomb proudly “laughed him rite in the face, and said I did sir,” with the major’s endorsement. The lieutenant “had nothing more to say but turned on his heel and left.”

The “petty tyranny” articulated by Courtland Stanton, and illustrated in the experiences of Joseph Fiske and George Newcomb, reflected the broader culture of officer-enlisted relations within occupied garrisons. George Hovey Cadman, a soldier in the 39th Ohio Volunteers, which occupied portions of Western Confederacy between much of 1863 and 1864, asked his wife why she “seemed surprised at my wish to be in active service again,” referring to his current position at Corinth, Mississippi. “When we are on the march, or in active service,” he explained, “we can do almost as we please in most things. The officers then have to wink at a good many things that men do.” Cadman made a clear distinction, though. When the soldiers were garrisoned, they had to “toe the mark pretty close. I would rather take a fight any day than a month’s drill. They are trying to make Sunday soldiers of us now, rather a poor experiment.”

23 George W. Newcomb to My dear little Wife, May 11, 1864, George W. Newcomb Letters, CWMC, USAMHI.

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Cadman’s words suggested that, within the garrison culture, officers used their authority indiscriminately to coerce the common soldier. Such instances ranged from troops being “bucked and gagged,” to barrels placed over their heads, to officers striking men with their swords, spitting in their faces, insulting their character, and, in one instance, shooting and killing a soldier. Enlisted men, effectively alienated from their leaders, responded with great disgust. “[Our commanding officer] has incurred the contempt of all men of common sense,” believed a soldier from one of the garrisons protecting Washington, D. C., “by his supercilious & important bearing & his cruel & unjust punishment of the men.” George O. Jewett, who served at New Bern, North Carolina, acknowledged that his commanding general was “getting very savage in his discipline . . . if a man dont stop as soon as the Provost sentry halts him, the sentry must shoot him down in broad daylight. It cannot last long.” Some soldiers even equated their officers’ conduct to the violence of slavery. Jabez T. Cox concluded from his position near Nashville “that a man in the army is almost as much of a slave as the negro in the cotton. there is an over seer directs and orders without doing any work[;] here a sarjeant or a corporal sets on a stump and over sees men that work like slaves without doing any work themselves.”

While they were perceived as unjust, some officers attempted to articulate and defend the particular methods they used to interact with their men. As a colonel in the 17th Indiana,
Benjamin Harrison, the future president, wrestled with the difficulty of governing volunteers in occupied garrisons. His unit spent the vast majority of the war occupying parts of Kentucky and Tennessee, which he described as the “lazy, spiritless life of a garrison soldier.” Harrison understood that such boring, disinterested, and inglorious service did not conform to his soldiers’ expectations, leading to breakdowns in discipline and behavior. Thus, he attempted to halt any transgressions before they began. Exacting very strict discipline, hoping to achieve some level of deference, Harrison believed that “every [soldier] has come to respect me and that traces of difficulty have been obliterated.” He personally celebrated having “broken” several unruly junior officers who “are beginning to know me.” Harrison came to learn, though, that his authority had limits. He lost the respect from, and even control over, some of his men after attempting to establish dedication to religious uniformity. Men were punished relentlessly for not abiding by strict Biblical principles, effectively driving them away from their colonel. Although Harrison understood the crucial necessity of obedience to authority, he also learned that harsh, arbitrary command, especially when not confirmed by battlefield leadership, caused distrustful relationships in occupied zones.26

Henry C. Gilbert, colonel of the 19th Michigan Volunteers, used a leadership style similar to Harrison’s. “The men think I am strict & severe,” he wrote from Lexington, Kentucky, “but they have to stand it & I know it is for their own good.” Gilbert explained how his men, once they embarked on expeditions into the countryside, plundered and stole “everything they could lay their hands on.” Once the regiment returned, Gilbert came down hard on his soldiers, and “by great diligence got the whole thing crushed out.” He was concerned more about the honor of his unit than he was about his men’s respect for him personally. A year later, Gilbert expanded on

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the varied contours of garrison leadership, suggesting the dominance that officers possessed over their men. In McMinnville, Tennessee, where his unit was stationed, “there is no civil law at all. There is nothing here but what is under my control. I have got in fact what Sancho Panza was so ambitious to secure—not an island, but a town to govern.” Revealing that only the “ranking military officer” dispenses the law, Gilbert explained that both soldiers and townspeople lived under the authority of one man, who could preside according to his own will.27

Although steeped in power, as Gilbert suggested, other officers had great difficulty implementing the levels of discipline necessary to control enlisted men within garrisons. A captain in the 15th Pennsylvania Cavalry, stationed at Nashville, complained that he could not find adequate scouts and pickets because most of the soldiers were unfit for duty, “go to town without passes, stay as long as they please, and are not arrested.” The officer feared that “I have no means of punishing these men.” Even after the soldiers were confined in prison, the provost guard allowed them to “roam about [the city] in perfect freedom.” The acting adjutant general promptly informed the captain that, “[a]s commanding officer you must enforce obedience at all hazards, trusting to your own judgment the manner in which it should be done.”28

The challenges experienced by the Pennsylvania cavalry officer reflected the broader problem of discipline and leadership in occupied zones. Officers on occupation duty, it seemed, had abandoned August V. Kautz’s prescriptions for effective, moral leadership. Indeed, their


style did not even meet the most basic standards of civil society. The common soldier accordingly drew contrasts between occupied garrisons and their peacetime world. Limitations on democratic privilege, arbitrary punishment, and leaders who were viewed as over-bearing, pompous, and domineering, collectively shaped the character of garrison life. It is crucial to recognize that soldiers sometimes viewed garrisons as smaller, more intimate extensions of American society. The war, in their minds, rarely touched occupied zones, thus informing a conviction that they once again lived in a town, populated by civilians, and governed by fair leaders. Thus, the peculiar varieties of bureaucratic organization and military hierarchy associated with garrisoned communities came as something of a shock. If we are removed from the principal theaters of conflict, they wondered, why submit to such abnormal, restrictive authority? Officers were put in an equally difficult position. They too considered themselves aloof from the war, yet they had to impart levels of power and discipline that would be unheard of during peacetime. Enlisted men and their officers therefore became estranged.

This problem typified not only the military occupations of the Civil War. The leadership constraints of the garrison ethos extended deep into the American military tradition, touching the roots of the early republic. As the United States expanded territorially, growing numbers of garrisons and frontier outposts dotted the national landscape. Naturally, the Old Army, populated by career officers and enlisted men, governed these distant military stations. Both groups of soldiers lived in close, intimate proximity, always interacting with one another. In spite of these concentrated relationships, a seemingly impregnable barrier divorced officers from the rank and file. Officers viewed their men with contempt and mistrust, reinforcing the static social divisions of garrison culture. Although some antebellum officers exhibited a paternalistic, protective
approach in their leadership style, many others incorporated discriminating modes of control and discipline.\textsuperscript{29}

Similar to the large, volunteer armies during the Civil War, the garrison ethos plagued the antebellum army. Ultimately, officers were challenged by the difficulty of sustaining a strict, hierarchical arrangement amongst the enlisted men’s burgeoning democratic impulses. Common soldiers interpreted extreme methods of punishment and control as direct affronts to their identities as free citizens. Garrisons, they believed, should be an extension of civil society; officers disagreed. They accordingly implemented severe disciplinary procedures, hoping to inspire respect and deference. But, similar to the milieu during the Civil War, such methods only amplified the gulf between officers and the men they commanded. Enlisted men resisted a system that they deemed threatening to their individual rights. Regular army garrisons spread throughout the antebellum United States, coupled with those in occupied regions during the Civil War, came to represent contested spaces of power, authority, and stratification on the one hand, and democratic, individualism on the other. These tensions were never fully resolved, instead leaving each group confused, frustrated, and distrustful.\textsuperscript{30}

Whereas officers struggled to negotiate the precise levels of discipline to maintain order, deference, and effective command, the enlisted men resisted in a host of peculiar ways. Drinking, gambling, fighting, petty theft, illicit sexual activity, and informal trade and economies, informed the troops’ behavior. Some soldiers attempted to define how and why garrisons contributed to the problem of immoral, sullied conduct. Joseph Waldo Denny, a soldier in the 25\textsuperscript{th} Massachusetts Volunteers, explained the deterioration of his regiment’s conduct shortly after it occupied New Bern, North Carolina, in the spring of 1862. Life in the city, in many respects,

\textsuperscript{29} Skelton, \textit{American Profession of Arms}, 261.
\textsuperscript{30} Ibid., 260-81.
Denny explained, imitated the comforts of home during the prewar days. The companies were lodged in “some of the best houses, and from the gardens were able to procure many esculents, some of which were almost ripened for the table.” The soldiers also enjoyed an abundance of produce and a variety of meats, all of which were pleasant changes from their lives campaigning in the field. In addition, the regiment had only to act as the daily provost guard, performing to the satisfaction of their commanding general, Ambrose E. Burnside. It appeared that New Bern would offer an ideal respite from the war, a needed rest for weary troops.31

Denny acknowledged, however, a troubling problem that emerged as the occupation grew more indefinite. “Long continued duty in a city was not desirable for a soldier,” he declared. Its effect was very disastrous to a wholesome esprit du corps.” The longer the soldiers spent in the city, the more they were surrounded by “the inertia and temptations incident to a town garrison.” Many of Denny’s comrades had probably never left their home communities, but now they were enveloped in a setting in which society could not judge their actions, where they were seemingly free from a traditional code of ethics. Denny believed that “men [could be] ruined in character by morality” if they took advantage of the enticements within garrisoned towns. “Army life pours a flood of light upon men,” he concluded, “and we see them as they are—see them as they give full swing to natural propensities. Frank Guernsey, a Wisconsin soldier, recognized these very challenges, revealing that “the temptations that surround one [in Memphis] are so greate.” He admitted to his wife in 1863, in relatively subtle terms, that he had succumbed to questionable enticements on more than one occasion. “I know that I have not been so watchful as I ought that

I do not enjoy that love which once was mine. I have suffered myself to be led astray and now am cold and indifferent.”

An anonymous writer for *The Cavalier*, a regimental newspaper published by the 5th Pennsylvania Cavalry stationed at Williamsburg and Yorktown, Virginia, built on Denny’s and Guernsey’s sentiments. In an article titled “Moral Soldiers,” the author expressed concern about his comrades’ behavior in the Old Dominion’s famed towns. He believed “it the duty of a soldier to keep as strict guard upon his morals as when he was where his parents, brothers and sisters could observe his deviations.” The author pondered why men acted so carefully and properly before they volunteered for the army, only to discard their virtuous behavior upon donning the Union blue. “Our friends at home expect us to retain that sense of morality and truth in camp which we exhibited while with them,” he instructed. The nature of garrison life naturally unleashed the influences of immoral conduct, he acknowledged, loosening men from societal restraints. “[B]ut greater dangers call for firm and steadfast determination and greater exertions against them,” the author suggested. A man’s personal character, governed by his private conduct, though, was not the only issue at stake. “A demoralized [and degraded] soldiery is a reproach upon our cause,” he warned. “We are fighting for the dearest rights of man.” Preservation of the Union encompassed not only the perpetuation of republican government, but also the moral conditions of republican society. If citizen-soldiers became corrupted, so too would the post-war world in which they would inhabit. “Nothing is so antagonistic to the fostering of these impulses,” the author concluded, “as the low vices which are rife in the camps of those who have forgotten the object for which they [enlisted], and have descended into the dark vale of obscurity and immorality.” Each soldier was duty-bound, obligated by his contract

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32 Ibid., 116-17; Francis Guernsey to Wife, March 26, 1863, item DL0301.44, Francis M. “Frank” Guernsey Letters, JLNCG.
of voluntary service, to uphold the ethical virtues of American culture. The fate of the Union, both ideologically and culturally, depended on its volunteers, and the occupied zones of the Civil War provided unprecedented testing grounds for republican citizens’ moral intuitions and commitments.\textsuperscript{33}

Joseph Waldo Denny and the writer for \textit{The Cavalier} spoke for many who struggled to outline the reasons why occupied garrisons symbolized the physical embodiments of wartime immorality and corruption. The Civil War exposed countless northern men to the rigors of military life, obedience to undemocratic authority, and the horrors of the battlefield, but it also revealed a peculiar world few had ever before seen. This new world seemingly possessed temptation without consequence, enticement without accountability. Men were reshaped by this environment, and it took little time for them to realize its initial allure.

Indeed, at the very beginning of the war, Wilder Dwight, of the 2\textsuperscript{nd} Massachusetts Volunteers, commented on the setting of occupied Harpers Ferry, Virginia. It seemed a “lazy military department which awaits new life,” he wrote. Celebrating the effortless seizure of the town, Dwight and his men were ready to push ahead, “getting ready for better things, I hope.” But a month later, he observed that “[t]he hard work, hot weather, and soldier’s fare begin to tell upon the men, and they are not as well satisfied as they were.” Dwight noted that the soldiers were also affected by disorder and lowered standards of discipline. “The result is,” he concluded, “that the regiment seems to lack willingness, obedience, enthusiasm, and vigor.” J. Henry Blakeman, stationed on the Florida coast in 1864, complemented Dwight’s complaints. “I am


The apathy and dispiritedness from which soldiers suffered carried grave consequences, fomenting a lack of interest in the war and inattention to military detail. These qualities contributed directly to the problem of misbehavior, informing the character of wartime garrisons. Life along the North Carolina coast was, for William Augustus Walker, “growing terribly monotonous.” The Massachusetts soldier encountered “literally nothing to do,” which “would be jolly for a lazy man, but I am not a lazy man & prefer a little activity.” Joseph K. Nelson, who served with the 81\textsuperscript{st} Ohio and 111\textsuperscript{st} United States Colored Troops (USCT), explained that “[t]his sort of relaxation was rather a subversion of military discipline.” Indeed he was correct. “We have very easy times here,” Adolphus P. Wolf confirmed from Memphis, “nothing to do, but two hours drilling daily.” He informed his father that “we have plenty of leisure time,” and even admitted, “I am getting fatter and lazier every day.” After remaining in Memphis for much of the next year, Wolf continued: “I suppose you would like to hear some news, but that is impossible, for we have the dullest time imaginable, it is a wonder that we do not die of the blues.”\footnote{William Augustus Walker to unknown, July 11, 1862, in Nina Silber and Mary Beth Sievens, eds., \textit{Yankee Correspondence: Civil War Letters between New Englanders and the Home Front} (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1996), 61; Joseph K. Nelson Memoir, p. 45, Joseph K. Nelson file, CWMC, USAMHI; Adolphus P. Wolf to Father, [December 1862/January 1863], and Wolf to Dear Brother & Sister, December 13, 1863, Adolphus P. Wolf Letters, Civil War Times Illustrated Collection, USAMHI (hereafter cited as CWTC).}

Countless soldiers in occupied zones equated the adverse effects of inaction and boredom directly to misconduct and wayward behavior. Union occupiers’ principal enemies were not gray-clad Confederates, whizzing bullets, or bursting shell but rather an invisible adversary of languor and idleness. Samuel Root, who served in the 24\textsuperscript{th} Massachusetts, long stationed at New
Bern, North Carolina, explained the occupiers’ dilemma. “The soldiers are uneasy at laying still so long & pine for action, no matter what or where it would keep them busy and healthy,” he wrote in September 1862. “[T]hey have not much to do, they are in danger of becoming lazy.” More than two months later, he accordingly judged that “[t]here is a want of interest in the war.” With little to do, coupled by distracted minds, anxious soldiers turned to the vices prevalent in wartime garrisons. Large, idle, occupying armies were most susceptible to breakdowns in discipline. “This city is a Sodem,” a Michigan soldier wrote of Nashville. “Probably just now the worst place in the country. All sorts of inequity held daily & nightly commences here.” Edward Gilbert, of the 74th Illinois, agreed, writing that occupied Nashville simply “is beyond description.” It “is given to Debauchery, profligacy, Infidelity & all vices springing from it.” Although vague in his references, Gilbert admitted that occupation soldiers involved themselves regularly in such ruinous conduct.  

Whereas observers and soldiers outlined the moral difficulties inherent within zones of occupation, they did so out of concern exclusively for white troops. The bulk of American society believed that citizen-soldiering encompassed only whites and excluded blacks, therefore placing the burden of upholding the ethical standards of the Union on white soldiers. Yet as African American males poured into USCT regiments, and thus formed a sizeable contingent of the wartime occupation force, new considerations emerged about soldier discipline and behavior. Many Americans feared the adverse distractions and temptations within occupied garrisons, articulating particular standards by which the republic’s white soldiers were to abide. Now, although presumed to be merely an auxiliary force, newly enlisted black regiments were expected to adhere to similar paradigms of conduct, while also enduring concentrated scrutiny.

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and harsher modes of discipline not attached to white soldiers. The basis for black soldier discipline in occupied regions revolved around white stereotypes of formerly enslaved people, which largely defined the behavioral conduct of African American occupiers.

Once it became clear that emancipation included the enlistment of black soldiers into the Union army, white Americans debated whether formerly enslaved men would make self-controlled, disciplined soldiers. Civil and military leaders believed that the static, indefinite nature of wartime occupation might transform white soldiers into an unruly mob, propelled by their fierce dedication to individualism and personal liberty. Conversely, it was presumed that black soldiers would produce an ideal force of occupation because of their previously immobile and restricted lives under slavery. Ulysses S. Grant welcomed emancipation and black enlistment because “[t]he negro troops are easier to preserve discipline among than our white troops, and I doubt not will prove equally good for garrison duty.” Grant long grumbled about the lax discipline that accompanied inactive soldiers, believing that acute attention to detail and conduct were crucial for an effective military occupation. White troops, because of their dedication to democracy, Grant believed, simply could not be fully controlled in occupied garrisons. Other white commentators reasoned that black men were already accustomed to the rigid discipline and behavioral regimens required to perform fatigue labor that was necessary behind the lines. Shortly after the Emancipation Proclamation went into effect, an article in the New York Times celebrated the potential of black soldiering on the grounds that African American males were already acclimated to the South and dissatisfied with the conditions of slavery, and thus would happily serve for less pay and comfort than white soldiers. Black men, the article concluded,
were already “submissive and very amenable to discipline,” the very qualities necessary for an effective garrison force.37

By contrast, other observers considered the experience of slavery detrimental to the conduct of black soldiers. A lifetime of bondage might inculcate a sense of retribution and uncontrollable demeanor that even a static garrison existence could not stem. Francis H. Peirpoint, the occupation commander at Alexandria, Virginia, argued that “[d]iscipline is the first requisite for troops of any color,” especially when they were placed in forces of occupation and sent on expeditions into the countryside. But the 600 African American soldiers sent to northern Virginia apparently posed a problem. “These colored troops are new recruits just from bondage. Their own welfare requires discipline,” he explained, “where they can be under the eye of their officers.” An additional factor, though, informed Peirpoint’s concern. “[T]he great objection is the positive insolence of these colored soldiers, undisciplined as they are, to the white citizen,” he suggested. Peirpoint confided to Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton, “I know you would not leave your wife and daughters in a community of armed negroes, undisciplined and just liberated from bondage, with no other armed protection.” Peirpoint feared that potential depredations committed by black soldiers would dislodge the growing unionist sentiment in the region, inspiring “terrible apprehensions that must haunt [the white citizens] by the presence of these troops.”38

In addition to assumptions that the experience of slavery both prepared and impeded black soldiers for long-term military occupation, racist notions emphasizing African American males’ supposed childlike demeanor also informed the white mind about the potential conduct of


USCT regiments within garrisons. “As to discipline I know not where to begin to describe defects,” wrote a white officer in a black Maryland regiment. “Those who have been accustomed to be the Masters servant arrogate to themselves privileges unbecoming in a soldier,” he continued, “and frequently after performing some light military duty seem to expect the reward to which they have been accustomed for slight favors for their masters.” Even Thomas Wentworth Higginson, the staunch Massachusetts abolitionist and colonel of the 1st South Carolina Volunteers (Colored), looked upon his soldiers in a paternalistic light. Debating whether enslaved southerners or northern free men made better soldiers, Higginson preferred “those who had been slaves, for their greater docility and affectionateness, for the powerful stimulus which their new freedom gave.” In addition, “[t]hey seem the world’s perpetual children, docile, gay, and lovable, in the midst of this war for freedom on which they have intelligently entered.” Higginson explained that “the superiority of these men to white troops in aptitude for drill and discipline, because of their imitativeness and docility, and the pride they take in the service,” supplied the crucial ingredients for an effective military force. And, touching on the experience of slavery, Higginson concluded that “[s]evere penalties would be wasted on these people, accustomed as they have been to the most violent passions on the part of white men. . . . They have a great deal of pride as soldiers, and a very little of severity goes a great way, if it be firm and consistent.”

39 The paternalistic approach used by white observers to define the conduct and discipline of black soldiers resonated across the occupied landscape. Many white Americans believed that USCT units would relieve white regiments from garrison duty for service in the field, while also

39 Thomas Wentworth Higginson, Army Life in a Black Regiment and Other Writings (1870; New York: Penguin Putnam Inc., 1997), 200-1, 22-23, 33. See also, Notes on Colored Troops and Military Colonies on Southern Soil, By an Officer of the 9th Army Corps (New York, 1863), 6-7. For an examination on the ways in which black troops were disciplined, see Joseph T. Glatthaar, Forged in Battle: The Civil War Alliance of Black Soldiers and White Officers (New York: Free Press, 1990), 99-120.
gaining practice in the “proper” avenues of behavior practiced by free people. Most commentators did not see the irony in these assumptions. If black soldiers were expected to learn disciplined, controlled behavior from the garrison experience, which they would then incorporate into their lives as free men, why were similar standards never applied to white troops? The answer was simple. Civil and military leaders, and especially soldiers, considered service in occupied garrisons to be clear restrictions of free white men’s individual liberty, prompting misbehavior in occupied zones. Thus, black men, who previously were enslaved by the stratified southern world, were considered more apt at following orders from white officers, and could presumably better relate to a rigid, hierarchical military culture. On the one hand, occupied garrisons were seen as constrained spaces to white liberty, while on the other, they were viewed as schools of instruction for black men’s entrance into the world of freedom.40

With acute perception, General David Hunter, who commanded the Department of the South and was an abolitionist in his own right, articulated this dichotomy, believing that garrisons served multiple, racial purposes. First, African American soldiers would function as “subordinate troops, who will be of service to the country . . . hav[ing] the practical effect of doubling the white forces in the field,” while occupying strategic locales. He considered this “indispensable duty,” because white units needed to be “at the command of Government” for active campaigning, “free from the weary and often pestilential” culture of long-term occupation. White garrisoning, Hunter suggested, did not conform to white military expectations and could lead to breakdowns in discipline, attention, and morale, ultimately threatening the moral core of the Union.41

40 For similar interpretations, see Keith P. Wilson, Campfires of Freedom: The Camp Life of Black Soldiers during the Civil War (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 2002), 14-15, 18-21.

Thus, he pronounced a second purpose of garrisoning he judged crucial to the development of black freedom. “Suddenly released from the cruel restraints of chattel slavery, and still pursued into freedom by the curse of that ignorance which slavery fostered as its surest weapon and most effective shield,” he explained, “the discipline of military life will be the very safest and quickest school in which these enfranchised bondsmen can be elevated to the level of our higher intelligence and cultivation, and that their enrollment in regular military organizations, and the giving them in this manner a legitimate vent to their natural desire to prove themselves worthy of freedom, cannot fail to have the further good effect of rendering less likely mere servile insurrection, unrestrained by the comities and usages of civilized warfare.”

The implication was clear. Occupied garrisons, according to some white contemporaries, taught black soldiers how to be disciplined and restrained citizens. Since white men had long enjoyed the privileges of citizenship and were thus imbued with the republican ethic, they should be released from the constraints of garrison culture and freed to fight for the Union. If not, this reasoning concluded, white men then would inevitably be corrupted by the temptations and distractions rampant within zones of wartime occupation.42

In spite of such racist theories, USCT troops tested the limits of military regulation, carving out autonomous spaces for themselves. They understood the stakes: if they were perceived as unruly and wild, or even lazy and docile, white stereotypes would be confirmed, fostering disastrous results. Behavior in the ranks provided an opportunity for black men to demonstrate their fitness for citizenship. “By good behavior, we will show them that we are men,” wrote William B. Johnson, of the 3rd USCT, “and able to fill any position in life that we are placed in. There is only one thing I want; that is my vote.” By actively challenging the

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42 Ibid.
stereotypes placed on them, black soldiers embraced the opportunities provided by occupation. Indeed, they protested pay inequities and resisted unfair punishment. In many cases, their acts of defiance worked, revealing the legitimacy of their freedom and position in the army.⁴³

Emancipation and enlistment allowed African American males to demand proper treatment and respect. White commanders learned that they could not exact indiscriminate or vindictive punishment, instead employing a combination of leniency and strictness as the most effective forms of discipline. Conversely, black soldiers’ adherence to proper military conduct taught white officers that they must also observe respectable, moral behavior. Officers in both white and black regiments were notorious for their questionable conduct, which made black troops lose respect for their leaders. “[M]y opinion of Capt Lewis and Lieut Moss has been reduced,” wrote John H. Crowder, a black soldier in the 1st Louisiana Native Guards. Writing from Baton Rouge, he revealed that “[l]ike many others they have no respect for no one. they seem to think there is not a woman that they cannot sleep with.” Disgusted by such behavior, Crowder insisted that men, especially those in the military, were “to respect all females.”⁴⁴

Black soldiers generally refused to emulate the behavior of their superiors, choosing instead, as William B. Johnson explained, to maintain standards of moral conduct. Their strategy worked. Commentators, white soldiers, and military authorities noted the principled demeanor and discipline of USCT regiments, praising their character. “[O]n the whole, their conduct could not have been better,” wrote a correspondent for the New York Times who visited a black unit in Louisiana. “I have seen older white regiments, with more regimental drills, that are not their


equal.” Henry Brown, a white soldier in the 15th New Hampshire, noted in June 1863 that black troops in New Orleans had drilled only for two months, yet “[t]he respect they show for their officers and all whom they meet, would be a good pattern for white soldiers.” Indeed, Brown determined, “in [matters of] discipline ‘whites’ may take lessons of them.” Black soldiers understood that their conduct attracted great scrutiny and inspection. They were deprived of the luxury afforded to white soldiers who often misbehaved with few of the consequences endured by African American troops. However, there existed a significant difference between both groups of soldiers. Because black troops were not considered citizens, few observers equated their behavior as a threat to the moral conditions of the Union. Whites, on the other hand, because they were the “true” citizen-soldiers, were viewed as the emblems of republican morality. If the ethics and honor of the Union were to be preserved, white soldiers had to rise above the temptations of occupied zones and, ironically, adopt the behavioral standards of their black comrades.45

Despite the massive cultural responsibilities attached to them, white Union soldiers often reshaped their patterns of behavior, falling prey to the temptations within the occupied Confederacy. When they saw first-hand the nature of occupied garrisons and witnessed how their soldiers behaved, northern citizens had shocked, disgusted reactions. Samuel Taylor, a Philadelphia merchant who conducted extensive commerce in the South during the antebellum era, eagerly sought a return to one of his favorite pre-war destinations, Memphis. Desiring “the golden opportunities for business” occasioned by the war and federal occupation, Taylor travelled the long, dangerous routes from Pennsylvania to Tennessee during the winter and early spring of 1863. He was stunned at what he found upon his arrival in the River City. His

observations recounted how northerners interpreted the debasing, demoralizing, and degrading environment of wartime military occupation, emanating from a static, idle army. “How great the change in this City now from the gaiety of years ago,” he wrote, explaining how most of the old residents had fled, leaving behind destitute refugees, both black and white. He observed that most of the grand, “elegant buildings” were now closed or used by the army for storage or hospitals, sadly admitting that his once beloved Memphis was “all fast going to ruin.”

Taylor reserved his most explicit critiques for the city’s army of occupation. The streets were crowded and cluttered by military wagons and equipment, he noted. “Soldiers loud and boisterous crowd the side walks, orderlees ride about among the teams[,] Long strings of cavalrmen ride up and down through the deep mud.” Although troubled by the seeming chaos, Taylor acknowledged an even more “disgracefull” spectacle. “Officers in crowds, some on the side walk others in the saddle,” most of whom exhibited “a state of intoxication making much noise and using language more forcible [than] refined sinking the man to a level of a blackguard.” This, he determined, reflected the supreme “demoralization of the army.” Taylor judged that the ethos of wartime occupation contained “no law, no system, no order,” in which “every thing is mixed up and in confusion.” In spite of these observations, though, Taylor admitted that “the worst has not been told.”

Upon reaching his destination at the Gayoso Hotel, Taylor concluded that nearly two hundred officers, ranging from generals to second lieutenants, also boarded at the establishment. “Two thirds of them each share their rooms with a prostitute,” Taylor estimated, while their families at home were “all forgotten.” Taylor was exasperated. “To see an army officer of rank

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46 Journal entries, February 24, and March 4, 1863, Samuel C. Taylor Journal, 1863; 1890, SCHOFF.

47 Journal entry, March 4, 1863, Ibid.
enter the dining room with a brazen faced whore hanging upon his arm,” he wrote, “tis disgracefull.” The Gayoso, Taylor was convinced, had devolved into nothing “less than a house of assignation.” “You see girl[s] of fifteen to wom[e]n of fifty painted and jeweled up to the high notch,” he explained, clearly dejected, “each with her, passing the bill, robbing families of their support, who are sending loving letters every day to the dear Husband or father in the army.” Taylor struggled to understand how soldiers could shamelessly discard their commitments to their families and nation. However, he had yet to spend a full day in Memphis. There was still more to learn about behavior in wartime garrisons.48

“At night when the rail of darkness falls upon the city,” Taylor wrote, “crimes are committed horrible to think of much less believe.” He learned that murder, robbery, and even people being “garroted” were quite common. “I do not exaggerate tis true,” Taylor insisted. Soldiers leaving picket posts and civilians wandering the streets, both in spite of curfew, typified clandestine acts of theft and assault. “It is a common thing as you sit in your room in the evening, or as you lay in a bed at night, to hear the report of a rifle and a cry of pain,” Taylor described. “[T]is truly war times, and Memphis is a battlefield I suppose, and greatly has she suffered thereby.” He ascribed the problem ultimately to rampant alcohol abuse. Soldiers in the 26th Missouri, who lodged near Taylor’s quarters, usually stayed awake past midnight, consuming great quantities of whiskey. “They seldom go away sober and make much noise. The problem, though, was that the 26th “is composed of fighters. . . . and the men [are] great hearty strong fearless fellows who mean business all the time.” Although he was never certain, Taylor believed that men such as these were partly responsible for the destructive behavior late at night. They craved liquor, they liked to brawl, and they “hate a reb as much as they hate satan.” Taylor

48 Ibid.
concluded that this volatile combination contributed to many troubling aspects of soldiers’
behavior in occupied garrisons.\textsuperscript{49}

Taylor accurately assessed the condition of occupied zones in general, and Memphis in
particular. An Ohio soldier, also stationed in the city, reported that “women and whisky are
plentiful here. . . . Drunkenness was the order of the day.” One of the troops in his regiment had
just been relieved of guard duty and received a pass to go into town. “[A]fter drinking too much,
[he] got into a fuss with the provost guard and ran off.” Following the scuffle, the soldier refused
to halt and was promptly shot. “The ball went through under his left shoulder and out at his left
breast, killing him almost instantly.” The soldier had a good reputation in the regiment, and was
considered respectful and quiet. “[B]ut on this occasion the damned whisky got hold of him, and
hence the result.” Justus Gale, a New England soldier stationed in Louisiana for more than a
year, likewise considered New Orleans “the worst place for drinking of any place I ever heard of.
Liquor is just as common here as watter in Vermont.” Gale described how “you can hardly go by
a door without seeing the glass and bottle siting on the bar.” He was most disturbed, though, after
realizing that “there is about as many women here that get drunk as there is men in the north that
get drunk.”\textsuperscript{50}

Alcohol abuse was ubiquitous in occupied garrisons; military authorities struggled
mightily to curb soldiers’ drinking, but often failed. The enlisted men, following the examples
set by their officers, imbibed copiously, oftentimes to perilous results. Drinking led to myriad
breakdowns in discipline, including fights, illicit fraternization with civilians, shootings,
disobedience, visits to prostitutes, and countless instances of crime. Despite nineteenth-century

\textsuperscript{49} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{50} George Hovey Cadman to My Dear Wife, May 18, and June 3, 1863, Cadman Papers, SHC; Justus Gale to Dear
Sis, February 22, 1863, in Silber and Sievens, \textit{Yankee Correspondence}, 99.
America’s professed adherence to the ideal of temperance, alcohol consumption united disparate economic classes and served as a custom to which all Americans could relate. Everyone had access to spirituous drinks, a tradition that soldiers believed should define military life. In an environment that sought to divide common soldiers from their officers, alcohol served as a unifying medium. In addition, soldiers justified drinking as a connection to their former lives as private citizens, attempting to reconnect with the familiar practices of home. Alcohol, though, served a broader purpose in occupied garrisons. Sitting idly for indefinite periods and seemingly removed from the war, soldiers had little opportunity to test their mettle as men. Thus, they consumed alcohol to gauge and prove their masculinity, hoping to outdo their fellow soldiers. They seldom drank alone, opting to consume beverages in large groups of their peers.  

Henry J. Seaman, a private in the 13th Illinois Volunteers, grew quite irritated at his regiment’s drinking. Yet he confirmed that alcohol consumption, coupled with its problematic results, was rooted in bored soldiers’ attempts to confirm their masculine identities. While stationed at Rolla, Missouri, in February 1862, soldiers in the 13th were detailed to report for picket duty early one morning. But many troops had caroused late into the evening because, as Seaman explained, “they could not miss the opportunity of getting tight when liquor was close at hand.” This, however, was not merely a calm gathering of soldiers enjoying a few drinks. Instead, Seaman described the episode as a “programe,” in which “the performances and expressions of the half crazed men were really dramatic theatrical and amusing.” He recalled that a handful of soldiers were “beastly drunk,” while the majority were only “some what drunk.” Nevertheless, “the drunkest of them wanted to fight,” causing quite a stir in camp. Seaman

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described the ubiquity of these occurrences, which reflected a broader problem at Rolla. “One thing is actually necessary in this town and should be strongly enforced,” he explained, “that is to keep a large patrol guard in the street,” because “a citizen is not safe walking in the streets after dark.” In this case, guards were not necessary to protect the occupiers from hostile civilians; quite the opposite. Seaman noted that four drunken soldiers had recently assaulted a private citizen and robbed him of four plugs of tobacco. “There are many similar depredations committed night after night in this town,” he concluded.\(^5\)

Drinking and fighting were time-honored exercises long performed by men and boys, yet within the garrison setting they presented troubling implications. Just as the article for The Cavalier suggested, success of the Union cause depended in large measure on the ethics and integrity of its citizen-soldiers. Men such as Henry Seaman were concerned about drunken, truculent behavior, primarily because of their collective influence on the fate of republican society. But the problem of manhood and the defense of personal honor could not be easily discarded. Soldiers were accordingly conflicted. “[W]e have quite exciting times here once in a while,” Alfred Holcomb wrote from occupied North Carolina. Men in his regiment, the 27\(^{th}\) Massachusetts, took advantage of the large amounts of beer and whiskey sold at New Bern, to which they “get tight and then get to fighting.” This happened nearly every day, Holcomb reported, primarily because there was little else to do in the sleepy coastal garrison. “[O]ne of our boys got almost killed yesterday [when] he got nocked down and then they jumped on him and kicked him in the face. he could not hardly see last night.” Holcomb was shaken by this incident. “[Y]ou can see what a little beer and whisky will do,” he wrote to his sister. “I wish that there was not a drop of [liquor] to be had for officers or privates and I wish that the first boat that undertook to bring [it] here would sink before it left New York harbor.” Holcomb understood

\(^5\) Diary entry, February 10, 1862, Henry J. Seaman Diary, CWTC, USAMHI.
that zones of occupation would benefit morally in the absence of spirituous temptations. Only then, he reasoned, “we could [garner] some comfort.”

Even troops stationed in garrisons on United States soil, hoping to safeguard their individual respect, found themselves subject to dynamics similar to those in the occupied Confederacy. “We have had some fighting in camp lately,” wrote Charles Wright Wills, a sergeant in the 8th Illinois Volunteers. His regiment had been positioned at Cairo, Illinois, for several months while it waited to be transported south. “An artillery man stabbed one of the [soldiers] of the 9th [Illinois] and got knocked, kicked, and bayoneted for it.” Wills reported that the garrison’s artillery had “sworn revenge and every [soldier in the 9th] they see they pounce onto. They have a skirmish every day.” The tensions never fully settled, Wills explained. “One of our company got drunk to-day, got to fighting, was sent to the guardhouse, tried to break out, guard knocked him down with a gun, cut his cheek open, etc.” The soldier “then got into a fight with four other men in the guard house,” all of whom suffered “bunged eyes and bloody faces.”

Tensions among Union occupiers erupted not only because of rampant drinking. Soldiers from different regions of the United States found themselves stationed in close proximity within occupied zones, and sometimes they looked at one another with a distrustful, skeptical eye. Although they fought for the same Union and sought the same principles of national preservation, men from the Northeast and the West held prejudices against each other. Grounded in biased portrayals, occupiers from New England generally characterized their western counterparts as uncouth, undisciplined brutes always promoting violence. Westerners, on the

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53 Alfred Holcomb to Dear Sister, August 4, 1863, Holcomb Letters, CWMC, USAMHI.

other hand, described northeastern soldiers as craven and weak, continuously slinking from a fight. These divisions created great pressures, contributing to the pugnacious feelings among the occupiers. Eugene Payne noted that his fellow Illinois soldiers did not particularly care for troops from Massachusetts. Indeed, by the fall of 1863, both groups shared occupation duties at New Orleans. “The Western troops cannot hitch with the Yankees,” Payne wrote of the strained relationship. They regard our troops as Western boors and we regard them as devilish cowards.” Fights arose regularly between the soldiers. “[N]ot a day passes now,” Payne reported, “but one may see some of the western boys ‘going in on his muscle’ on some long slab sided gingerbread Yankee who has perhaps . . . ‘tread on the tail of his coat.’”55

In addition to drinking and fighting, Union occupiers found other, more subtle ways to combat presumed threats to their manhood. Similar to the ways in which soldiers from different regions distinguished themselves, troops who enlisted later in the war, sometimes motivated by pecuniary interests, were viewed with suspicion and contempt by long-serving veterans. Nine-month regiments, raised during the summer and fall of 1862, coupled with conscription the following year, helped states fill their troop quotas, while also offering bounties as inducements to enlist. Many of these units were sent to Union-occupied regions, helping to secure territory or relieve veterans for campaigns elsewhere. When the nine-month men arrived, they were met with sneers and disdain by soldiers who had long been stationed in garrisons. The latter attempted to separate themselves from the “bounty men,” who were considered unworthy, selfish, and cowardly.

55 Eugene Payne to Dearest Wife, [September 1863], Eugene B. Payne Letters, 1863-1864, Mss. 3792, 3796, LLMVC, LSU. For similar sentiments, see Diary entry, March 15, 1864, Charles Wright Wills Diary, Mary E. Kellog, comp., Army Life of an Illinois Soldier, 217-18; Browning, Shifting Loyalties, 138-39. For the ways in which soldiers from East and West competed against one another, see William H. Whitney to Dear Mother, March 1, 1863, William H. Whitney Letters, 1863-1864, MSS 1043, 1046, LLMVC, LSU.
The occupiers struggled against the presence of conscripted and nine-month men. Those who had long been stationed throughout the occupied Confederacy already considered themselves unlucky and dishonored. They had enlisted at the beginning of the war, fulfilling their duties as republican citizens. Fighting was a man’s obligation, yet the long-term occupation in which they found themselves fomented great disillusionment about one’s masculine tasks. A new class of soldiers now appeared who, in the minds of veterans, did not initially answer their country’s call and skulked from the republican requirements of civic responsibility. Their placement in the very zones of occupation inhabited by troops who had done their duty and upheld their cultural contracts, created a new tension within garrisons.56

Although both groups remained stationed together in occupied zones, veteran troops embarked on a campaign to characterize the differences between themselves and their new counterparts. Few things made William E. Dunn, of the 85th New York, more impatient than “to [hear] the everlasting grumbling which some men keeps up. The nin[e] months’ men from Mass. takes the lead on that score, and you may believe that there is not much friendship between them and the old troops who did not inlist for the bounty.” Dunn believed that “money soldiers are not worth as much as they cost... You could see hundreds of them sherking from dutie in [the] most disgraceful manner.” Charles Henry Moulton, who served in the 6th Michigan, expressed much greater contempt. Writing from New Orleans in December 1862, Moulton grumbled that the new soldiers’ “time is half out now [and] they dont know enough to shoulder arms [and] they cannot tell an Enfield Rifle from a ten inch siege gun.” The nine-month troops, according to

Moulton, “growl like a dog with a sore head and will not fight.” In fact, “they did not come here to fight they come to Garrison the Forts &c.” Moulton believed that “the Government done a big thing when they got such men as those. I am glad I am not a 9 months man. if any of our men meets any of them they ask them if they are 9 months men or soldiers.”

Veteran soldiers worried that they would be unfairly associated with nine-month regiments and drafted men, especially since all served equally as forces of occupation. Thus, troops who had long been in the army employed physical methods to distinguish themselves from the new arrivals. John Harrington, who served in the 17th Massachusetts, relished the opportunity to escape from the constraints of garrison life and embark on expeditions into the countryside. “As to these marches,” he wrote, “we could have no better experience,” particularly when the nine-month men could not handle the rigor. They “grumble shamefully,” he reported, even though they “receive in dollars and cents as much as the three years troops do in their entire term of service.” Harrington concluded that “[t]hey have no reason to complain.” An expedition relieved men from the torpor of garrisons and “wears loose fat off the men and toughens them if they march them reasonably.” Courtland G. Stanton, a Connecticut soldier stationed at Portsmouth, Virginia, agreed. Responding to rumors that conscripted men were coming to the coastal garrison, he wrote simply, “won’t it be fun to have them out here as privates[.] they will wish they were dead if they do not toe the mark.”

Indeed, troops on long-term occupation duty sometimes inflicted violence upon groups of soldiers deemed unworthy of military service. “We have also had a lot of conscripts and subs,”

Stephen Stebbins, of the 7th Connecticut reported from St. Helena, South Carolina, “and we say,

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57 William E. Dunn to Dear Sister, April 2, 1863, William E. Dunn Letters, CWTC, USAMHI; Charles Henry Moulton to Dear Bro and Sister, December 28, 1862, and July 15, 1863, Charles Henry Moulton Papers, BL.

58 John Harrington to Dear Capt., May 7, 1863, George O. Jewett Collection, LOC; Courtland G. Stanton to Wife, July 25, 1863, item DL0011.052, Stanton Papers, JLNC.
bad luck to the day that brought them.” Stebbins admitted that “[s]ome of them are good fellows, but some are ugly lubbers, and practical villains.” One of the drafted men was accused of stealing a watch and other items, provoking harsh reprisals from the veterans. Stebbins estimated “[a]bout 80 men volunteered to thrash him through the gauntlet, and they did it with a will. He had 31 good, stout, wales on him, several of them as large as my wrist.”

This episode suggests that Union occupiers unleashed their aggression by seeking avenues of moral authority, beyond that of martial glory, even if that meant engaging in excessively, violent behavior. Although they comprised an army of occupation, men in the 7th Connecticut could at least boast their voluntarism in the face of conscription. They believed that their particular garrison duties had thwarted their quest for ethical and honorable courage; thus they attempted to locate sources of virtue elsewhere. Yet, the seeming lack of opportunity for republican military behavior and individual conduct overwhelmed soldiers in occupied garrisons. They felt trapped, with seemingly few outlets to fulfill their dual cultural contracts. As one Ohio soldier wrote from Memphis, “here we are nothing but prisoners.” Drinking, fighting, and “othering” fellow soldiers seemed like possible cures for the problem of confinement but only ended up fostering additional complications.

The pursuit of individual validation, oftentimes at the expense of republican morality, took many forms. Some soldiers craved the appeal of liquor or the thrill of fisticuffs, while others engaged in more subtle, elusive methods of rebellion. Garrisoned towns quickly devolved into zones of financial depravity in which soldiers craved the opportunity to spend money on vices that they might not normally consume during peacetime. In addition to purchasing alcohol, the

59 Stephen A. Stebbins to My Dear Edward, January 13, 1864, Stephen A. Stebbins Letters, Lewis Leigh Collection, USAMHI.
60 George Hovey Cadman to My dear Wife, May 18, 1863, Cadman Papers, SHC.
occupiers engaged in gambling and partook in widespread prostitution available in most occupied regions. Such practices seemed to follow armies of occupation, mainly because bored soldiers sought numerous, questionable ways to squander their wages. How could virtuous republican citizens, who volunteered their services selflessly to the nation, they wondered, succumb to such disturbing levels of moral decay? The ethos of occupation invited various avenues of corruption available to soldiers with military pay in their pockets.  

Sylvester Strong, of the 20th Wisconsin, believed that “this war will be the means of spoiling many a young boy & get them in to a great many bad habits.” Stationed at Rolla, Missouri, during the spring of 1863, he witnessed many of his friends capitulate to the temptations of garrison life, lamenting “[t]here is not hardley one in the regt but what uses tobacco and gambles their money all away.” Strong came to believe that some troops did not attach value to their military pay, instead choosing to waste it on sinful practices. Benjamin C. Lincoln, who served in the 39th Massachusetts, agreed. Gambling was one of “the proverbial vices of a soldier,” he wrote from Poolesville, Maryland, and “I am very certain that there are many who embrace every opportunity to practice the nefarious art, and when you understand that gambling is wholly cheating.” Strong and Lincoln disapproved of their comrades’ behavior, yet countless soldiers chose to employ wagering and betting as additional sources of dominance. Although victory and acquisition of money occasioned personal respect in occupied zones, they came at the expense of personal morality and virtue.  

Prostitution was interpreted as one of the more unethical activities in occupied zones. Whether or not they yielded to the temptations of the garrison’s sirens, pockets full of money,

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61 Gambling and prostitution have received due scholarly treatment. See, for instance, Wiley, Life of Billy Yank, 212, 247, 249-52, 257-62; and, Ramold, Baring the Iron Hand, 101-3, 121-32.

62 Sylvester Strong to Dear Brother, March 22, 1863, Sylvester Strong Letters, item DL0959.26, JLNC; Benjamin C. Lincoln to Dear Wife, February 10, 1863, Benjamin C. Papers, 1861-1865, SCWC.
and presumably no consequences for their actions, soldiers wrote constantly about the prevalence of “loose women.” Prostitution flourished in towns occupied by countless soldiers, creating a formidable system of financial and physical commerce. Indeed prostitution functioned as a substantial component of the local economy in several garrisoned towns. The practice increased as more soldiers were stationed in occupied regions. And, although it was considered a morally reprehensible practice, soldiers used their dalliances with prostitutes as symbols to validate personal power. An Ohio soldier recalled “there was an old saying that no man could be a soldier unless he had gone through Smokey Row,” the notorious street in Nashville. Yet an Iowa soldier considered prostitution as one of “the weapons used by Satan to rob the soldier of his money and drag his soul down to the black gulf of despair.” The problem of moral conduct and individual expression once again found new, challenging, and conflicting avenues in garrisoned regions.63

Whereas some soldiers perpetuated existing commercial economies by gambling and chasing prostitutes, others inaugurated wartime markets. The peculiar environment of occupation created a host of opportunities for troops to trade goods, make money, and provide services. The war did not kill market economies; rather, they were transformed into informal modes of commerce to meet the wants and desires of various parties. Many occupiers possessed a savvy business acumen, which allowed them to emulate their prewar lives as salesmen, merchants, or craftsmen. Thus, they ably established unique economic networks enabled only by the disruption of war. Although the United States government paid a wage and provided clothing

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and food, soldiers sought distinctive, imaginative ways to make extra money either for themselves or to send home to their families.

The spirit of individualism and the tendency of self-interest motivated occupiers to integrate themselves into the informal economies of occupied zones. Much of what they inaugurated and practiced was not necessarily illegal according to civil law, but their conduct was certainly forbidden according to the 1863 Laws of War, more commonly known as General Orders No. 100, or Lieber’s Code. Participating in informal economies diverted soldiers’ attention away from their military duties, instead focusing them on financial pursuit. Once again, the impassable gulf between the republican citizen-soldier ideal and individual initiative revealed the moral problems inherent within arenas of wartime occupation.64

Numerous factors inspired Union soldiers to pursue financial profit in occupied regions. First, they were bored. Garrisoned communities offered few diversions, tempting soldiers to find creative ways to focus their attention. Additional incentives, though, appeared much more calculated. Despite their military pay, food, and clothing, soldiers generally believed that the government did little to meet their needs. They wondered whether civil authorities purposely neglected their well-being primarily because they were stationed in seemingly forgotten corners of the occupied Confederacy. New Englander Frank Peck wrote, two months after the fall of New Orleans, that the government “sent on batteries without guns, cavalry without horses, and

Paymasters without money.” He disparaged the politicians who celebrated the city’s capture, even though he and his fellow soldiers had accomplished the feat. Rather than “throwing up their hats,” Peck remarked, bureaucrats should consider “how soldiers encamp without tents, or make turtle soup out of salt beef . . . the nakedness of the men is no pleasant appendix to attach to some of the reports of Congressional Committees.” Although he considered his complaints well-founded, Peck admitted, “[w]e are situated now so that it makes very little difference whether the government take any further care or not.” Peck knew that his comrades would find alternative means of personal attention and reimbursement.65

Pragmatism also informed the reasons the basis of informal economies. Soldiers encountered very quickly the expense required to live in garrisoned towns. Officers especially, who rented rooms and houses from local civilians, paid rent and purchased goods for which their military pay was generally insufficient. In addition, temptations such as alcohol and prostitution came at a cost. “It cost us a great deal to be stationed at Memphis,” Oscar Lawrence Jackson wrote in June 1863. “Our mess accounts were large, there being a good market, fine clothing, plenty of whiskey, etc.” Jackson recounted how many of his comrades had been “ruined,” wasting their money on “such indulgences.” Courtland Stanton, of the 21st Connecticut agreed, explaining that Norfolk, Virginia, was equally pricey. “I wish we were in the field,” he acknowledged. “It is so expensive to live in the city, if one keeps any kind of appearances.”

Overall, soldiers were motivated to recreate some semblance of their prewar domestic lives in which men engaged in business, commerce, and even entrepreneurism. The war, they reasoned, should not arbitrarily place limits on economic practices cherished by free male

65 Frank Peck to Dear David, June 17, 1862, Montgomery Family Papers, 1771-1974, Peck Correspondence, LOC.
66 Diary entry, June 1863, in Oscar Lawrence Jackson, The Colonel’s Diary: Journals Kept Before and During the Civil War (Privately published, 1922), 98-100; Courtland G. Stanton to wife, October 2, 1863, item DL0011.063, Courtland G. Stanton Letters, JLNC. See also William Ward Orme to wife, November 3, 1862, Illinois State Historical Library Papers, 1838-1865, Special Collections, David W. Mullins Library, University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, Arkansas.
citizens. They rarely considered the legitimacy of their conduct, instead believing that the provisional nature of their military service enabled and excused their wartime economic habits. Work and the pursuit of financial self-interest reinforced the basis of individualism, which volunteer troops refused to discard. This dynamic truly reflected the literal meaning of “citizen-soldier,” while simultaneously altering its character. They incorporated peacetime economic practices into their lives as soldiers, creating an informal economy in which goods were exchanged, debts were owed, and market prices fluctuated. In addition, occupiers blurred the distinction between civilian enemies and potential clients. They traded and negotiated prices with residents of garrisoned towns, bartered with passersby while posted on picket duty, and also provided numerous services to fellow troops.

Few, if any, official laws governed these confidential economic arrangements, which oftentimes resulted in tension, argument, and dispute. Although problems naturally abounded, most willing parties accepted the tenuous nature of informal economies, primarily because of market demand. Southern civilians especially involved themselves in buying, selling, and trading with soldiers. The disrupted condition of the Confederate economy, coupled with a depreciating currency, forced residents of occupied areas into business relations with the occupiers. The soldiers themselves came to see southern citizens as willing economic partners and were inspired by sympathy for their destitute condition. Nevertheless, the problem still remained as to whether these were proper avenues of conduct for citizen-soldiers. They chose not to answer this question, instead focusing on lucrative business opportunities.67

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Union occupiers inaugurated and participated in informal economies in two primary ways: simple and complex commerce. The former comprised acquiring and selling minor goods, including paper or tobacco, coupled with providing services, such as haircuts or even taking a fellow soldier’s place on picket duty. Complex modes of commerce included monopolies within garrisoned towns, causing prices to soar, making a single soldier, or small alliance of troops, quite wealthy. Or they often inserted themselves into broader markets, such as the cotton trade, which reflected regional, national, and international economic implications. Regardless of the commerce in which they engaged, soldiers, in most cases, maintained low profiles, hoping that they would not draw concentrated attention to their activities. Ironically, though, soldiers, civilians, and authorities were acutely aware of the prevalence of informal business practices.

Efforts were made to curb illicit commerce, only to be met with resistance by soldiers who refused to abandon their financial enterprises. The occupiers argued that their rights as citizens guaranteed the opportunity to make money as long as it was done through legal channels, downplaying their temporary duties as ethically responsible soldiers.  

Union soldiers first encountered informal economies shortly after a town or region fell to the forces of occupation. Indigent, desperate civilians swarmed garrisoned communities, hoping to receive some sort of relief. “People come in here from the country every day,” wrote Robert Stuart Finley, an Illinois soldier stationed at Fort Donelson, Tennessee. Nearly a month after the Union army secured the strategic river garrison, civilians entered the lines, offering to take loyalty oaths. “Some of them come in wagons 30 & 40 miles & bring corn meal & butter & eggs which they trade for coffee with the soldiers,” Finley explained. He was satisfied with the market that developed, especially after his regiment was treated to a barrel of sauerkraut, which sold “out briskly at 10 cts a plate full.” Other goods and produce were exchanged at acceptable rates.

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For a listing of diverse modes of informal commerce, see Ramold, *Baring the Iron Hand*, 75.
which Finley considered “pretty dear for the ‘Sunny South’.” White southerners eagerly sought economic protection from the occupiers. The war shattered the Confederate economy, and Union occupation offered alternative means of subsistence. “Refugees and Deserters are coming every few days,” Benjamin T. Wright, of the 10th Connecticut, wrote from Jacksonville, Florida. “The people in the country are in a miserable condition [and] are heart[ily] sick of the war, in fact they are completely destitute.” Wright described how occupation authorities allowed civilians to enter the lines once a week “and bring what they have to sell such as sweet potatoes venison &c.” In return, the army sold goods from the commissary stores, effectively fulfilling the needs of both parties. “[T]he trading is done under the supervision of the Provost Marshal,” Wright concluded, suggesting the legitimate and accepted means of commerce.\footnote{Robert Stuart Finley to Friend Molly, March 7, 1862, Robert Stuart Finley Papers, 1862-1867, 1911, Collection No. 03685-z, SHC; Benjamin T. Wright to [unknown], February 27, 1864, Benjamin T. Wright Letters, item DL1126, JLNC; Ash, \textit{When the Yankees Came}, 79-84. For similar episodes of economies between soldiers and civilians, see, Benjamin F. McIntyre diary entries, January 16 and March 11, 1863, in Tilly ed., \textit{Federals on the Frontier}, 100-1, 121; and, Diary entries January 12 and 16, 1865, Samuel A. Shumway Diary, 1865-66, Collection No., 05031-z, SHC.}

After repeated exposure to the wants and needs of civilians, as well as fellow troops, the common soldier recognized the potential of untapped markets in the occupied Confederacy. The entrepreneurial spirit, gleaned from their days as private citizens in the North, infused soldiers with a budding sense of economic profits. These markets existed solely because of the war, suggesting that they would evaporate once peace ensued. Thus, although they imagined occupation service to be indefinite, troops acted quickly, finding ways to expand markets to meet the widest demand, while simultaneously reaping profits for themselves. Soldiers considered their new commerce to be legitimate, even though they attempted to conceal their activities. They did not advertise, nor did they actively promote their practice. Informal economies were governed by reputation, steeped in suspicion, and fraught with apprehension.
The eight months in which Orrin S. Allen, a private in the 112\textsuperscript{th} New York Volunteers, spent at Suffolk, Virginia, offered ample opportunity to create a profitable business. He routinely expressed “how disgusted I have become with these fellows who are stumbling over each other to get [promoted] to the office[r corps],” and thus sought alternative avenues of personal distinction. Occupied Suffolk presented Allen with an ideal environment in which to earn a commercial reputation in the garrisoned community. In January 1863, after receiving his pay, he visited numerous sutler’s stores and even the camps of soldiers who privately sold merchandise. “The business is not as nigh as good as it was,” he reported. “Too much competition, some of the officers buy [goods] and turn them over to the government and pocket a pricey sum in the operation,” he wrote. Although discouraged, Allen sought to match, and even exceed, the transactions conducted by the officers, “but it takes smart moneying,” he informed his wife. “Only think,” he fancied, “today the Sutler came round, some of the fellows have run up half their wages. . . . Oh what a thing of temptations does the soldiers money expose him to!” He proudly explained how he resisted the urge to purchase needless trinkets, instead saving his cash for a potential business venture. He surveyed the situation at Suffolk, analyzed the market, and learned how to overcome his business competitors.\textsuperscript{70}

Nearly a month later, Allen sent his wife twenty dollars, even though the army paid him only sixteen dollars a month. “You ask if I sent more pay then I got,” he wrote, “I did . . . but did not steal the $4. I worked for it but there is too much competition now, every nigger and boy is running around camp taking the money from the [soldiers].” Allen learned about the high demand for apples, so he bought a bushel, “[t]ook out the injured ones and sold the rest for 50 cts

\textsuperscript{70} Orrin S. Allen to Dear Frank [Francis E. Wade Allen], January 25, 1863, in William L. Rockwell, trans., “Dear Frank: The War Years, 1862-1865: The Civil War Letters of Orrin S. Allen to his Wife Francis E. Wade Allen and Family,” typescript bound volume, Manuscript Collection Mss2 AL543 a 1, VHS.
more then [the] cost.” He then made applesauce from those that were leftover, which he also
sold. Soldiers in the 112th, probably including Allen, confiscated apples while on picket duty,
which increased potential supply. In addition, he made a list of items most valued by soldiers,
including food, paper, and writing utensils, of which he made “packages” for sale. It was much
easier for fellow troops to buy their goods in one trip, he reasoned, rather than travel across the
garrison to visit different dealers and sutlers. Allen purchased all of these goods himself,
assembled them in one bundle, marked up the price slightly, and, in the first few days, “have sold
40 packages profit $2.00.” Soldiers indeed valued convenience over price.  

Allen was not finished. Upon selling out of his original supply, he went to the town’s
train station to purchase more packages. It turned out that the sutler with whom Allen competed
was about to leave Suffolk because his cost of business had become too great. Thus, to Allen’s
surprise, he “will sell me 200 packages at 17 cts each, I pay 20 now.” Although his principal
source of competition was now removed, Allen faced another problem. The goods he purchased,
which encompassed his “packages,” were now inspected by the garrison’s customhouse. “It is
very hard getting goods of any kind through,” he wrote. “Every box and package of goods that is
sent to or from this place is subject to the closest scrutiny.” Recognizing that soldiers were
allowed access only to certain items that met the authorities’ approval, Allen could have dropped
his business venture, but the new regulations increased demand for his services.

Allen’s business thrived, and by the end of March 1863, he boasted selling “44 packages,
6 portfolios, some envelopes and a few quires of paper, profits about $3.” He had developed a
reputation as Suffolk’s premier wholesaler, and “[t]hey think it curious I can ‘Smell Money.’”

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71 Orrin S. Allen to Dear Frank, February 18 and 20, 1863, “Civil War Letters of Orrin S. Allen,” VHS; William
Lyman Hyde, History of the One Hundred and Twelfth N. Y. Volunteers (Fredonia, New York: W. McKinstry &
Co., 1866), 20.

72 Orrin S. Allen to Dear Frank, February 20, 1863, “Civil War Letters of Orrin S. Allen,” VHS.
The troops could not understand how or why Allen constantly evaded detection, especially since most other soldiers “are fined $5 if they sell a few apples. Some of them told me today their wages were stopped, to pay the fine.” Though he did not explicitly state it, Allen alluded to the reasons he was never caught. “It does me good to see the guards salute as I pass,” he wrote, “instead of ordering to ‘halt’ as they should. . . . They have strict orders to stop all private soldiers and examine their passes, but they scarce ever ask for mine.” Allen’s reputation was presumably so pervasive, coupled with services that only he could provide, that he enjoyed high standing in a garrisoned community otherwise governed by strict discipline. Over the next few months, Allen expanded his business, in which he bought and resold shoes, jewelry, and paper. In one instance, he even traded his pistol for a watch, which he also later sold. He consistently reported profits, estimating that his net gains totaled twenty-four dollars per month, which meant that he earned between nine and eleven dollars in addition to his wages from the government.  

Although the phrase “Yankee ingenuity” developed long before the Civil War, it aptly described Orrin S. Allen and the countless other Union soldiers who benefitted financially from their extended service in occupied regions of the war-torn Confederacy. Indeed, the practice of inaugurating informal economies, wrought exclusively because of war and occupation, allowed soldiers to profit from their voluntary military service. As the war dragged on, commercial economies became increasingly complex. “Our boyes are all making money,” Rankin P. McPheeters wrote from De Vall’s Bluff, Arkansas, “peddling trading &c.”, with local civilians, as well as dabbling in the larger markets at Little Rock. Sometimes, though, soldiers suspected that they were deceived when negotiating with white southerners. In order to keep their practices discreet, troops near Norfolk, Virginia, sneak ed into town during the evening to engage in trade.

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73 Orrin S. Allen to Dear Frank, March 28, 1863 [quotation], February 20, April 6, November 1, 1863 “Civil War Letters of Orrin S. Allen,” VHS.
“I cant imagine why they will go nights,” wondered Courtland G. Stanton of the 21st Connecticut, who considered, “they could trade so much better in the day time.” “But they will eventually learn better,” he concluded, “for I have heard quite a number of them complaining . . . that they got cheated making change in the dark.”

In addition to profit, other occupiers expressed alternative reasons for their commercial behavior. John M. Steward of the 1st Maine Heavy Artillery, stationed at the garrisons protecting Washington, D.C., worried constantly about his debts at home. He promised his wife that he would send extra money after the next payday, because he learned how to use his military income “to a good advantage.” He reported that he earned an extra ten dollars in only three days because there “is a good many of the boys that get short and sell thing verry cheap which I will buy and find no trouble in selling them for a few dollars more than I gave.” He proudly explained how he purchased a pistol for six dollars and an overcoat for one dollar, which he then resold for eleven dollars and two dollars and fifty cents, respectively.74

Orrin S. Allen and his comrades throughout the Union’s armies of occupation developed unique ways of inaugurating illicit economies, sometimes developing lucrative, monopolistic businesses. Others, though, invested themselves into larger, burgeoning markets. The cotton trade, which touched nearly every region of the occupied Confederacy, presented great opportunity for speculation and enormous profits for anyone willing to risk both capital and personal safety. Northern demand for cotton, coupled with southern demand for reliable commercial trade, created vast networks of negotiation and transaction. Although the United States and Confederate governments desperately needed the benefits provided by mutual participation in the cotton trade, both nations soon realized the inherent problems in such a

74 Rankin P. McPheeters to Annie M. McPheeters, March 1, 1864, McPheeters Family Papers, USAMHI; Courtland G. Stanton to Wife, June 1, 1863, Courtland G. Stanton Letters, item DL0011.048, JLNC; John M. Steward to Dear Abby, February 6, 1864, John M. Steward Letters, CWMC, USAMHI.
practice. An enemy’s goods being used by another to wage war forced each government to restrict commerce. Yet, the trade in contraband cotton proved much too seductive to be left untapped. Untold amounts of money could be made, reputations fostered, and power garnered. Thus, Union soldiers temporarily-turned-businessmen, used their positions in the occupied Confederacy to engage in the black market cotton trade.75

By 1863, Union soldiers stationed in the Mississippi Valley entrenched themselves in cotton speculation, contrary to restrictions authored by the federal government, President Lincoln, and Ulysses S. Grant. Dozens of reports detailed the illicit practices of enlisted men and officers who partnered with civilian speculators, all of whom sought to make a profit. The Provost Marshal at Vicksburg reported to Grant that some of the garrison’s occupiers “really violate the spirit of the orders prohibiting trade in cotton,” and worried that if “minor offenses are now tolerated, open violation of orders will soon occur.” He likened the soldiers to “mischievous school boys,” who insisted on “going as far as possible without being caught.” The Provost Marshal recommended that the troops, “and all others of like character, be ordered to leave the Department immediately, not to return under the penalty of arrest and imprisonment.” He not only was concerned about his troops breaking the law, but also troubled that their behavior devalued the moral condition of the republic’s citizen-soldiers. Understanding the great

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danger of other occupiers emulating these practices, the Provost Marshal pleaded that Grant limit the trade even further.\textsuperscript{76}

James Harrison Wilson, a brigadier general and member of Ulysses S. Grant’s personal staff, characterized the unusual nature of occupied Memphis, equating the behavioral problems of occupation to the rise of informal economies. “I don’t like this ‘part of the machine,’” Wilson bemoaned, referring to the decrepit condition and undisciplined manner of the volunteer regiments stationed in the city. The cause, he explained, was that “[w]e have too many generals engaged in semi-civil affairs, to the utter neglect of their military duties.” He was stunned to learn that commanders failed to lead their troops on parade and neglected the needs of their units. Myriad soldiers were thus deprived of leadership and were even inspired to emulate their generals’ odd behavior. Wilson exposed the problem. Rather than abiding by personal and moral responsibility, military authorities in charge of Memphis’s occupation were instead steeped in the illicit cotton trade, which governed the bulk of their time and attention. “These distinguished gentlemen should be required to assume command of their men as their first duty, and dispose of civil and trade business afterward,” Wilson exclaimed. “They should be held responsible for the discipline, order, and instruction of their troops, and give their first attention to these matters rather than devote their undivided time to cotton, Confederates, and corruption.”\textsuperscript{77}

Wilson did not simply complain about his generals’ behavior. He also cited the implications of their conduct. “I tell you, sir,” he confided to John A. Rawlins, Grant’s chief of

\textsuperscript{76} L. Kent [Provost Marshal General, Vicksburg, Mississippi] to Ulysses S. Grant, September 13, 1863, Letters Received, 1862-1866, Record Group 393, Part 1, Department of the Tennessee, #4709, Box 1, NARA. For additional examples, see Parks, “Confederate Trade Center under Federal Occupation,” 289-314.; Simpson, \textit{Ulysses S. Grant}, 144-45.

staff, “the Government of the United States cannot be upheld in purity and honesty by hands that lay aside the sword for instruments of trade and peace. We want soldiers, not traders; generals, not governors and civil agents.” Wilson became increasingly exasperated, staggered by the absurd and inexplicable nature of the topic. This crisis was not insignificant, he stressed. The nation was at war! “A few hundred thousand bayonets led by clear heads and military rules can crush the rebellion, but a million without military generals can do nothing except by main strength and awkwardness.” What was worse, he implicitly concluded, was the strong possibility of the soldiers themselves also being corrupted and molded by their leaders’ behavior. But in a strange twist of irony, Wilson did not place the blame squarely on the generals themselves. Rather, he faulted the very environment in which they served. “The system of occupying undisputed territory is all wrong. We must put our armies in the field and compel our generals to lead them against the enemy, and if they fail from ignorance, put them aside. I am disgusted with the whole system.”

Wilson’s frustration reflected the growing restrictions against the cotton trade, and informal economies at large; civil and military authorities’ had become greatly concerned about the ethical behavior of citizen-soldiers. Politicians and generals naturally wanted to deprive the Confederacy of money and resources, which contributed to trade limitations, but they also sought to maintain a moral balance in the army. Orders issued at Nashville, for instance, required sutlers to receive permits to sell goods; no one else, “unless he is a resident trader,” would be allowed to engage in business. Soldiers would be punished, and their units’ officers held accountable, if they were “found shipping, selling, or attempting to sell goods, either directly or indirectly, in violation of the above orders.” At Huntsville, Alabama, and Morganzia, Louisiana, as late as 1864 and 1865 respectively, civilians who were not linked to the government would be arrested.

if they were caught loitering around camps and “or holding intercourse with the troops,” for fear that goods would be smuggled out of the lines. Interestingly, these latter two directives, and many like them, were passed after the army issued General Orders, No. 100, or Lieber’s Code, the official laws governing the conduct of armies in the field and in zones of occupation. Section II, Article 46, explicitly forbade soldiers engaging in informal economies:

Neither officers nor soldiers are allowed to make use of their position or power in the hostile country for private gain, not even for commercial transactions otherwise legitimate. Offenses to the contrary committed by commissioned officers will be punished with cashiering or such other punishment as the nature of the offense may require; if by soldiers, they shall be punished according to the nature of the offense.79

These restrictions, coupled with many others of similar intent, were inspired by occupation commanders who expressed great disgust at the conduct of their soldiers who participated in informal economies. “A perpetual flood of fraud, false swearing, and contraband goods runs through this city,” Stephen A. Hurlbut, the commanding general at Memphis, wrote in November 1863, “interfering with all proper military control and guided and managed by designing men for their own purposes.” Hurlbut’s words were quite ironic because, while in Memphis, he built a notorious reputation for his corrupt occupation of the city. Gambling, drinking, prostitution, and especially intricate rings of cotton extortion escalated under his leadership, oftentimes at his own direction. Yet even Hurlbut, the man responsible for much of his soldiers’ inattention to detail and military discipline, could not help being troubled at the extent to which the occupiers neglected a semblance of order and honor. “Pickets, in whom the ultimate virtue of a line consists, are bribed and corrupted, and no vigilance that I can use can prevent it,” he lamented. In spite of numerous general orders and restrictions from the federal

government, Hurlbut realized that soldiers in occupied zones would not give up their pursuit of financial profit. “I trust [such actions of restriction] will have no effect,” he concluded. He was correct. Soldiers joined northern merchants in the illicit cotton trade and a major in the 8th Missouri Volunteers (Union) even resigned his commission in order to focus his full attention on the “mercantile business” of illegal cotton exchange in Memphis.  

These trends distinguished much of the garrisoned landscape, as Union occupation officials struggled to restrict and define the scope and meaning of their soldiers’ participation in illegal economic activity. Union observer Charles A. Dana, a confidant of President Lincoln, implored Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton to remove cotton speculators from occupied regions, “as a matter of military necessity. The mania for sudden fortunes made in cotton,” he asserted, “has to an alarming extent corrupted and demoralized the army. Every colonel, captain, or quartermaster is in secret partnership with some operator in cotton; every soldier dreams of adding a bale of cotton to his monthly pay.” Calling these practices “evil,” Dana recommended that “no private purchaser of cotton shall be allowed in any part of the occupied region.” Ulysses S. Grant agreed, commenting that he was “very much opposed to any trade whatever until the rebellion in this part of the country is entirely crushed out.” Trading with white southerners, Grant implied, and even experimenting in entrepreneurism, were perfectly acceptable practices in which northerners could partake, as long as they suspended such inclinations while in the military. It was not acceptable for soldiers to neglect their duties and profit from their voluntary service to the nation. Ethical considerations lay at the heart of Grant’s insistence. Henry Seaman,

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the conscientious Illinois soldier stationed at Helena, Arkansas, agreed, writing simply that “speculating is unbecoming to a soldier, and is apt to infringe upon military duty.”

While Grant, Seaman, and other northern commentators worried that Union soldiers became corrupted and distracted by economic profit in the occupied Confederacy, they probably did not comprehend the profound cultural forces that inspired volunteer troops to engage in such behavior. Informal economies symbolized one of the great tensions that governed the conduct of occupation soldiers during the American Civil War: devotion to republican obligation versus adherence to individual liberty. Whereas northern males selflessly left their private lives to serve and defend the nation, they assumed that their duties as occupiers did not conform to the ideal of national voluntarism. Thus, believing that they were detached from the war, they sought alternative means of reaffirming and recreating their lives as private citizens, even while they remained in public military service to the United States.

These pressures elicited outraged responses from civil and military authorities. Leaders and commanders did not necessarily disagree with the substance of their soldiers’ conduct; rather, they feared the damaging implications of such behavior to the American citizen-soldier ideal. Soldiers were not supposed to pursue self-interest while in national service. But what if that service, notably occupation, did not meet the expectations of their voluntary contracts? Under such circumstances, soldiers reverted activities and priorities as private citizens, hoping to recreate a semblance of normalcy.

Participation in informal economies accordingly blurred the distinctions between republican obligation and republican privilege. On the one hand, soldiers were obliged to maintain moral standards while in the military. But, on the other, they could not so easily discard

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their tendencies as free men and citizens. These tensions were rooted in the cultural spirit of entrepreneurism that characterized much of the antebellum North. Work filled northern males with individual character, fostering pride and achievement. Yet the war and occupation, in their minds, temporarily halted these pursuits. Northern males, who came of age during the height of the “market revolution,” of the capitalist market economy, entered the Union army imbued with instincts of financial independence and self-interest. Individualism, coupled with competition, defined northern economic culture. These qualities helped construct the antebellum ideal of the “self-made man,” made possible by economic and political institutions that supported the market. Republicanism and the market revolution collided shortly after the Revolution, and grew together during the nineteenth century, to inculcate a public spirit, eliminate dependence, and unleash a quest for individual initiative. The common American male took seriously the republican notion that he was free to make his life as he desired, as long as he adhered to virtuous, honorable behavior. Men were expected to participate and thrive within this system, creating a unique, singular identity.82

As they remained stationed indefinitely in static zones of occupation, northern males came to believe that their pursuit of a self-sufficient life was under assault. The increasingly bureaucratic environment of occupied garrisons, and the resulting limitations to personal freedom, thus motivated volunteer soldiers to shed the restrictive yoke of military culture and resume their habits as private citizens. Just as they had acted during the antebellum era, northern males had to make adjustments according to market demands, but they found new, innovative ways to earn an autonomous, financial, and rewarding existence. They reacted to market dynamics, welcomed adjustments to greet competition, and sought strategies that would ensure

success. In essence, they used the setting of occupation as an opportunity to practice economic traditions that they had learned as citizens in order to improve their lives as soldiers. 

However, republican culture and the heritage of the market revolution clashed during the Union’s war of occupation, creating a significant problem. Civil and military leaders had good reason to fear the impact of wartime economic habits on the citizen-soldier tradition. Their worries focused on troops’ negligence to proper military detail and conduct, but their concerns functioned on a much deeper level. When Charles A. Dana wrote in 1863 that informal economies, and especially the illicit cotton trade, had “corrupted and demoralized the army,” in which “every soldier dreams of adding a bale of cotton to his monthly pay,” he touched on long-held societal fears concerning unrestrained ambition. The nature of informal economies during the Civil War functioned on two levels. On the one hand, they reflected a perpetuation of antebellum practices in which men pursued financial self-sufficiency. But on the other, they were institutions in which laws of regulation did not exist, monopolies were common, and limitless profits were standard. Thus, many soldiers indulged in unbridled ambition, fostering a single-minded obsession. From the days of the nation’s creation through the antebellum era, American culture long distinguished between self-sufficiency and uninhibited ambition and sought to establish institutions to curb creed. “Ambition must be made to counteract ambition,” James Madison warned, referencing humanity’s natural, yet potentially destructive predispositions.


The culture of misbehavior and lax discipline within occupied garrisons led many observers to question how soldiers would act in the postwar world if they incorporated excessive practices learned from their days as long-term occupiers. Some considered that the ethical conditions of American society, and the moral fate of the Union, hung in the balance. Preservation of the Union encompassed political, social, cultural, and moral considerations. The central problem of occupation revealed the tensions between individualism on the one hand, and virtuous republican citizenship on the other. Both were required and celebrated characteristics during peacetime, yet the Union’s war of occupation pushed soldiers to test the extremes of each position, challenging the virtues of the citizen-soldier model.
CHAPTER SEVEN

BEHAVIORAL EXTREMES:
VIOLENCE, GUERRILLAS, AND THE IRREGULAR WAR

The culture of wartime occupation, defined by a static environment that wrought misbehavior and inspired unethical conduct, possessed an ironic character. Although Union soldiers often complained about boredom, their lives of tedium and monotony were punctuated by sporadic episodes of chaotic violence. Responses to these encounters pushed Union soldiers into myriad forms of extreme behavior, leading to carnage and destruction. Although they might have appeared as spaces of relative calm from which massive, warring armies long ago departed, regions of the occupied Confederacy were also defined by irregular warfare, periodic violence, and combatants who wore civilian clothing.

Union soldiers initially defined garrisons and occupied zones as fairly peaceful, lackluster environs, far-removed from the war’s principal events. But they sensed that a ghostly enemy lurked in their midst, threatening to kill them at any moment. Yankee occupiers realized that guerrillas and combatants dressed as private citizens reflected a very different kind of war from what they expected. This was not a war conducted on distant fields of battle in which organized ranks of uniformed soldiers engaged one another. On the contrary, the occupation war raged in the streets of towns and in the desolate countryside where traditional rules of engagement and “civilized” combat rarely existed. Unorganized violence flourished, forcing Union soldiers to adopt powerful modes of recourse. The occupiers were changed in the process. Soon they no longer waited to be attacked; they no longer acted confused about the nature of their enemy. Instead, they craved revenge, which they sometimes meted out on their aggressors in a grisly fashion.
Union soldiers’ responses to the occupation war in general, and the guerrilla war in particular, might appear exceptionally violent and destructive. Yankee occupiers despised their guerrilla foes, claiming that only “dishonorable” Mexicans and “cowardly” Native Americans practiced insurgent warfare. And indeed, the ethos of occupation forced Union troops to depart from traditional approaches to conventional war when combating their furtive enemies. Irregular methods of violence, which strayed from antebellum conceptions of “civilized” martial struggle, were deeply shocking because the targets and types of violence appeared to be far-removed from the United States’ previous conflicts.

Although the occupiers believed irregular warfare and its perpetrators to be uniquely violent on levels never before seen in American history, Yankee reprisals were comparatively mild in their retribution. On the whole, the United States army showed remarkable constraint when combating southern guerrillas, even while individual soldiers may have desired to mutilate bodies or kill civilians. Instead, in combating the guerrilla insurgency, Union occupiers employed particular mechanisms, such as shaming an offender’s masculinity, burning private property, or destroying local communities. When placed within a broader context, these methods were a far-cry from the experience of occupation in Mexico in which American occupiers justified limitless recourse on the grounds of racial difference. Few scholars deny that Union soldiers adopted destructive modes of recourse. Historical inquiry, though, centers on the question of the degrees of destruction and violence. Although the guerrilla conflict during the Civil War unleashed chaos and ferocity, racial similarities between the occupiers and the insurgents prevented the conflict from deteriorating into a war of extermination.¹

¹ Wayne Wei-Siang Hsieh, “Total War and the American Civil War Reconsidered: The End of an Outdated ‘Master Narrative,’” *Journal of the Civil War Era* 3 (September 2011): 393-408. Hsieh’s article provides a detailed argument against the idea that the Civil War should be viewed as a turning point on the road toward the modern, destructive, and total wars of the twentieth century. For a complementary interpretation, see, Mark Grimsley, *The Hard Hand of
Perhaps the interpretative lens should be refocused to address an additional, often overlooked problem. Long-term military occupation, combined with the violence of irregular warfare, reveals how American volunteers struggled to come to terms with the citizen-soldier ideal’s fundamental, and sometimes violent, alteration. Waging a war of counterinsurgency required targeting elements of society traditionally removed from previous American conflicts: civilians, landscapes, towns, and private homes. Wartime occupation unleashed a wave of punishment against those who violently resisted Union authority, even while the scale of reprisal was necessarily limited. Although they became willing participants in this irregular war, the occupiers were nevertheless troubled by the implications of their conduct and actions. They feared being transformed into the very embodiment of violence that they combated, which they believed threatened their virtue both as individual men and as a collective army. How did the occupiers struggle to define civilian enemies and guerrillas? By what means did soldiers adopt irregular styles of combat to contest their irregular foes? On a broader level, how did irregular warfare alter the idealism of American citizen-soldiering?

Guerrilla warfare represented an organic response both to the tangible and the imagined nature of military occupation, offering the white South a violent mode of resistance against the Yankee invaders. Stretching from the hills of western Virginia through the Ohio River Valley and dominating much of the upper and lower South, the guerrilla war exercised a powerful, unorganized, and chaotic alternative to the more traditional war fought on the fields of Shiloh, Antietam, and Gettysburg. Guerrillas unleashed murder, thievery, burning of bridges and towns,

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destruction of rail roads and supply lines, intimidation of Unionists and African Americans, and even the capturing and kidnapping of civilians and enemy soldiers. The clandestine and insurgent dynamics of the guerrilla war revealed a dark and messy underside in a most uncivil manner. Indeed, the guerrilla conflict functioned as an independent war within the broader wartime landscape, awakening Yankee soldiers from the doldrums of occupation duty. They came to learn that this peculiar conflict required a reorientation and redefinition of their preconceived notions about the enemy in particular and the war in general.²

As the Union army first penetrated the South, guerrilla activity was relatively sparse and scattered. During the spring of 1862, although minor guerrilla attacks annoyed Union rearguards, full-scale assaults rarely occurred. This tepid resistance initially convinced the invading troops that occupation would be relatively peaceful; white southern civilians might well remain passive. The occupiers assumed at the outset that they merely resided in quiet areas of the Confederacy while the real war was decided on distant battlefields. John W. De Forest, a captain in the 12th Connecticut Volunteers, believed that guerrillas were the exception to an otherwise quiet occupation of southeastern Louisiana. Describing a small clash between guerrillas and Yankees occupiers in June 1862, De Forest wrote, “[t]his is the only skirmish which has occurred within

² Scholars have given excellent attention to the creation and evolution of the guerrilla war, its purpose, and its leading figures. Yet it seems that the Union soldier’s perspective and comprehension on the guerrilla conflict traditionally appears in the background of many studies. See, for example, McPherson, Battle Cry of Freedom, 782-88; Michael Fellman, Inside War: The Guerrilla Conflict in Missouri During the American Civil War (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 149-66; Reid Mitchell, Civil War Soldiers (New York: Viking Press, 1988), 132-38; Stephen V. Ash, When the Yankees Came: Conflict and Chaos in the Occupied South, 1861-1865 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 21-22, 47-50, 64-65, 63-67; Daniel E. Sutherland, ed., Guerrillas, Unionists, and Violence on the Confederate Home Front (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1999). More recent literature has rebalanced the Yankee response closer to the center of examinations on the guerrilla war. See, for example, Robert R. Mackay, The Uncivil War: Irregular Warfare in the Upper South, 1861-1865 (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2004); George S. Burkhardt, Confederate Rage, Yankee Wrath: No Quarter in the Civil War (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2007); Clay Mountcastle, Punitive War: Confederate Guerrillas and Union Reprisals (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2009). Daniel E. Sutherland, A Savage Conflict: The Decisive Role of Guerrillas in the American Civil War (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), is the most comprehensive treatment to date. This chapter examines only the Union soldier’s attempt to understand the meaning of guerrilla warfare; chapter 5 provides a treatment of the violent response to guerrillas.
forty miles of here since New Orleans surrendered. I had no idea until lately what a Quakerly business war could be.”

Within a few months, however, as the Yankee presence grew, and it became increasingly clear to white southerners that their unwelcome guests would not depart anytime soon, guerrilla resistance mounted and ultimately spiraled out of control. Much of the occupied Confederacy erupted into a muddled, disorderly war in which small bands of irregular forces rode the countryside and harassed the occupying soldiers in their midst. Flaunting the conventional and “proper” rules of civilized warfare, guerrillas convinced Union soldiers of their precarious and dangerous positions. William T. Sherman wrote during the late summer of 1862, “There is not a Garrison in Tennessee where a man can go beyond the sight of the flagstaff without being shot or captured.” It became quite difficult to combat these forces: they operated at night, disguised themselves in civilian clothes, and employed hit-and-run tactics expressly to inspire fear and terror.

For a number of reasons, Yankee occupiers believed that the guerrilla war genuinely turned the citizen-soldier ideal upside down. First, soldiers faced the difficult task of determining who, precisely, their enemy was, what they looked like, and how they operated. Insurgent combatants behind the lines resembled anything but, and functioned in completely different ways, from the butternut-clad soldiers in the principal Confederate armies. John M. King, whose unit occupied Middle Tennessee for much of 1863, characterized the situation from Nashville: “The citizens were all rebel in sympathy and to guard those magazines and store houses was no easy task. Rebel spies and bushwhackers were going in and coming out [of the city] dressed as

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4 William T. Sherman to Salmon P. Chase, August 11, 1862, in Brooks D. Simpson and Jean V. Berlin, eds., Sherman’s Civil War: Selected Correspondence of William T. Sherman, 1860-1865 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 269; Ash, When the Yankees Came, 34, 46-50; Sutherland, Savage Conflict, passim.
farmers, women, negroes, and the like, crawling through the guard line under the cover of
darkness, getting ammunition and supplies to shoot our men from behind a tree or under a bush.
A head guard line night and day completely encircled the city, and no man, woman, or negro
could pass in or out unless he prove his loyalty, and yet a heavy patrol was kept constantly
scouring the streets night and day. A great many bushwhackers and villains were shot down in
the streets from time to time and a few innocent men. Thousands of women and men were
arrested and put under guard for a time.”

King’s description gave voice to an assortment of confusing questions that Union
occupiers asked about their enemy. Were guerrillas civilians? Yes, but they also appeared to be
violent combatants. Given that, how should they be treated? Acting largely independent of any
formal guidelines, Yankee soldiers had to answer these questions on their own. Gilbert M. Shaw,
along with a handful of his comrades from the 42nd Massachusetts Infantry, embodied this
problem. As they embarked on a picket patrol near St. John, Louisiana, “[we] hadent gone more
than twenty rods when two men started and ran down the Road. We told them to Halt but they
ran into the bushes. We saw where one of them went in so we walked up to within a rod of him
and cocked our muskets and gave just a minute to come out.” Shaw reported that he believed
that the two men were guerrillas, yet he remained completely undecided. Thus, “I told [them] to start
or I would blow [their] d____d guts out.”

The blurry and uncertain distinctions between civilian and guerrilla spread paranoia
among the Union occupiers who believed that both groups conspired together as one body to

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dislodge the Yankee presence. Charles Harding Cox, who protected the rail lines in Tennessee with the 70th Indiana Volunteers, commented, “Our career as railroad guards was tended with a great deal more danger than you may suppose . . . as we were scattered in small squads in a strong secesh [country], where guerrilla bands were thick as hail, and the citizens would aid them against us any moment.” Similarly, in coastal North Carolina, Dexter Ladd of the 23rd Massachusetts noted that “[t]he guard was fired [upon] at night . . . the Shot was fired from a house.” In Rolla, Missouri, Henry J. Seaman related how one of his commanding officers in the 13th Illinois Infantry led a small detachment that “captured every man woman and child that was capable of conveying intelligence to the [local guerrillas].” Moreover, Union soldiers felt as if they were constantly watched from behind bushes or trees and believed that the shadowy guerilla bands constantly outnumbered them and threatened to kill anyone who dared to leave a fortified garrison. “Last night there was considerable confusion in camp as the guerillas attacked our Pickets,” wrote an Indiana soldier stationed in eastern Arkansas, “we do not know on going to Bed any night but what we may be aroused up during the night to fight the devils as they are hovering around us day and night watching an opportunity to surprise us.”

Guerrillas operated with a frightening combination of viciousness and unpredictability; Yankee soldiers continuously remained on edge, wondering when the next attack, murder, or theft might occur. “I have felt very uneasy about [our current location at Fort Donelson, Tennessee] on account of the trouble along the river,” wrote Jerome Spilman of the 5th Iowa Cavalry. “At this place we know not what a day may bring forth. Gurilla bands are roving all over the country. . . . We sleep on our arms every night.” Courtland G. Stanton of the 21st

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Connecticut agreed, believing his position at Suffolk, Virginia, to be quite dangerous: “The people are all Secesh & the country is full of Guerilas.” Although his unit had recently constructed a fort, Stanton believed that they were only mildly safe. “Picket duty here,” he explained to his wife, “is such as you have heard of where the pickets have to keep themselves hid and are liable to get poped over it any time.”

William Whitney, who served in the 38th Massachusetts, expressed similar concerns, and he painted a very detailed picture of the precarious situation. Guerrillas, he said, “form bands of desperadoes to capture and seize and appropriate to themselves the property of others in the shape of good from the Union lines.” “Another part of their work,” he explained to his brother, “is to steal horses and sometimes they in a band have crept silently upon our cavalry pickets and shot them down for the purpose of getting their horses and equipment. A man’s life is not safe outside the lines when alone and unarmed. Their mode of action is to hide in the bushes when they hear of the approach of travelers and jumping out suddenly presenting a pistol, just as you read of banditti and highway robbers, they force the occupants of the carriage to give them what they demand. Such is the state of the country outside our lines. The citizens are in great measure responsible for this condition of affairs if they are not the participators themselves.”

Indeed, Union occupiers struggled to determine the precise distinction between combatant and civilian, which ultimately forced them to blur these lines for the sake of survival—zones of occupation represented areas of desperation in which to endure. Fred Osborne of the 23rd Massachusetts related one such episode. Several weeks after New Bern, North Carolina, fell to Union forces, Osborne explained frankly that “[t]here isn’t much news

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8 Jerome Spilman to Dear Wife, July 23 [1862], Jerome Spilman Letters, CWTC, USAMHI; Courtland G. Stanton to wife, [March or April] 5, 1863, DL0011.032, Courtland G. Stanton Letters, JLNC.

here excepting that the citizens have commenced the game of firing on the sentries from houses in the night.” Civilians-turned-combatants refused to reveal themselves in the light of day, which deeply frustrated Osborne and his men. Related incidents occurred “several times a man fired on the guard twice with a revolver. Two of the sentries returned it with their rifles and then chased him, but it was so dark and he being acquainted with the yards and gardens round there he got off. They have arrested one man and got him in jail.” Osborne suggested that, although it might be difficult, “[w]e had ought to take everyone [w]e catch and shoot them. That would stop it as quick as anything.”

While stationed in remote areas, protected only by small garrisons, and enduring the haphazard, arbitrary, and terrifying encounters with guerrillas, occupation soldiers questioned the honor and legitimacy of their clandestine foes. Guerrilla warfare epitomized anything but the grand battlefield encounters between troops clothed in the blue and gray in which the war, and the course of history, would be determined. Instead, the guerrilla presence encouraged an ambiguous outlook about the conflict. A Connecticut major wrote from Louisiana that his regiment had battled guerrillas continuously. “Nearly every day we have [fought] them to a fair engagement distant from our support,” he recollected. However, “[o]n each occasion we obtained only dissolving views of them. . . . they are activated by no motive but plunder, they fight only from ambuscade and war indiscriminately, upon friend and foe.” It seemed, the occupiers concluded, that guerrillas existed merely to perpetuate chaos and spread violence.


Union soldiers learned that they could not fight a fair, open battle against guerrillas in which an honorable outcome might be achieved. As one soldier from New England wrote from New Orleans, “our regt havent done any fighting[,] for the rebels that we was sent to whip picked up their heels and skedaddled before we got to them.” This characterization led many occupiers to conclude that guerrillas were, in the words of John Vreeland of the 19th Illinois, “equalled only by the Cowardly Mexicans.” Other soldiers similarly categorized guerrillas as dishonorable cultural inferiors. “The expeditions sent out to break up guerrilla dens & seize & bring in there effects are always attended with a good deal of fatigue, & sometimes, but rarely, with skirmishing,” explained an officer in the Department of the Gulf, “which is generally after the Indian fashion of skulking thro’ the woods & bushes thus approaching their object or lying in wait. The general weapon of the Guerrillas is a double barreled gun loaded with buckshot. His appearance & his qualities those of a white Indian.” Even Union General William Starke Rosecrans characterized guerrillas “scalping their victims is all that is wanting to make their warfare like that which seventy or eighty years ago was waged by the Indians against the white race.”

The process of describing guerrillas as inferior racial and cultural groups typified the ways in which Union soldiers classified the occupation experience as dishonorable. The essence of wartime military governance and its accompanying, violent resistance from white southerners resembled a destabilized environment in which chaos and disarray ruled supreme. These were disturbing realities for northern men who attached themselves intimately to societal order and

balance. Union soldiers came to believe that the disordered milieu of military occupation, coupled with its guerrilla perpetrators, resembled dislocated Mexican regimes and loose-knit Indian nations, always on the verge of collapse and upheaval. Guerrillas, in the minds of the occupiers, represented the ignoble and fragmented components of these societies. But on a broader level, and because of the guerrilla presence, Yankee soldiers came to believe that they themselves were transforming into the very institutions responsible for perpetuating societal unruliness and instability, the very qualities that they attributed to Mexican and Indian culture. Indeed, the occupiers comprised a formidable army, yet their presence failed to ensure peace and order, instead spawning violence and chaos.13

This troubling scenario tested Union soldiers to locate an honorable, meaningful wartime experience. As Private Jessie Osgood described in 1863, “[guerrillas] are [too] cowardly to inlist and fight in open field. But they want to get out of sight in the Swamps behind trees. I wish [we] would hang every gurrila that [we] catch.” Osgood’s words, though, included much more than mere complaint. The combination of military occupation and guerrilla warfare forced the occupiers to explore their own blurring line between private citizen and soldier. Guerrillas merged their dual identities as civilians and combatants, the blend of which profoundly confused Union occupiers. On the one hand, the citizen-soldier ideal necessitated that those who threatened the nation must be killed or defeated. On the other hand, the soldier had to abide by a certain code of moral conduct as determined by the laws and customs of his peacetime society; he had to fight an ethical war within a mutually accepted and honorable arena.14


14 Jessie Osgood to Dear Uncle John, June 22, 1863, Jessie C. Osgood Letters, 1862-1864, Mss. 1460, LLMVC, LSU.
However, guerrillas completely repudiated the basic requirements and assumptions of the citizen-soldier ideal. Their identity as civilian-turned-combatant relied on murder, thievery, and plunder; their disregard for moral law and custom was evident. Union occupiers had to adapt to this model themselves, or simply be killed. But they struggled mightily with the implications of this dilemma, primarily because they retained so much of their own civilian identities. In their minds, guerrillas did not function as formal soldiers but rather as rebellious and dangerous civilians. In peacetime society, though, private citizens naturally would remove themselves from the presence of such uncouth individuals. And civilians certainly were not granted the legal or moral recourse to respond in a warlike manner. The experience of wartime occupation thrust these contradictory elements directly at Union soldiers and challenged them to decide how best to deal with this unique situation. Northern men volunteered, in part, to defend and uphold the rule of law, a concept that they held dear. Killing functioned as a universally acknowledged component of warfare; blurring the lines between civilian and combatant and arbitrary murder, did not. Their immediate enemies thrived exclusively on this brand of lawlessness, yet traditional methods of law enforcement—those that normally governed civil society—failed to work within the occupation and garrison environment. Their ultimate alternative, therefore, was to adopt the guerrilla’s tactics, which fundamentally transformed their relationship to the army and American society.15

The occupiers exhibited much concern with the implications of adjusting their approach to war. One letter in particular underscores the apprehension involved with the changing role of the citizen-soldier ideal. In 1863 Brigadier General Benjamin Loan related the murders and brutal maiming of several soldiers under his command in Missouri. The guerrillas engaged in “stamping with boot heels the flesh from [the soldiers’] faces, cutting off their ears, pouring

powder into their ears and exploding it.” The standard constructs of military occupation did not provide the means, Loan concluded, to properly combat such grisly incidents. “The occasion which justifies martial law [has] not passed away,” he wrote. “The people are not generally quiet; those who sympathize with the rebellion will not yield obedience to the Government for the sake of peace or otherwise. It is not true that the civil officers performed their functions fully or without molestation, and it is utterly false to say that the machinery of civil government can now be operated as in times of profound peace.” Instead, “there has been at no time since the commencement of the present civil war when it required more vigilance or a stronger hand to protect Union citizens in parts of this district than it does at this present hour. You know that the whole western country is filled with guerrillas, who are carrying on a most bloody and cruel warfare.”

Loan explicitly equated restive civilians with the guerrillas who actually perpetuated the murders. In his mind, the two groups were indistinguishable. He tried to remain assured in the fact that “the most thorough, constant, and energetic [means] are resorted to suppress these outrages.” Yet, “[o]ur forces are, to all intents and purposes, in an enemy’s country, protecting these enemies in all their rights, and [we are] so to conduct ourselves that we can hereafter live in harmony and concord with them. As we claim to be honest people, and loyal to the flag of our country, would it not be as well for the administration to change this policy and require them (the rebels) to so conduct themselves that they can hereafter live in harmony and concord with us?” Loan yearned for his enemies to be governed by the rule of law and to conduct their resistance accordingly. He fully understood, though, that reality necessitated that his soldiers no longer

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could abide by the traditional approach to war. The enemy had changed his tactics; in response, the common Union occupier would have to change his as well. The war against southern guerrillas could be won only with means that broke with the moral codes of civilized warfare. This departure from an honorable war greatly distressed Loan in particular, and Yankee soldiers in general, throughout the occupied Confederacy.17

Traversing the backwoods in search of partisan bands, retaliating against the property of, and even killing, civilians whom they thought were guerrillas, and enduring the fear, stress, and worry about being murdered, collectively transformed Union occupiers’ understanding of an honorable war. Yankee troops thus expressed a host of sentiments that underscored their desire for a change of scenery, preferably one that conformed more closely to the citizen-soldier ideal. Often positioned far from the principal battlefields, many Union soldiers longed to be transferred from their isolated garrisons to the front lines. The rise of guerrilla warfare only exacerbated their established frustrations with garrison duty. William H. Whitney wrote from Baton Rouge in late 1863 that “[t]he other day two of our cavalry outposts were murdered by guerrillas. . . . The life we are leading just now is rather tiresome. I confess that active service upon which we shall enter has many charms to make us desire it to come.” In a rather ironic fashion, Whitney yearned for the seemingly organized, yet more deadly arena of the battlefield in which uniformed armies faced off against one another to determine the war’s outcome. This was the primary reason for which they enlisted; not hunting hostile civilians in a seemingly foreign region. Charles Wright Wills, who served in the 103rd Illinois Infantry, confided to his diary that chasing guerrillas through Tennessee, and even waiting for them to attack, created needless anticipation among the soldiers in his regiment. Standing for hours on picket and seeing no real enemy, “save ‘citizen

17 Ibid.
guerrillas’,” wore on the Illinoisan and seemed to serve little purpose. “I’d give a month’s pay to get this regiment into a fight,” he admitted. “Don’t want it for myself particularly, but think it would do the regiment a great deal of good.”

Whitney’s and Wills’s comments, which were prompted in part by their proximity to guerrillas, functioned on a much deeper level. Union occupiers exhibited a keen awareness and comprehension of what their particular service meant, constantly seeking to define the state of their current positions within the occupied Confederacy. Yankee soldiers viewed guerrilla warfare as highly shameful and, for a host of reasons, wanted to be removed from its presence. Northern men profoundly cherished the concept of honor and perpetually strove to fulfill the cultural obligations embodied by their citizen-soldier heritage, yet they believed that guerrillas could not be fully eradicated. Rather, they remained a constant source of annoyance and danger to Union troops. Thus instead of skulking in fear and struggling to abide by civilized approaches to wartime occupation, Union soldiers willingly shed their identities as controlled soldiers and embarked on a campaign of destructiveness and violence, hoping to punish the Confederacy and its presumed support of irregular warfare.

The occupiers believed that their comrades had not been killed in formal battle but rather murdered by lawless bands of assassins, thereby planting the seeds of revenge and retribution. Charles O. Musser, a private in the 29th Iowa Volunteers, drew a clear distinction between various modes of wartime death. “I think there is not much of a rebel force in this part of the country—mostly guerrillas,” he wrote in 1863 from Helena, Arkansas. He judged that the war of occupation had produced enough slaughter, stipulating “not so much bloodshed as murder.”

Being “killed in battle and [dying] of sickness,” he believed, were far different from succumbing to the arbitrary will of guerrillas. Musser and countless Union soldiers were troubled by this dichotomy. They entered the army prepared to die on the field of battle, not to be murdered in the southern backwoods. The occupiers were concerned that their comrades had not received a good death when killed by irregular combatants. The lack of honor and dignity attached to this form of passing did not conform to their imagined embodiment of the citizen-soldier model. American volunteers, they reasoned, should not have to endure needless acts of random violence. They nevertheless learned that new tactics would be necessary to adequately combat this troubling situation. But these approaches were not unique. They were the same ones employed by the guerrillas themselves.¹⁹

Stationed in theaters throughout the occupied Confederacy, Union soldiers struggled to define the limits of appropriate recourse. Guerrilla warfare, and the civilians who perpetrated it, were, in the eyes of Union occupiers, lawless and brazenly violent. These very characteristics pushed Yankee troops to inquire just how much the citizen-soldier ideal was worth in occupied zones. If their enemies refused to fight in an honorable and open manner, they asked, what might be the proper avenues of retaliation? The answer to this question was shocking: it reflected the dark nature in which guerrillas functioned and profoundly challenged the occupier’s attachment to the citizen-soldier ideal. Soldiers in the Union’s armies of occupation sought various modes of vengeance for their dead companions. On this basis, the occupiers justified a copious response to the irregular war, stretching the limits of restraint and widening the gulf between wartime civility and annihilation. Officers learned that their men could not be convinced to withhold their anger;

thus, they sanctioned, sometimes unofficially, wide-ranging tactics to counter the guerrilla presence.

Writing from Memphis in the summer of 1862, William T. Sherman summarized the evolving convictions of countless Union troops. “The Government of the United States may now safely proceed on the proper Rule that all in the South are Enemies of all in the North,” he declared, “and not only are they unfriendly, but all who can procure arms now bear them as organized Regiments or Guerrillas.” It is more important to consider the milieu in which Sherman wrote, rather than the accuracy of his statement. He believed it to be true, as did many of his soldiers, thus dictating the ways in which they would conduct the irregular war. All white southerners were potentially complicit in inflicting harm on United States armies, and all were considered impediments to the restoration of the Union. Indeed, what would the post-war nation resemble in the aftermath of a violent, irregular war? Sherman and his soldiers refused to answer this question. Instead, they believed that nothing short of annihilation would settle the issue. Of course widespread extermination never occurred, but that misses the point. The mind of the citizen-soldier was irrevocably altered by the realization that any mode of reprisal was justified, any method of punishment necessary to dominate those who threatened peace and honor. It was an ironic situation, yet one that could not be avoided.20

Union soldiers had grown weary of their indefinite occupation of the Confederacy and its violent character. They struggled to comprehend the brutal truths of occupation, yet once they did, the scope of retribution expanded. They no longer worried about the differences between civilians and combatants; all southerners, in their minds, possessed the potential for disorder and chaotic violence. The occupiers accordingly constructed two distinct modes of recourse through

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20 William T. Sherman to Salmon P. Chase, August 11, 1862, in Simpson and Berlin, eds., Sherman’s Civil War, 269.
which they channeled their vengeance. First, they attacked the southern landscape, targeting local environs, towns, buildings, and private homes. Second, they trained their sights directly on the irregular combatants, the physical embodiment of insurgent brutality. This new war necessitated violence to combat violence, destruction to combat destruction, all while discarding traditional adherence to civilized conduct. Focus on proper discipline had evaporated, attention to moral behavior had disappeared, and devotion to wartime civility had faded. The occupation war was now reshaped, defined by vengeance and measured by devastation, altered by a profound shift in the citizen-soldier’s mentality.

A key distinction, however, needs to be drawn between the range of reprisals and the ways in which Union occupiers understood their participation in a war of vengeance. There is little question that desires for retaliation largely inspired the evolution of counterinsurgency warfare. Yet it is crucial to recognize the constraints placed on the conduct of Union armies. Although most soldiers and commanders sought to extend “the hard hand of war” against guerrillas and civilians sympathetic to irregular conduct, appropriate calculations were made on the acceptable limits of wartime retribution. Rather than murdering entire communities or dislocating whole towns, Union authorities instead countered the guerrilla presence through the burning of private dwellings thought to be the sources of civilian violence. And they targeted particular citizens suspected of harboring or funding guerrillas. Although restrained and pragmatic in their approach, these policies nonetheless conditioned the troops in the art of waging war against the countryside and ununiformed civilians. The common citizen-soldier now had to negotiate the meaning of these new elements of American warfare, the implications of which he considered to be troubling.²¹

Edward F. Noyes, an Ohio soldier, summarized the emerging problem. “As I go through this traitor country,” he wrote, “two impulses are struggling in my heart, one to lay waste as we go—like destroying angels, to kill & burn and make the way of the transgressors [hand]—the other is to wage a civilized warfare.” Union policymakers and military authorities initially sought the latter path, but the troops chose differently. “[I]n view of the atrocities of the rebels,” Noyes concluded, “our boys only wait for the word, to make the land desolate.” Focus on proper discipline had evaporated, attention to moral behavior had disappeared, and devotion to wartime civility had faded. The occupation war was now reshaped, defined by vengeance and measured by devastation, altered by a profound shift in the citizen-soldier’s mentality.22

Noyes’s wavering but ultimate acceptance of attacking the physical landscape in retribution for guerilla warfare, was expanded further by Lt. Col. John A. Keith of the 21st Indiana Volunteers. Stationed in southeastern Louisiana, Keith received orders to take a detachment of troops into Terra Bonne Parish to “arrest and punish certain parties charged with having fired upon four sick soldiers . . . killing two and wounding the others.” The dead soldiers “were robbed of everything . . . [their] bodies after being brutally and disgustingly abused, being kicked and beaten, the face of [one soldier] scarcely retaining the semblance of a human being.” Keith, along with 240 members of the 21st Indiana, arrested several citizens of Houma, and learned that the primary culprit was a prominent attorney and newspaper editor who plotted the murders of other local citizens. Keith demanded that other residents come forward who could provide information. He then declared that “the foul and unnatural murder of two American soldiers, repugnant alike to the instincts of humanity and the practice of civilized warfare,” had

caused the perpetual occupation of the town. “The atrocious nature of the crime itself,” he
continued, “the indecent, shameless and un-Christianlike burial and robbery of the dead . . . have
forever disgraced the town of Houma.”

Keith purposely chose these symbolic words. The citizens of Houma opted to embrace
an uncivilized mode of warfare, which allowed the Union occupiers to justify a response in kind.
After Keith ordered Houma’s citizens to rebury the dead soldiers, he left a flag atop the
courthouse as a reminder that “terrible consequences” would befall the town and its population if
the graves were disturbed and future attacks made on Union troops. Indeed, local residents were
given forty-eight hours to identify and turn in the culprits. If they failed to comply, Keith
warned, “not a vestige of the town of Houma shall be left to identify its former location, and the
plantations in the parish of Terrebonne shall suffer in a like degree.” Southern civilians and the
physical landscape were no longer passive actors in the drama of wartime occupation. All were
now brought into the purview of Union occupation, used as symbols of retribution and
vengeance.

Houma, Louisiana, escaped the destruction of the United States military; other southern
communities were not as fortunate. As the guerrilla threat continued unabated, the Union’s
armies of occupation deployed the very tactics threatened by Lt. Col. John Keith. The occupiers
came to believe that extinguishing the ubiquity of irregular warfare required absolute
devastation. Union soldiers were not moved by a sense of careless attention, immaturity, or blind
misbehavior. Instead, they were inspired by calculated decisions to end the war efficiently and
decisively. A gray-clad Confederate army did not exist for them to fight and strategic points on

23 John A. Keith to Benjamin Butler, May 22, 1862, Provost Marshal General Records, RG 393, Part 1, Department of the Gulf, #1756, Letters Received, Box 1, NARA.
24 Ibid.
the map had long been captured, yet the war dragged on, becoming increasingly violent. Thus, it was necessary to punish those whom they deemed most responsible for their condition. And they did so with meticulous devotion. Their outlook had clearly shifted. Burning towns was now easy, wrecking the landscape effortless and seemingly enjoyable.²⁵

By the middle point of the war, the guerrilla presence in Tennessee, for instance, had tested the occupiers’ sanity. Numerous soldiers articulated precisely how they desired to rectify the situation. Addison McPheeters, Jr., of the 21st Illinois Volunteers, commented that “the boys are raising hell in Nashville every night, I would not care if they would burn it to ashes, it is no uncommon thing to see houses burning here.” McPheeters explained that such occurrences are “the best way to put down the rebellion, burn them out, damn them.” Fearing that his father, to whom he wrote, might believe that his son had adopted a savage approach to warfare, McPheeters offered assurance that his conduct was justified. “[P]erhaps you think that I am too severe,” he acknowledged, “well wait till you get in Dixes land, and see what they have done, to the Union families, then I think you will think I am right. . . . tell [the boys] when they get in Dixes land, to go in on their verves, give secesh hell from the word go.” Charles Wright Wills, a fellow Illinoisan, agreed with McPheeters’ sentiments. “This little town had when the war commenced some 40 house[s],” he wrote from Middleton, Tennessee, in June 1863. “[N]ow it

²⁵ Historians have devoted great attention to the nature of destruction wrought by the Union army, and especially the shifts in national policy from conciliation to “hard war.” Studies on expeditions, foraging, pillaging, confiscation, plundering, burning towns, and targeting civilians—in essence, the turn to “hard war”—have dominated the literature over the past two decades, rendering perceptive insight and lucid interpretation. Attempting not to repeat what scholars have already successfully established, this chapter focuses more on the shifting mindsets, and their implications, of Union soldiers who adopted these tactics. For studies on the former, see Ash, When the Yankees Came, 13-75; Grimsley, Hard Hand of War, passim; Mountcastle, Punitive War, 1, 6-7, 24-25, 59, 71-72, 106-8, 126-28; Joseph W. Danielson, War’s Desolating Scourge: The Union’s Occupation of North Alabama (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2012), 45-91.
boasts of not more than 12 or 15. . . . This country has literally been scraped, swept and scoured.”

Such tactics were crucial to reconstruct what McPheeters and Wills considered an archaic, violent society. Rather than being pushed by simple wayward conduct, Union soldiers’ believed that the Union must be rid of the physical emblems of secession and the ingredients of the Old South. Thus, their implementation of pillaging, burning towns, foraging the countryside, and confiscating crops, food, and household goods, were guided by an acute sense of national cleansing. In addition, the violence perpetrated by guerrillas was symbolic of what Union soldiers considered to be outmoded relics of the southern culture of honor. Everything in the southern world, from its agricultural staples, to its rural landscape, to its embrace of irregular violence, must be extinguished or reshaped. The post-war Union needed a singular identity, they supposed, one defined by the northern image. In an ironic twist, Yankee soldiers considered that national rejuvenation came only through means of great destruction and violence, the very elements practiced by their guerrilla foes.

Joseph H. Prime, of the 13th New Hampshire Volunteers, centered Union at the heart of his desire for retribution and national purification. He wanted to “see something done towards closing this war and putting down this rebellion,” believing that “the only way will be to burn every rebel city and village and show the rebels that we are determined to conquer or die and then there will be some thing done towards closing this war.” Charles Wills, who served with the 103rd Illinois Infantry, agreed. Surveying the southern landscape, he lamented the conflicting

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26 Addison McPheeters, Jr., to R. P. McPheeters, November 25, 1862, McPheeters Family Papers, USAMHI; Diary entry, June 4, 1863, in Wills, and Kellog, comp., Army Life of an Illinois Soldier, 178.

loyalties prevalent in the wartime Confederacy. “The guerrillas first ran the Union men off,” he wrote, “and then when we came here the Unionists returned, took up arms and drove out all the secesh families.” This instability resulted in needless bloodshed, “murders being committed in every neighborhood by either one party or the other.” The North, he alleged, did not have these problems, unique only to the South. “It will take at least 8,000 years for this people alone to make this country what Illinois is now,” Wills concluded.  

While Union soldiers made a deliberate decision to target both the southern countryside and local towns, they also trained their vengeance on the bodies and physical presence of their guerrilla adversaries. Although not as sizeable as targeting large, natural environs, the choice to integrate a corporeal element into the irregular war created an intimate, yet deeply violent bond between the adversaries. Guerrillas had long besieged the occupiers’ bodies through mutilation, hanging, and disfigurement. Union soldiers now responded in like manner, adding new elements to a war that knew few bounds. Similar to their interpretations of the rural southern landscape and large plantations, Union occupiers viewed guerrillas’ physical existence as an impediment to national reunion. Those individuals who practiced the archaic, martial tendencies of the Old South had to be eradicated. Yet by exercising methods that they believed would smother the guerrilla threat, the occupiers redefined a war that simultaneously lacked structure and clarity.

The occupiers had long been exposed to the war perpetrated on their bodies by guerrillas. Frank Twitchell, a soldier who served in Louisiana, articulated the varied ways in which his comrades died, describing how their bodies rested. “The guerrillas captured a transport and burned it with 15 officers and a few soldiers,” he illustrated, “what was done with them is more than wee know.” A few days later, Twitchell better understood. “An officer of the 128th NY went

across the river to look for some cotton that was hidden in the woods, he was found the other day hung by the neck to a tree,” concluding that “those Officers on the boat may of shared the same fate.” Twitchell ultimately learned that a several soldiers ventured a “little ways from the camp after some brush to make brooms [and] they found a human skeleton laying in the weeds very likely it was one of our own men shot buy the guerrillas.” Guerrillas hanged soldiers, burned their remains, and left their bodies behind as physical reminders of the occupiers’ unwanted presence. The peculiar deaths of Union soldiers in occupied zones did not mirror the felled columns of deceased combatants upon the fields of Manassas or Fredericksburg. Instead they were killed in a deliberate, yet random style, which sent specific messages to the occupying armies.29

Union occupiers took very seriously the implications of this contest, primarily because they did not consider guerrillas to be official soldiers or honorable men. Thus, any mode of recourse against them would be acceptable. After an advance Union guard captured an officer from a guerilla company roaming the countryside near Bayou Bouef, Louisiana, “evidently for the purpose of shooting down our soldiers,” the occupation commander issued a directive outlining the rebel’s destiny. The guerrilla would “be shot to death . . . as a warning to all men not soldiers to remain peaceably at their homes, if they desire the protection of the Government of the ‘United States.’” His crime was simple, and his verdict served as a warning to other potential civilian combatants: “And the fate of this man shall be the fate of every man found with arms in his hands not belonging to the so-called Army of the Confederate States of America.” An honorable man, in the minds of Union occupiers, would enlist in the military and fight his

29 Frank Twitchell to [unknown], April 3, 1864, Frank Twitchell Letter, Mss. 3367, LLMVC, LSU.
nation’s battles. If he chose an alternative course, he would meet a fate similar to the very type of war he perpetrated.  

The occupation commander at Little Rock, Arkansas, articulated similar definitions in March 1864. Celebrating his occupying army as the institution that protected loyal citizens’ “enjoyment of life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness,” he promised to eradicate the guerrilla bands that endangered such cherished values. He vowed to target the “robbers and guerrillas who have taken advantage of the unsettled state of the country to burn dwellings, murder their neighbors, and insult women.” These guilty parties “are in no respect soldiers, and when taken will not be treated as such.” A government committee that travelled from Kentucky to Missouri during the spring and summer of 1864 likewise described the “numerous” and “destructive” character of the irregular war, declaring, “Guerrillas are upon the land what pirates are upon the sea. They are hostis humani generis, and are entitled to no quarters.” Union soldiers had long agreed, and waged a war with these vital definitions in mind.

Once they accepted that this manner of conduct was the standard by which the irregular war was guided, Union soldiers adopted the same techniques. If their bodies were targeted, killed, and mutilated in a shameful fashion, then their aggressors would endure the same destiny. The occupiers implemented a variety of violent techniques, which ranged from hangings, executions, beatings, chases through the woods, and even knocking on suspected guerrillas’ doors and pulling the trigger. They sought to demonstrate that they too could play the game of irregular warfare, while reducing their enemy to nothing more than a skeleton. Simple killing and burial was unsatisfactory. That was how the uniformed, principal armies practiced warfare.

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30 Special Order No. 211, May 6, 1863, Provost Marshal General Records, RG 393, Part 1, Department of the Gulf, #1756, Letters Received 1863, Box 3, NARA.

new, constantly evolving code governed the irregular war, with competitions of power directing its course. The male image was the central target in this sphere of martial struggle, and great strides were taken to ensure a stain on the enemy’s masculinity.32

Yet some modes of recourse, while remaining grounded in masculine humiliation, represented basic forms of peace and innocence, underscoring an ultimate sense of restraint. The occupiers considered guerrillas and their tactics to be acts of purposeful emasculation and disgrace. Thus, they fashioned ways to make their enemies endure the shame of their conduct. As the 92nd New York Volunteers picketed the cold, dark shores of the Neuse River in coastal North Carolina, they experienced nightly battles with guerrillas, whom they “hated cordially, and were disposed to show them but little mercy.” The unconventional combatants often dressed in civilian clothes, professing to be “unionists, neutrals, or ‘know nothings,’ as they chose,” often shooting “our men in cold blood.” After a scouting mission departed to rout a guerrilla band, the rebel leader challenged one of the occupation officers to a fight. The two parties squared off in the woods, riding, yelling, and shooting in a violent rampage. When the fighting ceased, men on both sides lay killed or wounded, while some of the guerrillas were captured and taken to the Union garrison at New Bern. “One prisoner was marched through the city,” an observer noted, “with a woman’s skirt on, and on his back a placard with the words, ‘guerrilla caught dressed in woman’s clothes.’” The soldiers simply could have killed their prized catch, leaving his body to rot in the woods enveloped only by the peace of nature. Indeed, that was how many Union occupiers experienced their final moments, alone and isolated. But the spectacle of public humiliation in the broad daylight of southern society, exposed by an uncensored denigration of

32 For a specific interpretation of targeting of the male body, on both sides, during the guerrilla war, see Fellman, Inside War, 186-89.
guerrillas’ masculinity, was much too tempting to resist. Cloaking the male body in women’s attire, in this instance, was far superior to wasting a bullet.33

Other guerrillas did not enjoy similar diplomatic punishment. The occupiers were often instructed to kill their opponents, show no mercy, and take few, if any, prisoners. And the soldiers responded with few hesitations. One officer ordered his troops, who picketed the lines outside of New Orleans, “if attacked by such infernal rascals to bring no prisoners in, only their dead carcasses, of those that they are successful in securing.” A Michigan colonel stationed in Middle Tennessee replied to similar orders in July 1863, “I propose to bring some of the scoundrels to grief if I can. I have no doubt they intend the same thing by me.” Over the next few months, his regiment captured numerous bushwhackers, most of whom were sent to Nashville for imprisonment. Yet the colonel kept “two or three to hang when we want a little fun.” Indeed, Union occupiers used hanging as an effective, symbolic means of retribution. Charles O. Musser explained to his father that although reports of such executions rarely appeared in northern newspapers, “that is no sign that it is not done.” As early as August 1861, the occupation commander at Cape Girardeau, Missouri, declared that if local guerrillas made war on the local population or army, “I will hang them, and take a bitter revenge on you in other respects.” And the practice continued more than three years later following the murders of three Union troops at Powder Springs, Georgia. The guerrilla perpetrators were caught and ordered to “be either shot or hung in retaliation.”34


34 Dudley to Davis, September 6, 1862, Provost Marshal General Records, RG 393, Part 1, Department of the Gulf, #1756, Letters Received 1863, Box 1, NARA; Henry C. Gilbert to My Dear Wife, July 18 and November 4, 1863, Henry C. Gilbert Papers, 1826-1864, James S. Schoff Civil War Collection, William J. Clements Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan (hereafter cited as SCWC); Charles O. Musser to Dear Father, November 9,
The liberal corpus of reprisals employed by Union troops extended far beyond hanging guerrillas. Invasions of private homes, blanket shootings, executions, and simple mutilation of enemy combatants’ bodies sometimes encompassed the irregular war. An Inspector General from the United States Army perhaps best summarized the scope of the occupiers’ violent retributions, writing from St. Louis in March 1864. “It has been the custom in many parts of the department for officers and soldier, when operating against guerrillas, to immediately put to death all who fall into their hands,” he disclosed, “even after they have thrown down their arms and asked for mercy.” The inspector reported that most officers freely admitted issuing orders forbidding the taking of prisoners. He explained that these troubling tactics prolonged the nature of irregular warfare, inducing the enemy to “to fight to desperation, as they dare not return to their homes or give themselves up to the military authorities for fear of being instantly put to death.” The guerrilla war would continue as long as occupation continued, he concluded, “where murder, highway robbery, pillage, and other kindred crimes are now of almost daily occurrence.”

Mirroring the tactics of guerrillas allowed the Yankee occupiers to exert a degree of power and control that they believed had been challenged by the character of irregular warfare. The essence of wartime occupation, at least in theory, rested on regulation and management of hostile civilians, an assumption clearly contested by the guerrilla presence. As grisly as it seemed, and as noticeably troubled as the Inspector General in St. Louis appeared, the no-quarter retaliation provided Union soldiers with a degree of martial leverage, additional arrows in their


proverbial quiver. For example, although they loathed combatants who looked and dressed like civilians, who appeared to skulk in the shadows, and who attacked indiscriminately, the occupiers learned to emulate those very approaches. “There is a party of soldiers from here in disguise,” warned a Union officer at Platte City, Missouri, “scouting secretly and under orders after the style adopted by the guerrillas. Be careful and not run into them.” The occupiers detested having to be reduced to such techniques, yet they did so anyway. They proudly wore the blue uniform of Union, the physical symbol of their citizen-soldier identity. Yet the irregular war mandated that it be discarded; the pendulum of power had to swing back in their favor.36

And it sometimes did, with shocking results. Perhaps the most peculiar tactic in the war against Confederate guerrillas was not a variation in military strategy or conduct. Rather, it was a change in language, an alteration of an imagined mentality. Union soldiers transformed expeditions and battles against guerrillas into a symbolic hunt, reminiscent of their prewar days in pursuit of deer, quail, or other wild game. Morphing guerrillas into a faceless foe, devoid of personality or humanity, allowed the occupiers to pursue their adversaries without concern for moral bearing. Instead, the hunt for guerrillas evolved into a game, a competition to see who could acquire the best prize. The environment of occupation, which threatened the core of northern masculinity, permitted the occupiers to exhibit the virtues of manly contest. There were no rules, no limitations, and no referees. Only raw instinct guided the soldier against his prey. The guerrilla body, indeed the “dead carcasses” of deceased opponents, became the trophy in this competition. The soldiers carefully gaged the score, always noting the number of dead opponents compared to survived comrades. “Captain Bishop with some 25 men of Companies A and G did a splendid thing last Thursday night,” Charles Wills of the 103rd exclaimed. “He surprised

36 W. T. Clarke to John M. Clarke, June 13, 1864, OR, vol. 34, pt. 4, p. 349; Fellman, Inside War, 166; Sutherland, Savage Conflict, 113.
Saulstreet and 20 of his gang . . . killed three wounded and captured five and six sound prisoners, without losing one of our men or getting scratched. Three of the wounded guerrillas have since died.” The hunt had commenced.37

Union soldiers across the occupied Confederacy employed the language of hunting, effectively downplaying their tactics and presuming to be desensitized to the nature of their conduct. Cloaking the battle against guerrillas in familiar, pre-war language allowed the occupiers to distance themselves from the horrific conduct of the irregular war, but it also revealed the troubling extent to which they were willing to engage their adversaries. Characterizing their opponents merely as animals implicitly sanctioned a mode of warfare that stripped the humanity away from both the hunter and the hunted. “I have just returned from a grand guerrilla hunt of over a week,” Connecticut officer Frank Peck reported from New Orleans. The pursuit, though, proved difficult because “they never fight openly” and often “skedaddled” when the hunters appeared. But this added an entertaining element. The game that Union soldiers hunted was crafty, smart, and clever. The human, intellectual component added a distinct challenge. Henry C. Gilbert, a colonel in the 19th Michigan Volunteers, penetrated to the heart of the matter when he described the guerrilla problem in Tennessee. “Our hunting still goes on,” he wrote in March 1864, “‘the hunting of men.’ Over 40 of the guerrillas have been shot since Feb.” The search parties, he reported, “go on foot & hunt men as they would deer. . . . It is awful but there is an excitement about it that places it far above anything recorded by Cumming

37 Dudley to Davis, September 6, 1862, Provost Marshal General Records, RG 393, Part 1, Department of the Gulf, #1756, Letters Received 1863, Box 1, NARA; Diary entry, May 29, 1863, Wills, and Kellog, comp., Army Life of an Illinois Soldier, 177. Fellman, Inside War, 176-84, introduced the concept of the guerrilla war as analogous to a wild game hunt.
and Gerard the Lion Hunter. Their game were mere brutes without intelligence. Here we hunt men with brains.”

Gilbert exhibited an acute sense of pride, celebrating the sport’s great difficulty, and praising his victims’ shrewdness and quickness. Thus, the thrill of securing a human trophy was all the more satisfying. Reports from a raid on a guerrilla encampment near Warrensburg, Missouri, testified to this point. In July 1864 the 7th Missouri State Cavalry (Union) snuck upon a local church, which reportedly housed local bushwhackers. The cavalymen appeared suddenly while the pastor was in the midst of his sermon, surprising the congregation from which nearly a dozen guerrillas fled the building. As the chase commenced, “and the work of death went bravely on,” five guerrillas were killed immediately, while a sixth lay mortally wounded. The others, terror-stricken yet focused, managed to escape, followed closely by the Union horsemen. A young private, John T. Anderson, pursued the rebel outlaws and “received three shots through his clothes, one knocking the skin off his nose and one striking the pistol in his hand.” Riding directly in the midst of the fleeing guerrillas, Anderson, “with great coolness and precision shot right and left, emptying twelve barrels and loading four more.” Another private, James D. Barnes rode ahead, “holding his fire until he drew up on his game,” and began shooting, only to be thrown from his horse shortly thereafter.

The two soldiers received high praise for their efforts. Anderson, who had been badly wounded a year prior in a hand-to-hand fight with a guerrilla in Livingston, Missouri, received
his revenge at Warrensburg. Barnes was “a mere boy and quite small, but is as bold and dashing a trooper as ever looked an enemy in the face.” The episode reflected the larger phenomenon of hunting for humans. The guerrilla-turned-prey signified an object to be killed, not captured. If they escaped, the pursuer would welcome shame onto his conduct as a hunter (soldier) and as a man. “In the human hunt,” historian Michael Fellman wrote, “these young men could prove their individual and collective manly nobility.” Indeed, the language of hunting assumed a necessary hierarchical structure, with the occupiers on top, following a less powerful foe, always fleeing for his life. In a war stripped of honor and control, it was crucial to assert one’s dominance, and the figurative nature of hunting for men supplied this necessary ingredient.40

The hunt for men testified to Union authorities’ concern that the Civil War in general, and the guerrilla conflict in particular, was spiraling dangerously out of control. Soldiers in service to the republic, they reasoned, did not adopt irregular, brutal tactics, but rather adhered to the moral standards of civilized society. The violent character of the occupation war, though, effectively quieted these idealistic assumptions. High-ranking civil and military leaders sought not only to curb the irregular war, but also to establish standards of conduct by which Union soldiers in occupied zones should act. General-in-Chief Henry W. Halleck, a military theorist and authority on the rules of war, turned to his friend Francis Lieber for advice. Lieber, a German-born political philosopher, historian, and expert on international military conduct, long taught at American universities throughout the antebellum period. An ardent supporter of the

40 Ibid.; Fellman, Inside War, 178. For additional references to “the hunt,” see H. Hilliard to C. B. Fisk, August 23, 1864, OR, vol. 41, pt. 2, p. 824; David M. Freeman to I. V. Pratt, May 27, 1865, OR, vol. 48, pt. 1, 293; and, E. Dane to Dear Wife, February 12, 1864, E. Dane Letters, 1862-1864, Mss. 1460, 1493, 2991, LLMVC, LSU.
Union, Lieber considered the guerrilla conflict to be a great offense to civilized warfare, defiling both perpetrators and victims.41

Lieber dedicated significant thought to the matter, supplying Halleck with a pamphlet entitled, “Guerrilla Parties Considered with Reference to the Laws and Usages of War.” Defining nearly a dozen forms of irregular combatants, Lieber concluded that the nature of guerrilla warfare presented the greatest threat to an effective military governance. Thousands of Union troops were assigned to guard large swaths of the Confederate South, battling the violent enemies who defied the Union occupation. Lieber considered all forms of guerrilla warfare, and the individuals who perpetrated it, to be illegitimate, which civilized nations should not utilize or acknowledge. His attempt to define combatants, contend that some “guerrillamen” should be captured and tried as war criminals, and offer moral modes of recourse, were grounded in a sense of false hope. Lieber understood that offering academic theories was one thing; putting them into practice was quite another. “Indeed, the importance of writing on this subject,” he acknowledged, “is much diminished by the fact that the soldier generally decides these cases for himself.”42

And herein lay the problem. The government could issue countless edicts, orders, and restrictions, all of which meant very little to the common Union soldier who sought only to protect his life and safety. Employing a shrewd element of common sense, and knowing precisely the kinds of soldiers who populated the Union’s armies of occupation, Lieber concluded that “no army, no society engaged in war, any more than a society at peace, can allow


unpunished assassination, robbery, and devastation without the deepest injury to itself and disastrous consequences which might change the very issue of the war.”

Lieber genuinely sought to outline the proper and civilized avenues of recourse for Union armies to exact upon guerrillas, yet he was checked by the reality of the situation. Nevertheless, his pamphlet evolved into a deeper reflection on the subject, culminating in General Orders No. 100, a codified system of conduct for armies in the field. Published in April 1863 and promptly adopted by the United States government, the code was the first official effort, either in Europe or America, to incorporate the nebulous “laws of war” into systematized legal theory. Hoping to define the Union’s war of occupation in positive, moral, and humanitarian terms, Lieber’s Code offered the proper ways, among other things, to conduct martial law, protect civilians’ rights and private property, and accommodate prisoners of war. Lieber was profoundly concerned, along with countless United States citizens, military commanders, and civil authorities, about the implications of wartime destruction, targeting of civilians, and seemingly wanton rampage perpetrated by Union armies. Undoubtedly inspired to introduce a level of moral consideration to the war, and especially the peculiar nature of occupation, Lieber believed that “[m]en who take up arms against one another in public war do not cease on this account to be moral beings, responsible to one another and to God.” The insistence on morality and restraint, it appeared, functioned at the heart of Lieber’s quest.


Lieber was equally committed, however, to justifying the Confederacy’s destruction. “The more vigorously wars are pursued,” he argued, “the better it is for humanity. Sharp wars are brief.” Although he devoted significant attention to the protection of rights and property, Lieber authorized wide-ranging latitude for Union armies as they swept across the South, employing “those measures which are indispensable for securing the ends of the war.” He merely wanted to curb what he considered unnecessary or unauthorized pillaging, destruction, or killing. But those, of course, were terms left to the soldiers and field commanders themselves to define. In fact, General Orders No. 100 suggested that protection of enemy civilians and property were exceptions to the rule. Above all, therefore, Lieber’s Code was hazy on its particular guidelines. On the one hand, armies of occupation were instructed to practice civilized restraint, while on the other, given substantial leeway to measure their destruction of hostile environments and people.⁴⁵

Although seemingly ambiguous, and at times contradictory, General Orders No. 100 functioned on a much deeper level. Lieber’s writings voiced the great discomfort expressed by many Americans who witnessed the seeming cultural degradation of the Union’s citizen-armies as they became increasingly mired in the long-term military governance of the Confederacy. The ethos of occupation initiated unprecedented challenges, few of which were anticipated by the wartime generation. The expansive guerrilla war prolonged by hostile southern civilians especially caused great alarm, coupled with the string of violent and destructive reprisals. Lieber’s Code was, in essence, an admission that the United States simply did not have a grounded experience in wars of occupation or a martial culture dedicated to regulating the behavior of white citizens. Indeed, republicanism taught that the very presence of standing armies, even in wartime, spawned depravity, violence, and the fragmenting of society. Wartime occupation, under the supervision of Union armies, was intended to restore peace, calm, and

⁴⁵ General Orders, No. 100, OR, ser. 3, vol. 3, p. 150; Grimsley, Hard Hand of War, 150.
loyalty to regions of the South, yet sometimes the exact opposite occurred. White southerners resisted and blue-clad troops pushed back until the situation exploded in violence and chaos.

General Orders No. 100, then, was the United States government’s attempt to codify and articulate a national position of wartime morality, an effort to maintain the ethical integrity of the republic’s soldiers. The Code suggested that the troops were to blame if they committed acts of destruction or violently engaged enemy combatants—the nation was exonerated. Those Union occupiers who defied the conditions of the Orders would be interpreted as men who failed to abide by the official ethical standards of the Union. Lieber’s efforts were genuine. He sincerely sought to return a degree of virtue and restraint to military institutions that presumably had become devoid of moral direction. He simultaneously acknowledged, however, that the character of American warfare had changed permanently. Seeing that long-term occupation was now a fixture within the nation’s military tradition, Lieber prescribed wide latitude for the Union army’s reprisals against the enemy. The United States must win this war, he concluded, or else all efforts to rededicate the nation to a system of moral wartime conduct would be irrelevant. Thus, Lieber’s Code was, perhaps, less an inflexible legal decree and more a commentary on maintaining the honorable standards of a republican army.46

Francis Lieber’s Code, an articulation of his concerns about the fate of wartime conduct and morality, did not function in isolation. It reflected a growing commentary among the occupiers themselves who expressed great distress about their transformation into institutions of violence and destruction. Few soldiers, upon their enlistment, considered that they would participate in an irregular war, coupled by a systematic devastation of the southern landscape. Indeed, with the exception of the Mexican-American conflict, long-term wars of occupation were

simply non-existent in nation’s military tradition. Union soldiers, like Lieber, were torn. They learned that in order to extinguish the guerrilla threat, they must adopt the guerrillas’ tactics. But these active decisions, like everything else in the occupation experience, held great contradictions and were fraught with irony. Lieber was, in essence, merely echoing the larger chorus of anxiety articulated by the occupiers, who believed that their conduct in occupied zones created significant and potentially harmful consequences for the American citizen-soldier ideal.

James W. Denver, a brigadier general of volunteers stationed near Corinth, Mississippi, described what happened to soldiers once they were relieved from the constraints of occupied garrisons and embarked on expeditions into the countryside. The troops “seem to be possessed with the idea that in order to carry on war men must throw aside civilization and become savages,” he wrote nearly a year before Lieber’s Code was published. “We have had some most heart-rending cases, and I do not see how men claiming to be enlightened and educated do such things.” Acknowledging that occupation soldiers had become devoid of republican restraint and virtue, Denver illustrated how his troops engaged civilians, destroyed private property, and commandeered livestock. Noticeably worried by these “lawless acts,” Denver believed that “it will not be long before the soldier will be sunk in the cowardly plunderer—for men loaded with plunder are always cowards.” As soldiers sought “to sweep the country as with the besom of destruction,” he warned, the more they would be detached from ways in which moral citizen-soldiers were expected to act.

Some Union soldiers echoed Denver’s apprehension, believing that their conduct, although sometimes necessary, was burdened with damaging implications. Guerrilla attacks

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outside of New Orleans, for example, pushed local occupation commanders to order the
destruction of nearby Donaldsonville, Louisiana. F. A. Roe, a naval lieutenant on the *U. S. S. Katahdin*, implored his commanding officers to halt what he considered the needless leveling of the town. “I am desirous of encountering enemies and of injuring them in every manly manner,” he acknowledged, “but I cannot further prostitute the dignity of my profession.” Roe believed that “[i]t is disgraceful and humiliating to me to be ordered on guard duty of soldiers employed in pillaging ladies’ dresses and petticoats, and I respectfully request that I may be relieved from such service.” Lucius Barber agreed, commenting on the destruction of the landscape in eastern Arkansas. “A wailing note of agony would creep along our heartstrings at the thought that God’s beautiful handiwork of nature was now witnessing a bloody and terrible strife on its very bosom,” he wrote sadly. Yet similar to countless other soldiers, Barber attempted to justify the conduct of his comrades. After guerrillas attacked a troop transport near Greenville, Arkansas, “[o]ur troops immediately landed and laid everything to waste on the shore. This mode of retaliation may look barbarous to some,” he admitted, “but it was the only way in which we could check these lawless villains in their murderous schemes.”

As the guerrilla war escalated, with seemingly no end in sight, wreaking havoc on the Confederate South as well as soldiers and enemy combatants, civil and military authorities struggled to understand the kind of war into which they had entered. Indeed, even Benjamin F. Butler, the rugged, blunt occupation commander at New Orleans, who rarely hesitated to enforce the will of the Union army, questioned the implications of the irregular conflict in 1862. “Is this civilized or savage warfare?” he asked his opponent in Louisiana, Richard Taylor. After several Union soldiers had been captured indiscriminately by partisan rebels, Butler posited that “[i]t

sounds precisely like the history of similar strategy by Toussant L’overture toward the French forces in San Domingo.” Butler suggested that “lawless violence” had no place in civilized warfare between two consenting nations. Yet the guerrilla presence inverted this assumption. Although greatly troubled by its inherent meaning, Butler implied that similar recourse supplied the only logical, necessary alternative to the guerrilla problem.49

In response to the nature of violence endured by, and perpetrated against the guerrillas, Union soldiers echoed Butler’s sentiments. Almost certainly referring to the nature of the “guerrilla hunt,” R. B. Marcy, the Inspector General at St. Louis, believed that “[t]hese bushwhackers undoubtedly deserve the most severe chastisement for the atrocities they have committed,” for which Union soldiers had long displayed their willingness to enact. Yet “it seems to me,” he stated, “that they should be speedily taken before a complement tribunal and given the opportunity to prove their innocence before being executed.” Marcy had witnessed enough violence and destruction during his tour of the contested border state, writing how the character of guerrilla warfare excused soldiers from questioning whether their enemies were guilty. The irregular conflict, he concluded, “enables evil-disposed soldiers to rob and murder loyal and inoffensive citizens under the plea that they were acting as bushwhackers.” Marcy painted this scenario as dangerously unsettling not only to local civilians but also to the occupiers themselves.50

Charles Henry Moulton, a private in the 6th Michigan Volunteers, built on Marcy’s contention. Soldiers in zones of occupation, Moulton believed, were profoundly altered by the exposure to the guerrilla war. Their violent responses functioned as the great agents in their

49 Benjamin F. Butler to Richard Taylor, September 10, 1862, Provost Marshal General Records, RG 393, Part 1, Department of the Gulf, #1756, Letters Sent, Box 2, NARA.

changed attitudes. Much like Marcy, Moulton undoubtedly referred to the character of the guerrilla hunt as a leading culprit in the Union soldier’s unfavorable intellectual condition. Referring to a recent expedition to capture guerrillas, Moulton wrote, “I am getting so I dont care for anything. let a man be in the army,” he warned, “and he is more like a Savage than a man.” As early as October 1862, Moulton implied, the irregular war had taken its toll on the occupying forces in Louisiana, where the Michiganders were stationed. “Our men is all sick and tired of the war,” he moaned, “and are discouraged.” The war seemed “as though it would never get done,” primarily because guerrillas appeared to be self-perpetuating, never fully eradicated. Thus, Union soldiers, Moulton concluded with troubled expression, became hardened and distant, adopting a callous regard for civilized conduct and human dignity.51

The implications were clear. Soldiers wrote in near unison about the fundamental changes that had befallen the Union’s armies of occupation. They agreed that although the men who populated these forces were still citizen-soldiers, their adherence to republican military conduct was forever changed. As R. B. Marcy suggested, little distinguished guerrilla from occupier. The ethos of occupation brought them both together, merging their identities as agents of violence. Northern observers were accordingly shocked, as indicated by the tenor of Francis Lieber’s writings on wartime morality and conduct. Above all, Robert Gould Shaw, the white officer of the famed 54th Massachusetts Infantry, perhaps best underscored the troubling dichotomy. He struggled to comprehend the implications of long-term occupation and irregular warfare on the citizen-soldier ideal, effectively voicing the American public’s concern.

Shaw pledged himself to civilized warfare, believing that belligerents on both sides must remain wedded to controlled, moral conduct. Guerrilla warfare, he believed, unleashed Union

51 Charles Henry Moulton to Dear Bro and Sister, October 31, 1862, Charles Henry Moulton Papers, 1835-1916, Michigan in the Civil War Collection, Bentley Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan.
soldiers to perform acts of peculiar violence against people, property, and the environment. “Besides my own distaste for this barbarous sort of warfare,” he acknowledged, the guerrilla conflict was fraught with disrepute and disgrace, sinking the citizen-soldier “into a plunderer or robber.” The abnormal culture of occupation, he observed, spawned an equally strange mode of warfare, which Shaw considered unprofessional and simplistic. He criticized his colleague in the Department of the South, James Montgomery, for adopting irregular tactics to combat the insurgent presence. “He is a guerrilla-man,” Shaw scoffed. “He is an Indian in his mode of warfare . . . I can’t say I admire it. It isn’t like a fair stand up such as our Potomac Army is accustomed to.” Distinguishing between the war in the Eastern theater as a former member of the Union’s principal field army, and the guerrilla war in South Carolina and Georgia, Shaw denounced Montgomery’s tactics. His willingness to burn and destroy “wherever he goes with great gusto, & looks as if he had quite a taste for hanging people & throat-cutting whenever a suitable subject offers.”

While disgusted not only by Montgomery’s tactics, Shaw also worried about the broader implications of his comrade’s conduct. Denigrating him a “bush-whacker,” Shaw believed that Montgomery reflected the larger body of soldiers who relished wanton destruction and unnecessary violence. Montgomery evidently had been converted by the abnormal environment of wartime occupation, claiming that Union soldiers were no longer bound by traditional modes of warfare. “[T]hat makes it none the less revolting to wreak our vengeance on the innocent and defenseless,” Shaw grumbled in June 1863 after the town of Darien, Georgia, was destroyed. The Massachusetts colonel believed that long-term occupation, and the guerrillas against whom Union troops battled, degraded the character of citizen-armies. Referring to it as a “dirty piece of

business,” Shaw noticed the stark differences between occupying the Department of the South and serving in the field with the Army of the Potomac. “For myself, I have gone through the war so far without dishonor,” he acknowledged, yet the very acts of committing war upon civilians, hanging guerrilla enemies, or skulking through the woods, Shaw believed, were all devoid of “pluck or courage.”

If, though, the army had fought honorably for possession of territory, such as it did in Virginia, he explained, “there might have been some reason for Montgomery’s acting as he did; but as the case stands, I can’t see any justification.” Outlining the spirit of the citizen-soldier ideal, Shaw suggested that “[i]f it were the order of our government to overrun the South with fire and sword, I might look at it in a different light.” But “[a]s the case stands, we are no better than ‘Semmes,’ who attacks and destroys defenceless vessels, and haven’t even the poor excuse of gaining anything by it.” He concluded, writing, “[a]fter going through the hard campaigning and hard fighting in Virginia, this makes me very much ashamed of myself.”

Robert Gould Shaw had seen both wars during his time in the service. On the one hand, he was exposed to the massive eastern armies that confronted one another on the formal field of battle, generally devoid of contact with civilians, focused on deciding the fate of the nation. He considered himself a citizen-soldier in this conflict, following orders and accepting the possibility of an honorable death. Guided by a sense of moral integrity that accompanied his identity as a citizen-volunteer, Shaw subscribed to an awareness of control and discipline. As a participant in the occupation war, though, Shaw witnessed what he perceived to be the devolution of the citizen-soldier’s revered character. The ethos of war in the occupied Confederacy, he learned, was far different from that in the Eastern theater. Although disgusted with Montgomery’s contention that “we are outlawed, and therefore not bound by the rules of

53 Ibid., 343-44.
regular warfare,” Shaw could not deny its inherent truth. The irregular war, populated by vicious guerrillas, vengeful soldiers, and suspicious civilians, enveloped all participants into its violent fold, changing everyone in the process.54

The American Civil War and even its aftermath were nowhere near as destructive as other nineteenth-century conflicts in, for example, Napoleonic Europe or dynastic China. The tolls of human death and environmental annihilation, in many cases, fell far short of these international episodes. However, Robert Gould Shaw highlighted a curious feature when he attempted to interpret the problematic nature of American wars of occupation. Underscoring the impact of individual experience, Shaw implied that focusing on numbers of dead soldiers or civilians missed a startling reality about the changing character of American warfare. Indeed, he witnessed far more deaths on the fields at Antietam than he did in the destruction of the town of Darien, Georgia. Yet, as indicated by his adverse reaction to the latter, Shaw emphasized the fast-evolving integrity of the citizen-soldier ideal in occupied zones.55

Americans believed that they lived in an exceptional nation in which free citizens, by virtue of their voluntariness, were obligated to protect and defend the very republic that safeguarded their liberty. But when these citizen-soldiers were perceived to discard the obligations of morality and honor, engaging in modes of warfare divorced from national tradition, and reflective of guerrilla tactics, the ethic of republican citizenship was threatened. This idea revealed the fundamental tension underlying the entire irregular war. Although Union occupiers actually behaved with considerable restraint, especially when compared against other nineteenth-century civil conflicts, they presumed that their participation in counterinsurgency

54 Ibid., 343.

55 For a comparative context of these events, see Hsieh, “Total War and the American Civil War Reconsidered,” 393-408.
warfare had pushed them into an inescapable arena of perceived immorality. Thus they considered, as Robert Shaw explained, that the implications of their actions indicated that the American citizen-soldiering tradition had forever changed.

Part of the problem stemmed from the character of their enemy: white southerners. American soldiers in Mexico, for instance, did not experience the crisis of conscience endured by Union occupiers during the Civil War. Yankee troops hated their Confederate and irregular foes, believing that the South had to be remade into a northern image. Yet United States armies did not set the entire region ablaze nor imprison and murder millions of civilians. But for each home that was burned and each community that was destroyed, through calculated responses to insurgent warfare, Union occupiers were shaken at the implications of such realities. Although “directed severity” served a defined strategic purpose, Union soldiers feared the consequences of what they considered violent conduct against white American citizens.

And herein lay the ironic tragedy of military occupation during the American Civil War. Union citizen-soldiers who participated in the irregular conflict underwent a striking alteration in their intellectual conceptions of war, their definitions of an enemy, and understandings of traditional, civilized conduct. The occupiers learned that war was not a restricted event in which only armies battled for the fate of nations. Instead, occupation necessitated making war on civilians, destroying private homes, and wrecking the landscape. In addition, these troubling realities forced Union occupiers to recognize that their particular war was directed against white civilians, private property, and American environs—ingredients central to the concept of national exceptionalism. Even though the experience of occupation and the waging of irregular warfare were purposely restrained, contemporaries could not escape the horrifying reality that white
citizen-soldiers conducted war against white citizens, all of whom claimed a common national heritage. The long-term implications of this troubling fact were yet to be seen.\textsuperscript{56}

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE PROBLEM OF POSTWAR “OCCUPATION”:
REPUBLICAN CULTURE, RACE, AND THE IRONIES OF RECONSTRUCTION

In the spring of 1865, when the surrender papers were signed at Appomattox and Durham Station, and Confederate troops began their long walks home, triumphant Union armies remained in the defeated South. The fighting may have ceased, but peace still needed to be secured. Reconstruction, the tumultuous and confusing era following the American Civil War, was a period fraught with unexpected challenges and long-term consequences. Efforts to reconstruct and rebuild the South unleashed a host of complications, revealing the postwar trials experienced by the United States army. Indeed, Reconstruction functioned as America’s first endeavor to transform a conquered society through a long-term military occupation. The era thus set many precedents and offered crucial lessons for future American occupations in the Philippines, Japan, Germany, and most recently, the Middle East.¹

Northern attempts to reshape the former Confederacy were met with unexpected, and oftentimes violent and chaotic, resistance. Former Confederates unleashed a wave of terror, waging a peacetime war against Republican state governments, freed people, and southern Unionists. Indeed, the postwar South developed a defiant character, in spite of, yet also due to, the humiliation of defeat and the destruction of its racial hierarchy. Such radical challenges spawned a cohesive identity for white southerners, based on contempt and animosity for the Union victors, both white and black.

Reconstruction, as evident in the South’s experience, nurtured a committed dedication to the old order, idealized through romanticism and imagery. Further, concepts like victory, defeat,

and freedom held multiple, contested meanings for all participants involved in postwar era. By 1877, when Reconstruction in the South officially ended, universally accepted definitions of these terms still did not exist. For white southerners in 1865, defeat meant something far different than it would twelve years later. Black Americans, who strove to secure the promises of citizenship and equality after the Civil War, were gradually placed, a decade later, into a secondary, segregated class. And white northerners, who harbored idealistic visions of the South’s progressive transformation at war’s end, became increasingly disillusioned by their victory in the face of the former Confederates’ stubborn resistance to change.

The Civil War answered many of the unsettling questions that had plagued the United States since its birth: secession was deemed illegitimate; slavery, the root cause of the great conflict, was unequivocally eradicated; and the Union was preserved, underscoring the supremacy of the federal government over the states. Why then, did the postwar era devolve into a disordered, violent mess, once again pitting white against black and North versus South? The war’s immediate aftermath raised a new set of troubling scenarios for peacetime reunion. The Union had been maintained, but how would the former Confederate states, disorganized and unstable in the flames of defeat, be readmitted and realigned in the nation? Slavery had been destroyed, and emancipation secured by military victory and the Thirteenth Amendment, but what was the meaning of postwar black freedom? What would be the fate of four million freed people as they sought equality and opportunity in the postwar South?

These were the central questions confronted by all segments of the American public immediately following the surrenders at Appomattox and Durham Station. Thus, the United States in 1865 entered into peacetime with a burdening paradox. “The reconstructor must transform society in its own image without appearing selfish or self-righteous,” writes prominent

2 Ibid.
historian Edward L. Ayers. “An effort at reconstruction,” he concluded, “must be implemented not only with determination and might, but also with humility and self-knowledge.” This was a delicate tightrope on which the North had to balance.3

At the root of this challenge stood the United States army, presumably equipped to enact a post-bellum military governance of the conquered Confederacy but also seen by white southerners as a constant and bitter reminder of their defeat. The final act in the Union’s war of occupation was now underway, its actors clothed in the Union blue and focused on remaking the postwar South. Yet peacetime military occupation proved exceedingly difficult, complicated by ironies and contradictions. The central paradox in 1865 was the army itself, stationed indefinitely in the South and seen as the only institution capable of guiding the former Confederate states peacefully back into the Union. Indeed, throughout much of Reconstruction, the military involved itself in matters of law, the economy, labor, and education, while also monitoring elections, maintaining peace, and assisting civil authorities to establish balance and stability in the war-torn South. These were crucial but also unique obligations for an institution that had once been relegated to the margins of antebellum American society, expected primarily to secure the far-away frontier for future settlement. Now, the army was called to implement and direct Reconstruction policy, establish southern loyalty, and protect the rights of freed-people and Unionists.4

A problem, however, rooted in long-held cultural ideals, emerged almost immediately, challenging the army’s new peacetime role. Many Americans, North and South, Republican and Democrat, harbored deep apprehension that any part of the nation should be regulated in times of


peace directly by the army, which would assume unprecedented responsibilities in the realm of military governance. The nation, by virtue of its republican heritage that reviled the idea of a standing army, was not prepared for this moment. Americans in 1865, grounded in the republican tradition, greatly feared the implications of a standing army that involved itself in civil affairs. Yes, the army had enacted a nine-month occupation of Mexico in 1847-48 following the Mexican-American War, but that occurred on foreign soil. The army had also occupied much of the Confederacy between 1861 and 1865, yet this occupation, at least, occurred during wartime. By the summer of 1865, many in the United States became troubled with the realization that martial law, occupation, and temporary military governments very well might be necessary, but also dangerous, tools for rebuilding the Union. And herein lay the central irony of Reconstruction: the very principles for which the United States went to war in 1861—preservation of the Union’s republican ideals—were the very values that helped undermine the project of military occupation in the postwar world.5

With great trepidation, the United States chose to use the army during Reconstruction as the central vehicle by which to enact the will of the federal government and ensure peace. Soldiers routinely implemented presidential and congressional policy. Yet ironically, the military was used sparingly, consistently demobilized, and spread very thinly across the southern landscape. After the massive mustering out of volunteers in the six months following

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Appomattox, 87,550 soldiers remained in the South by January 1866. This number trended downward over the next few years, so that by October 1869, 11,237 troops “occupied” the South, and seven years later in 1876, only 6,011 remained in the former Confederacy. Was this, then, a true military occupation? If anything, the army played, at most, a supervisory and regulatory role. Thus it appeared that the military decreased its impact congruent to the white South’s increased defiance of Republican influence. Even though Congress granted the army significant power and leeway, its authority in the South slowly dissipated as the years dragged on, and the nation watched with disgust as the former Confederacy was, in part, reborn through violence and intimidation.

The critical moment for genuine change in the South unfolded in the days, weeks, and months following Appomattox, while white southerners were at their weakest, northerners and military authorities strong and defiant in victory, and African Americans ready and determined to embark on lives of unfettered freedom. The Union possessed the moral authority during the spring of 1865, and might have been able to dictate precisely the course of southern reconstruction. The moment was there, with the army already established in strategic positions spread across the region. But, as Ayers wrote, “the clock is always ticking.” And the clock, in this case, was moving fast, spurred quickly onward and challenged by citizen-soldiers’ definitions of Union victory, contemporary judgments regarding the postwar role of black troops, and, ultimately, a republican suspicion about the proper role of the military in peacetime civil affairs. Although the United States army remained an integral component of the Reconstruction years, its influence was severely hampered by Americans’ commitment to republican ideals. In the process, the garrison ethos, which had been felt so strongly during the wartime occupations,

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did not disappear in 1865. Instead, it underwent a fundamental transformation, exacerbated by the struggle to define the meaning of postwar occupation.\footnote{For an interpretation of the military as a moment of opportunity during the postwar years, see William Blair, “The Use of Military Force to Protect the Gains of Reconstruction,” \textit{Civil War History} 51 (December 2005): 388-402.}

The Union’s citizen-soldiers were the first group to define what they perceived to be the military’s postwar role, articulating a marked opposition to peacetime occupation. Their responses, coupled by a swift and profound demobilization of the volunteer army, revealed how the American public in 1865 chose to consolidate their wartime victory. The soldiers’ opinions reflected an acute understanding of the cultural contracts they had made with the nation, which stood largely in opposition to a sustained peacetime occupation. They had volunteered and fought to preserve the Union, which in turn guaranteed and protected their rights as free men. The surrenders at Appomattox and Durham Station were highly symbolic to millions of northern volunteers, signifying the moment at which their military service had come to an end. Any consideration of postwar work was simply out of the question, considered by many to be a violation of the citizen-soldier ideal. Postwar occupation, which they believed could last indefinitely, was a job for civil authorities and perhaps the regular professional army, not citizen-volunteers who yearned for home and a return to private life. These men did not think of themselves as professional soldiers, nor did they strive to be. They took great pride in their voluntarism, which embodied the republican ethic of selfless service during times of national crisis. Strikingly few Americans, whether in the military, politics, or otherwise, expected the volunteers to remain wedded to any form of long-term service. Ultimately they believed that they had accomplished everything for which they volunteered: the nation was secure and slavery was dead.\footnote{For an interpretation of the military as a moment of opportunity during the postwar years, see William Blair, “The Use of Military Force to Protect the Gains of Reconstruction,” \textit{Civil War History} 51 (December 2005): 388-402.}
The stunningly quick demobilization of United States forces during the spring and summer of 1865, combined with declarations from volunteers about the end of their service, underscored the initial belief held by many contemporaries that any form of postwar occupation should be conducted by a small, professional military force. In May 1865, the Union army numbered slightly more than one million volunteers; by November, 801,000 men had been mustered out. The vast majority of the remaining citizen-soldiers were discharged over the next year, leaving only 11,043 volunteers in the service. Those who remained in the defeated South between 1865 and 1866 voiced a consensual view of their relationship to the nation, army, and society, defining the citizen-soldiers’ perspective on peacetime military occupation. “Today we truly live in the Land of the free and our home shall be among the Brave,” Edward Rolfe confirmed from Montgomery, Alabama, on July 4, 1865, concluding, “the Enemy of Human Liberty and a Nations Glory is conquered.” Rolfe, and many other soldiers who expressed similar views, believed that preservation of the Union signified an end to the sectional divide caused by slavery, the elimination of the southern slaveholding elite, and perpetuation of republican government. White southerners, by virtue of defeat, would be forced to accept the terms of the war, resuming life as part of the United States. For such soldiers, long-term occupation did not seem either necessary or desirable.

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9 Gallagher, Union War, 125; Sefton, United States Army and Reconstruction, 261-62; Ulysses S. Grant to Quincy A. Gilmore, June 19, 1865, Letters Received, 1862-1867, Record Group 393, Part 1, Department of the South, #4109, Box 9, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D. C. (hereafter cited as NARA); Ulysses S. Grant to William H. Seward, November 10, 1865, in John Y. Simon, et al., eds., The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant, Volume 15: May 1-December 31, 1865 (32 vols.; Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1967), 15:413 (hereafter cited as PUSG).
Once it became clear, though, that the army would be required to maintain temporary stability in the war-shattered South, volunteers trained their attention on what they considered superfluous assignments. The United States army had proved superior to Confederate arms, but that did not mean, the soldiers reasoned, that rebuilding the South was their responsibility; quite the opposite, in fact. Connecticut soldier J. Henry Blakeman and his comrades were tasked with repairing the railroads near Jacksonville, Florida, which he considered “rather an insult to oblige [us] to perform such labor now [that our] time of service has expired.” Blakeman admitted that the troops refused to exert too much energy on this project, especially in light of the past three years of campaigning and fighting. Service in the defeated South, he lamented, was an “unnecessary detention.” Other soldiers echoed Blakeman’s sentiments, expressing what they considered unjust treatment. “I tell you it is not much like the soldiering that we had last year,” Henry Gay, of the 15th Maine Volunteers, wrote in August 1865 from Georgetown, South Carolina. Struggling to steer labor contract negotiations between formerly enslaved people and white plantation owners, Gay sighed, “I do not like to be a soldier in the peaceable time. thare is not any fun in it.”

Although the war had ended, citizen-soldiers’ views of peacetime occupation generally mirrored those voiced by those assigned to garrison duty during the conflict. The striking continuity of expression from occupiers during both war and peace revealed the profound level at which American volunteers detested the idea of the military’s involvement in governance, maintenance of societal stability, and regulation of civilian affairs. Indeed, their postwar duties, many of which resembled occupation assignments during the war, bred resentment and even fear about the implications of their continued service. Nevertheless, soldiers performed a variety of

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11 J. Henry Blakeman to My own Loved Mina, June 23, 1865, J. Henry Blakeman Letters; and Henry Gay to Dear Father and Mother, August 11, 1865, Henry Gay Letters, both in Civil War Miscellaneous Collection, United States Army Military History Institute, Carlisle Barracks, Carlisle, Pennsylvania (hereafter cited CWMC, USAMHI).
duties that helped guide the chaos of Confederate defeat into a semblance of order. They assisted in issuing loyalty oaths, mediated property disputes, aided in the construction of civil government, and maintained the peace by policing towns and guarding roads. And they ensured that freed-people’s rights were protected in the aftermath of slavery’s destruction. Despite their numerous duties, the soldiers complained of sheer boredom, often lamenting the inactive days spent either lounging in garrisons or executing seemingly endless drill exercises.12

While they performed the duties required of them, many soldiers became profoundly disillusioned by their continued presence in the South. Breakdowns in discipline routinely occurred and were met with stiff, and sometimes violent, resistance from officers who desperately sought to maintain control over their men. The common soldiers thus felt trapped, confined to a region about which they cared very little. Much like the experience of wartime garrison service, citizen-soldiers in 1865 struggled to understand why commanders so keenly adopted oppressive means to regulate behavior. The strictures of military life in a peacetime world were sometimes too much for troops to bear. “I long for a time when I can say that I am a free man and not bound down by military law,” Iowa soldier Charles O. Musser groaned in June 1865. Stationed at Brazos Santiago, Texas, he described how his regiment often mutinied against their officers, whom they blamed for their unfortunate position. Musser wrote on behalf of many soldiers who believed that corrupt officers persuaded high military officials to keep their regiments in the South, hoping to make money and secure prominent postwar positions of authority. “It is an outrage and a wrong that if we are men, we will resent it,” he declared. “we are not brutes to be bought and sold by a set of Ambitious villains—undermining, Scheming

officers.” The only solution to avoid this exploitation, Musser believed, was a prompt discharge from the army: “we offered our services to our country to help put down the rebellion,” he concluded. “that object has been accomplished, and our time is out, and we are no longer needed.” When soldiers like Charles Musser criticized their officers for using their military influence to acquire money and power, they echoed long-held American fears of a standing army that bred corruption.13

The problem of discipline and behavior in the occupied South, in addition to tense relations with officers, inspired great trepidation among the Union’s remaining citizen-soldiers. Occupied garrisons, just as they were interpreted during the war, were seen as far-removed from the central areas of conflict, isolated from any kind of martial obligation, and filled with temptations that detached republican soldiers from their moral compass; these dynamics became even more pronounced in the relative quiet of peacetime.

Officers, though, were not the only ones enveloped in the perceived unethical folds of peacetime occupation. The common soldiers, with little else to do, and distracted by their peculiar environment, found themselves drawn to nearby temptations. Daniel W. Sawtelle, of the 8th Maine Volunteers, revealed his fears while in Richmond, Virginia, in April 1865. Recounting his previous experiences in occupied garrisons during the war, Sawtelle remarked, “[e]very town was full of dens and every influence was brought to bear on the unwary. It was only a firm determination to stick to the right that carried a few through unscathed.” Yet, although the war was complete and victory secured, Sawtelle still noticed that soldiers, who in his mind had

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retained their civilian identities, succumbed to the moral pressures of the lingering garrison ethos. “It was heart-breaking to see boys that had been straight nice,” he remarked, “give way and take the downward road at last.”14

Enclosed within the constrained space of occupied Richmond, Sawtelle blamed the dissipation he saw on the continued presence of the volunteer army during peacetime. He was not naïve, though, understanding that the military provided much-needed stability in the former Confederate capitol. But the rampant corruption “of the army and all its demoralizing influences” made Sawtelle “anxious to get away from it all.” He expressed concern not only for his own well-being, but also for his friends and comrades with whom he had served for so long. Fearing that their unethical practices would continue once they left the army, Sawtelle remarked sadly, “[t]here was so much drunkenness and debauchery. Young boys were influenced in one way or another to drink and gamble until they pawned their clothing allowance and where the officers allowed drew more than their allowance.” Sawtelle sensed that his job was complete, his obligation to the nation fulfilled, and his mission to preserve the Union assured. Thus, in order to ensure that the moral integrity of the republic’s soldiers was maintained, the government ought to send the troops home as quickly as possible. Continued exposure to the disheartening environment of occupation left Sawtelle weary. “I was so tired of it all,” he remarked, “I wanted to go home where I should not have to come into contact with it.”15

Soldiers who were still spread across occupied South echoed Sawtelle’s concerns. The moral and cultural implications of occupation duty weighed heavily on many men’s minds. Although they appeared to busy themselves with numerous duties, the bulk of postwar service was spent doing, quite literally, nothing. Boredom and monotony spread across occupied

15 Ibid., 194.
garrisons as regiments waited days, weeks, and even months to be discharged. Idleness, according to soldiers like Daniel Sawtelle, contributed to men’s derelict behavior. Indeed, laziness was viewed by many as a great source of corruption, causing men to lose their efficiency, strength of character, and focus. The seemingly age-old question was once again asked: would these soldiers incorporate such practices into their lives as private citizens? Some officers, concerned that their men might transform into slothful, indolent creatures, led continuous drill exercises, hoping to retain a semblance of physical and mental fitness. The Thirteenth Corps, stationed at Mobile, Alabama, was ordered to drill an hour and a half per day, “accurate and according to the letter of the tactics, especially in regard to time and cadence.” Emphasizing “industry and attention,” the exercises would also occasion a “moral effect of superior soldiership in our troops in this part of the country.” The ultimate purpose, though, was not to punish the soldiers but rather to ensure that they would return to civilian life fit and focused: “It is also worth painstaking for each regiment to appear thorough when it returns home.”

Although they deeply cherished the formal cessation of hostilities and no longer faced the prospect of battle, pervasive laziness reflected a common thread of concern among the postwar occupiers, highlighting their desire to go home. “Seeing the prospect of quiet before me some might think I would not be anxious to leave the army,” Courtland G. Stanton, of the 21st Connecticut, explained from Manchester, Virginia, “but I was never so anxious to be home.” Indeed, “[t]he Army is more tedious when it is quiet,” he confirmed. Danford D. Cole, a soldier in the 12th Michigan, agreed. “The life of a soldier in time of peace is a lazy life,” he remarked in

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October 1865 from Camden, Arkansas. Even the *New York Times*, one of the cultural pulses of the northern public, expressed concern about the long-term occupation of the South by volunteers. Criticizing officers in particular for succumbing to a life of “inelegant ease” in their postwar garrisons, the *Times* posited that exposure to slaveholding practices in the South had perpetuated a large degree of laziness in the republic’s defenders. The time was at hand, it concluded, for the North’s citizen-soldiers to return home, removing themselves from the rampant, debasing influences of the defeated Confederacy.17

But they could not yet return home; soldiers were obligated to remain in the conquered Confederacy until order and stability had been established. When duty called, wresting them from their dull lives, soldiers embarked on a series of missions to assist in the reestablishment of civil authority, guiding white southerners back into the Union as loyal citizens. Some soldiers came to view themselves as agents of change, regulating millions of people who, during the previous four years, waged a war of rebellion against the United States. Some soldiers embraced this moment, seeing an opportunity to reconstruct the Union now that they had preserved it. In their minds, United States armies had protected the right of self-government and destroyed slavery; it was now incumbent on the soldiers to assist southerners with accepting the realities of a changed world. H. Matson, of the 3rd Minnesota Volunteers, remained in Arkansas “to guide, help, and protect [former Confederates] . . . in all the rights of citizen-ship.” Matson relished the opportunity to restore law and order, “get[ting] the people started anew in the peaceful avocations of life.” He delineated a careful point, though. White southerners had proven, by virtue of secession, that they were not fit for all of the trappings of republican citizenship.

17 Courtland G. Stanton to Wife, April 12 and 26, 1865, Courtland G. Stanton Letters, items DL0011.110, 114, JLNC; Danford D. Cole to Wife, October 27, 1865, Danford D. Cole Letters, 1865-1866, Special Collections, David W. Mullins Library, University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, Arkansas (hereafter cited as UA); *New York Times*, June 26, 1865.
Matson believed that Union soldiers, protectors of the integrity and perpetuation of republican institutions, were the most qualified to reintroduce southerners into the American tradition. “It was in this work that our soldiers,” he remarked, “showed without exception, that trait of character which entitles them to the name of exemplary citizens as well as exemplary soldiers.” Since Union volunteers were also citizens, Matson suggested, they possessed a cultural obligation to see that other citizens enjoyed a smooth transition back into the Union.\textsuperscript{18}

Matson’s hopeful, optimistic position on the role of United States volunteers during postwar Reconstruction was decidedly in the minority. Testimony from numerous other soldiers indicated that they resented their continued martial responsibilities, believing that they had duly fulfilled their obligations to the nation. But their standpoint did not emanate only out of mere annoyance at remaining in the army. They directed their complaints at what they considered to be dangerous implications of peacetime military service. Imbued in the antebellum republican tradition and steeped in the meaning of American citizenship, occupying soldiers interpreted Union victory as the triumph of self-government. Disagreeing profoundly with Matson’s reading of the postwar scene, these soldiers believed that because self-government had been preserved, white southerners were expected to return to the American tradition; it was not the army’s responsibility to ensure their conformity. Indeed, such assurance had been occasioned, they believed, by a triumph of arms between 1861 and 1865. The South was to return to the nation as a self-governing body, dedicated to the perpetuation of American ideals.

Mathew Woodruff, a soldier in the 21\textsuperscript{st} Missouri Volunteers, embodied this system of beliefs. Enlisting in 1861 and fighting throughout the Western theater, he served in the postwar occupation forces at Mobile, Alabama. A self-described pragmatist, Woodruff believed that the

war had settled all of the nation’s divisive issues; thus he was opposed to an indefinite occupation of the postwar South. By November 1865 Woodruff had grown weary of his continued service on the Gulf Coast. One particular event summoned his attention, eliciting profound worries about the implications of peacetime occupation. Commenting on the recent congressional elections, Woodruff hoped for “Loyal candidates” to represent a changed South. Indeed, he hated secession and celebrated the defeat of the Confederacy, yet he articulated a profound point about the elections. “There was an Order Issued to Keep all Soldiers in camp during the day,” he commented, “which I think was verry beneficial from the fact that Politicians of either side can not say, that the Election in Mobile was controlled by Yankee Bayonets.”

Woodruff implied that self-government, which had been secured on the field of battle, could not be guided artificially by the military. The very essence of republicanism, in his view, was tied directly to the will of the people, not the muzzle of a rifle. “I am verry anxious indeed to hear the Returns of the Election,” he explained, “thinking it will have some bearing in regard to the Mustering out of the troops in this Dept.” A free, fair, and open election, Woodruff suggested, would legitimize the war and honor the deaths of countless northern men who strove to secure the promise of self-government. Conversely, a sustained military occupation would betray the spirit of Union victory.19

Brevet Major General, Alvin C. Voris, of the 67th Ohio Volunteers, echoed Woodruff’s position, writing from Virginia in the weeks and months following the Confederate surrender. Voris, a devoted Republican, opponent of slavery, and profound adherent to the promise of Union, dedicated significant thought to the current state of the postwar South and its changed racial structure. Like Mathew Woodruff and countless other United States soldiers, Voris

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believed that the war had resolved the central problems that occasioned secession and war. But he perceived a series of unsettled issues that lingered in the immediate aftermath of hostilities. Charged with commanding a sizable sub-district consisting of counties that stretched from Albemarle eastward to Henrico, including Richmond, the former capitol of the Confederacy, Voris relished the opportunity to preserve order and regulate oaths of loyalty. But he noticed that “[f]ormer slave owners feel sore at the loss of their slaves, money, horses, [and] crops.” Voris thus found himself in the midst of emerging negotiations between former master and slave in which disputes took place concerning labor and wages. Seeking to use his influence to protect the rights of recently freed African Americans, Voris “hope[d] to be able to do some good . . . to a poor class of heretofore abused people. I had rather have the satisfaction of having done them permanent & substantial good than have the honor of fighting a battle.” Voris sensed a moment of opportunity presented by postwar occupation. The Union military possessed the manpower, resources, and ability to assist freed-people in the transition to free labor, a concept Voris cherished.20

Although Voris genuinely believed that “I am doing good here,” acting as “a sort of middle man between the former poor, helpless slave and his owner,” he began to voice the same concerns highlighted by Mathew Woodruff in Mobile, Alabama. By late June 1865, slightly more than a month after the war ended, Voris became dejected, sensing white planters’ dedication to resurrecting the antebellum racial and labor order. This troubling situation, he wrote, “occasions much perplexity,” primarily because “I must confess to verry vague ideas as to what ought to be done.” As he assessed the mounting tension and unbalanced relationships between white master and black laborer, Voris remarked, “efforts made by military authorities to

regulate the domestic relations and internal affairs of a community must be looked on as being an assumption and should not be resorted to only as a matter of necessity.” Voris attached significant weight to the ideal of Union—a dedication to personal liberty and self-government—that had been secured by armies of citizen-soldiers like himself. Thus, he struggled to divorce the republican tenets of Union from the nation’s newly constructed racial dynamics. On the one hand, genuine self-government must prevail, Voris believed, in the absence of a standing army dictating, or even passively guiding, local, civil affairs. But on the other hand, Voris instinctively knew that freed-people’s rights were meaningless without dedicated, focused military support, which could guarantee fundamental change.  

Voris’s intellectual conflict was rooted in the ways in which republican citizen-soldiers conceptualized the army’s, or even the federal government’s role in peacetime. His uncertainty pitted the destinies of freed-people against the fate of republican tradition, thus underscoring one of the central ironies of the immediate postwar period. One or the other scenarios would have to be profoundly, and perhaps irrevocably, altered. “The General Government never has regulated the details of social life & obligation,” he wrote, concerned that his position as a force of military occupation would mandate such obligations. Voris entreated local planters to devise a system of labor, contracts, and wages that worked to the mutual benefit of both parties, black and white, in hopes that the military would not be forced to intervene. Yet he came to learn that the “landholders will not develop their agricultural resources unless they can secure labor on advantageous terms,” while “[t]he freed man will not unless he can be satisfied that he is securing an equivalent for his labor.” Undoubtedly startled by this problematic scenario, Voris judged the potential outcome, which was almost certainly never envisioned as a component of Union victory. In the event the army and government “assumes to make a tariff of prices for

\[21\] Alvin C. Voris letter, May 30, 1865, Ibid., 264.
labor,” he maintained, “the objection will be fairly made that [they are] interfering arbitrarily with the laws of trade and the domestic relations of the citizens of the state.” This was a deeply troubling paradigm for citizen-soldiers to embrace. Even if the military was not actively formulating laws, it would still be enforcing the government’s will on presumably loyal citizens of the nation, violating a cherished tenet of republican culture.22

Whereas many Union troops did not share Voris’s concerns about African Americans, soldiers did reflect his anxieties about the symbolism of a standing army of military occupation. Indeed, Voris’s worries underscored a belief that the Civil War, by virtue of the manner in which it was waged, in some cases altered the relationship of citizens to the government. This dynamic occurred in two ways. On the one hand, Voris thought that white southerners were being regulated arbitrarily during peacetime by an imposing army. On the other hand, he believed that his relationship to the government was being altered because of the responsibilities mandated by military occupation. To complicate matters, Voris’s disquietude underscored the antebellum culture in which he was reared, indicating his commitment to republican ideals. But he also approached the present situation honestly, recognizing that fundamental change very well might not come to the postwar South unless a standing army of occupation enforced the meaning and promise of the war. The ironies and complications of Reconstruction were not lost on Union soldiers. In fact, they were well articulated by the men occupying the former Confederacy.23

The problem of peacetime occupation, as Voris suggested, rested in the fact that the army attempted to stabilize an unstable situation. Some efforts proved successful, but overall, the ethos of the postwar landscape revealed undiluted tension, distrust, and a power struggle between white southerners who desired a return to the old order against black southerners who desired

22 Alvin C. Vorhis letter, June 18, 1865, Ibid., 264.

23 See Chapters three and six for a discussion of soldiers’ wartime fears about the symbolism of standing armies.
permanent change. And in the middle stood the army, playing the role of mediator and counselor, trying not to get too close, but also staying close enough to ensure order. This confusing dynamic further contributed to the ways in which soldiers, during and after the war, believed that a standing army might complicate societal matters, inadvertently contributing to the instability of the war-torn South.

These sentiments, though, were not reserved only for citizen-soldiers in the army. The northern public also contended that military occupation in the republican tradition was a complicated matter. As early as 1862 Henry Adams, while working in London, presaged the problems of long-term occupation, especially in the postwar period. “Firmly convinced as I am that there can be no peace on our continent so long as the Southern people exist,” he wrote to Charles Francis Adams, Jr., “I don’t much care whether they are destroyed by emancipation, or . . . a vigorous system of guerrilla war.” Adams believed that absolute destruction of the southern economy, political system, and ideology must be occasioned for peace to be secured; the ingredients of secession must be ripped completely from the national tapestry. If not, he warned, the United States would be compelled to use military force during peacetime in its attempt to reshape the South.24

Adams, however, recognized a difficult, potentially unanswerable problem. How would the United States erase the ideology that inspired secession? “[W]e must not let them as an independent state get the monopoly of cotton again,” he advised, alluding to the southern staple crop as a key source of ideological separatism. If the South retained its antebellum identity, Adams determined, the nation as a whole was “sure to be in perpetual anarchy within,” which would “compel us to support a standing army no less large than if we conquer them and hold

them so, and with infinite means of wounding and scattering dissension among us.” The nation, in the process, very well might lose cherished aspects of its exceptionalist identity, moving closer to a European style of reconstruction, grounded in chaos and instability. Indeed, Adams believed that his time in England fostered an understanding of European systems. He concluded that permanent military establishments could dislodge the possibility of a successful reconstruction, rendering the United States, like Europe, in a perpetual condition of instability. But like Alvin C. Voris, Adams sought complete destruction of the old southern order. The conflict between republican tradition and fundamental reconstruction proved to be a significant problem for many Americans.\textsuperscript{25}

Citizen-soldiers spread across the postwar southern landscape confirmed Henry Adams’s predictions when they noticed that white southerners, whom they initially thought welcomed peace and reunion, began resisting United States authority in disturbing, violent ways. Occupying troops watched as former Confederate soldiers and southern civilians planted seeds of defiance, perpetuating postwar instability. The troops learned that Appomattox and Durham Station might not have been the heralds of peace that they suspected in April and May 1865. Reunion, they sensed, could be achieved through the force of arms; reconciliation, however, could not. North and South, therefore, remained at war during a time of peace.

Thus by the late summer and early fall, the occupiers sensed the resurgence of a particular southern ideology, born from the Confederate experience, that sought to dislocate the Yankee presence in the South. It was one thing to destroy the Confederate army on the field of battle, forcing a termination of hostilities in 1865. It was another matter to eliminate the ideologies caused by four years of war and defeat. Once again, the occupiers faced a frustrating question that possessed vexingly few answers. What was the proper military response to unruly

\textsuperscript{25} Ibid.
civilians who had, presumably, reaffirmed their “loyalty” to the nation and were once again citizens during peacetime? Indeed, the occupying troops witnessed the rise, or rather the continuation, of an irregular, guerrilla-style resistance that did not abide by proper rules of engagement. The occupiers had long wrestled with this problem during the war. Peace only complicated their predicament as they came to recognize that white southern attitudes and approaches to unconventional warfare remained just as strong in the post-Appomattox world.\textsuperscript{26}

Union soldiers were all too familiar with the type of war spawned by the presence of military occupation. The guerrilla conflict, which spread to all corners of the occupied Confederacy during the war, remained a fixture of the postwar landscape, its participants motivated by similar convictions. But white southerners were now inspired by the shame and humiliation of defeat, and viewed the blue-clad occupiers as a source of despotism. By clinging to established cultures of honor and violence, some former Confederates initiated a wave of destruction that lasted more than a decade, perpetuating chaos in an already unstable society. A pair of Union occupiers in Arkansas accordingly scrutinized this conflict. James Sykes, stationed in the eastern part of the state, wrote bluntly, “we are in a hostile country.” Danford D. Cole, of the 12\textsuperscript{th} Michigan Volunteers, confirmed from nearby Washington that “[t]here is lots of d—d old rebs here and some of them are pretty saucy.”\textsuperscript{27}

In Texas, where the largest concentration of Union occupying soldiers was stationed, John C. Gill, of the 114\textsuperscript{th} Ohio Volunteers, related a common incident experienced throughout.


\textsuperscript{27} James Sykes to Agnes [May 1865], James Sykes Letters, The Butler Center for Arkansas Studies, Little Rock, Arkansas; Danford D. Cole to Emma, August 3, 1865, Cole Letters, UA; Rable, \textit{But There Was No Peace}, 1-15.
the South. “[O]ccasionally we meet from rabid rebels,” he wrote from Houston in June 1865.

“Everyone carries a large bowie knife and revolver.” A soldier from an Iowa regiment was murdered by a local citizen “before we had been in the city fifteen minutes.” After his regiment was transferred one month later to nearby Millican, Gill revealed that organized gangs patrolled the outskirts of federal occupation, “threaten[ing] to kill every officer if they have to pick them off one by one.” He acknowledged that “[t]his seems very little like times of peace. . . . I hope we will soon be relieved from doing duty here.”

The violent setting in which Union occupiers served reflected a society without law and order. The army successfully regulated some areas of the South, but the mounting resistance functioned in concert with the rapid demobilization of volunteer forces. It is crucial to remember that 87,550 troops occupied the former Confederacy by January 1866—a number down from one million the previous April—30 percent of whom were stationed in Texas. Thus the soldiers, strictly in a numerical sense, struggled to prevent chaos, which manifested itself through riots, theft, murder, and tense race relations. Further, they were given few official guidelines on how to engage the restive civilians under their control.

Even General Orders No. 100, which attempted to codify and organize the manner in which conquering armies treated occupied civilians during the war, did not have much, if any bearing, during peacetime. Martial law existed throughout much of the postwar South but sometimes offered few protections against defiant white southerners. Finally, the Constitution was arrestingly silent on any issue pertaining to secession, civil war, and reconstruction. Thus, it is no wonder why armies of citizen-soldiers, who remained in the South for no more than a year after the war (and in most cases much shorter), voiced serious concerns about the implications of

their duties. Precedents and traditions did not exist for this moment of American military history; *they* were the ones who would set new patterns, causing them to think and write deeply about these issues.29

The one tradition that the occupiers knew well was the republican heritage that informed their identities as citizen-soldiers. Frustratingly for them, many troops found the duties assigned to them in the aftermath of the war beyond the bounds of their cultural contracts. A pair of responses testifies to this predicament, voiced by soldiers with very different postwar responsibilities. H. C. Forbes, a lieutenant colonel in the 7th Illinois Cavalry, stationed at Okolona, Mississippi, expressed great concern at the manner in which white citizens unfairly treated former slaves. “We are in the midst of a remote, populous, sensitive district,” he began, “without instructions to guide, or orders to administer.” Forbes received daily reports that revealed planters abusing their laborers, oftentimes enacting cruel and unjust practices. Black migrants, Forbes explained, then became demoralized, notwithstanding continuous efforts by the military to negotiate fair labor contracts. Nevertheless, he cited the ultimate problem: rise of the Black Codes, effectively reinstituting the old southern racial order.30

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30 Report of Lieut. Col. H. C. Forbes, in Edward Hatch to Brig. Gen. W. D. Whipple, June 22, 1865, *OR*, vol. 49, pt. 2, 1024-25. The Black Codes were laws passed in 1865 and 1866 by the southern states that restricted the rights and freedoms of African Americans. The laws prescribed written proof of employment, defined the terms of labor and servitude, enacted curfews, prevented vagrancy, and designated former slaveholders as “masters.” Northerners protested loudly to these measures, arguing that the codes represented a new form of slavery in the former Confederacy. (Foner, *Reconstruction*, 199-201; Carter, *When the War Was Over*, ch. 5-6).
Forbes was at a loss, searching for ways to solve this problem. “To announce their freedom is not to make them free,” he wrote dejectedly. “As Federal soldiers, we can neither recognize slavery nor its equivalent and are left helpless lookers on.” Yet, he suggested that perhaps the federal government and military could involve themselves in this situation, with courts enforcing the law and proper instructions on free labor bestowed to black people. Ultimately, “careful policing of the entire area of the slave States by mounted soldiery in support of the jurisdiction of the courts,” might assure the protection of labor and rights. And herein lay Forbes’s predicament. He instinctively knew that the military would have to play a substantial role in regulating and protecting civilian behavior, a proposition far removed from the American tradition. “I presume that so comprehensive a measure will not be taken until some great and fatal mischief has indicated its necessity,” he wrote. His concluding sentence revealed his thoughts on the proper role of the army, doubtlessly shaped by the confusing and depressing milieu of postwar occupation: “I would rather face an old-fashioned war-time skirmish line any time than the inevitable morning eruption of lean and hungry widows that besiege me at sun up and ply me until night with supplications that refuse to be silenced.” The American military tradition was slowly changing, and Forbes recognized that he stood directly at the center of its alteration.31

John William De Forest, a former captain in the 12th Connecticut Volunteers, built on Forbes’s assessment, outlining the problems faced by the military. At the beginning of 1866, De Forest, still an officer in the United States army, joined the Freedmen’s Bureau in Greenville, South Carolina, assisting formerly enslaved people enter the world of freedom. Shortly after his arrival, De Forest witnessed aggressive efforts made by local whites to curb black rights, oftentimes resorting to violence in hopes of resurrecting the antebellum political and social order.

31 Ibid.
Disgusted with the rampant chaos in his district, De Forest concluded that the war had changed little in the southern mind. In fact, the experience of defeat, he suggested, only exacerbated long-held racial beliefs, grounded in violence and control: whites “simply kill [free blacks] in the exercise of their ordinary pugnacity.” Violence thus served as the white South’s chosen means of defiance against the Thirteenth and proposed Fourteenth Amendments.32

De Forest immediately cited the army’s problem, despite his loathing of local whites and desires to buttress the equality of African Americans. “It was a dubious and critical matter to handle,” he explained. “On the one hand, I wanted to make sure that [freed-people] should not fall a victim to any burst of popular fury, and that the bushwhackers who had outraged [them] should be brought to condign punishment. On the other hand I so interpreted my orders as to believe that my first and great duty lay in raising the blacks and restoring the whites of my district to a confidence in civil law, thus fitting both as rapidly as possible to assume the duties of citizenship.” De Forest, comforted that this responsibility did not supersede the cultural assumptions underlying the proper role of the army during peacetime, gladly used his identity as a citizen-soldier to guide other citizens back in the Union’s fold. There was, however, a problem. “If the military power were to rule them forever,” he warned, “if it were to settle all their difficulties without demanding of them any exercise of judgment and self-control, how could they ever be, in any profound and lasting sense, ‘reconstructed?’”33

Citizen-soldiers thus summarized the ultimate problem that they faced during the first months of Reconstruction. These sentiments, though, actually formed a consensus throughout the North as the postwar years unfolded. The military was an integral part of Reconstruction until


33 Ibid., 4-5.
1877, yet the role played by the soldiers was viewed with suspicion and misgiving, first articulated by the troops themselves immediately upon entering the postwar world. The culture of republicanism, an idealistic faith in self-government, and a fear of the army playing a central role in peacetime affairs, helped limit the military to a passive, regulatory role. American misgivings regarding the dangers of a standing army were further confirmed when, by April 1866, the vast majority of volunteer regiments were mustered out of the service, leaving a small force of little more than 38,000 soldiers, many of whom comprised the regular army, to occupy the former Confederacy. Indeed, the federal government never entertained the idea that volunteers should be compelled to contribute to the long-term project of postwar occupation. They were citizens, not civil agents, wielding strong political leverage that they, by virtue of being free men, helped define.34

A sizeable group of volunteers, however, remained in the occupied South, whose presence would undoubtedly shape the long-term course of Reconstruction. The United States Colored Troops (USCT), regiments of African American soldiers raised during the middle of the war, primarily to garrison portions of the Confederacy, maintained a substantial presence in the postwar occupation army. These units, most of which had been mustered into service in 1863 and 1864, still had one or two years remaining on their military contracts. Although during the war black troops endured rampant discrimination, unequal pay, and deficient equipment, they came to relish the opportunity to occupy the Confederacy, upsetting the traditional balance of racial power in the South. Once the conflict ended, they initially demanded to be discharged, believing that volunteer military service had secured their right to citizenship. Free citizens, they argued, should not be compelled to remain in the peacetime army to regulate civil affairs. But as

the postwar scene evolved, and black troops continued to be exposed to the violence and discrimination rampant in the former lands of slavery, some realized that their positions as occupying soldiers could be used to further shatter outmoded racial assumptions, while also protecting their families from white insurgents.  

Black soldiers constituted an integral part of the army of occupation during the first two years of Reconstruction. However, their numbers, like those of the white regiments, dwindled quickly as the nation moved further away from the war. In June 1865, 122,179 USCT soldiers populated the South; a year later, only 14,656 black troops remained in the former Confederacy. Because they also comprised volunteer units, most soldiers were mustered out of the service when their time was up. Nevertheless, their blue-clad existence reflected, just as it did during the war, the marked racial changes occasioned by the conflict. Although countless black troops desired to leave the army and begin their lives in the post-emancipation era, some realized the overwhelming importance and symbolism of their presence as a force of occupation. They could positively shape the newly constructed racial landscape, “disseminating ideas about freepeople’s prospects, and . . . rais[e] their expectations.”

Most important, black soldiers sought to use their martial influence to stem the growing tide of violence and discrimination meted upon freed-people, who in turn desired the protection of a black occupation force. In this regard, very few black southerners cared about the republican implications of a standing army that influenced and directed the course of social, political, and civic affairs in the former Confederacy. From their perspective, the promise of emancipation hung in the balance, threatened by white intransigence and embodied in the Black Codes. Their definition of citizen-soldiering required a formidable, robust military occupation to protect the gains of freedom and citizenship. The assurance of emancipation and the boldness of the Thirteenth Amendment, while stunning achievements in their own right, meant only so much if they could not be enforced. This was, according to many black observers, the fundamental postwar role of the United States military. And who better to enforce these promises than thousands of previously enslaved men-turned-soldiers, serving in the former lands of bondage, bent on overseeing change to the region.

The duties of black soldiers mirrored those of the army at large. Charged with maintaining order and regulating peace, USCT units were involved directly in the chaotic postwar scene. Troops detested the ugly realities wrought by the destruction of the slave system, watching as their people struggled to negotiate labor contracts and interact with local whites. Black soldiers sought to create a safe environment for black civilians to carve out a life of equality. Although N. B. Sterrett, a sergeant in the 39th USCT, savored the opportunity to occupy Kinston, North Carolina, he desired to be transferred. Hearing rumors of violence against blacks elsewhere in the state, he wrote, “We are needed in other places of more importance.” Garland

36 Hahn, Nation Under Our Feet, 132 [quotation]; U.S. House of Representatives, Executive Document #71, 39th Congress, 1st Session, 1865-66, pp. 3-4 [hereafter cited as House Exec. Docs.]. The bulk of African American occupation troops were sent to Texas in the summer of 1865. The all-black Twenty-fifth Corps, which was stationed in the Department of Northern Virginia at the end of the war, was ordered to Texas because white commanders believed that black soldiers did not possess the appropriate discipline to remain in the East. (Work, “United States Colored Troops in Texas during Reconstruction,” 340).
H. White, of the 28th USCT, built on these sentiments, from his encampment at Corpus Christi, Texas. Responding to the Black Codes, White contended that occupation, and even military coercion, were necessary means to rid the South of such unfair practices. And he volunteered to remain a soldier in the postwar occupation force. “The Government has a right to the services of men, when and where it [needs them],” he wrote, “and we calmly submit to it.” White believed, though, that the government should bestow the right to vote to all blacks, in return for the duties performed in occupying the South. Only then, could all African Americans “be enabled to protect our families from all the horrors that prey upon a disfranchised people.”

A. J. Willard, commander of a military sub-district near Charleston, South Carolina, advocated on behalf of many black civilians who sought protection specifically from USCT occupation forces, soon after the Black Codes went into effect. He wrote that “the freedpeople were looking forward to the arrival of Colored Troops with the expectation that their advent would enlarge their privileges, and obtain the realization of their expectations of obtaining possession of the lands of the country.” The very presence of black soldiers, moreover, inculcated a spirit of trust toward the U. S. government among recently freed slaves. Of all government agents, Willard suggested, African American troops most genuinely embodied the freed-peoples’ fates, desiring to guard their wellbeing. “The services they are called upon to perform, being so obviously directed to the advancement of the true interests of the people of color,” he explained, “are rendered freely and cheerfully without reluctance, while [white] volunteer Troops being anxious to return to their homes, feel that this service is a burden, and in many instances an imposition.” John Ely, the Chief Superintendent of the Freedmen’s Bureau for the District of Kentucky, concurred with Willard’s appraisal. “The presence of [black troops]

caused a marked change for the better in the sentiments of the people toward the Bureau,” he wrote, “and gave confidence to many good men (white people) who accept the present condition of affairs.” Although some black soldiers and civilians had been murdered in neighboring counties, freed-people across the region, Ely concluded, “are in the main well employed, at fair wages,” due in large part to the relative stability offered by black occupation troops.  

Willard and Ely well understood the rationale behind black men’s desires to stay in the army. Just as during the war, they continued to endure discrimination from white soldiers, oftentimes served in deplorable, unhealthy conditions (especially on the Texas coast), and bore the taunts, jeers, and violent reprisals from white southerners. Yet, some African American soldiers recognized, and fully accepted, the meaning of peacetime occupation. The immediate postwar scene offered them a moment, a chance to use their martial influence to reshape the South, erasing the ideology undergirding racial stratification. Although military authorities never formulated an efficient policy to combat the violence perpetuated against black soldiers and civilians, African American troops did not act passively in the occupied South. Instead, they openly demonstrated their martial influence, oftentimes taking matters into their own hands. They did not hesitate to aim and shoot their rifles, attack restive civilians, and enter private homes. In other occasions, they executed the laws and protected free laborers. African American soldiers understood that their presence necessitated active involvement in postwar society. To them, occupation was not something to endure but rather to direct. 

Carl Schurz, an anti-slavery advocate, dedicated Republican, and former Union army general, toured the Deep South during the summer of 1865 and reported to President Andrew

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39 Glatthaar, Forged in Battle, 215-16; Fletcher, Negro Volunteer in Reconstruction, 126-27.
Johnson what he considered the invaluable impact of black occupation. Although Schurz suspected that old secessionists attempted to reinsert themselves into local politics, he concluded, “[t]here is far less disorder in Mississippi than in Alabama,” because it was “more perfectly garrisoned than any of those [states] that I have visited.” Schurz ascribed the success of occupation exclusively to the region’s black troops. He considered white soldiers an ineffective occupation force because of their lack of discipline, inattention to military responsibility, and desire to go home. By contrast, he praised black soldiers’ focus, coupled with their “pride and a strict observance of their instructions.” Schurz explained that, in comparison to white soldiers, African American troops had a lot to lose by an ineffective postwar occupation. In spite of the dislocation and chaos in the postwar South, Schurz believed that societal stability, and change, could be shaped by a robust, black military occupation, which he reported that the troops duly understood. “There is nothing,” he concluded, referring to the symbolism of black garrisons, “that will make [African American freedom] more evident than the bodily presence of a negro with a musket on his shoulder.”

Schurz was correct, probably more than he knew, yet in ways that unsettled the very nature of black occupation. Few emotions wrought by Confederate defeat inspired such outrage and defiance from white southerners as the presence of African American troops. Almost as soon as the war was over, white southerners alleged that USCT units committed depredations against whites, arbitrarily used their authority to steal goods and destroy property, and erroneously convinced freed-people that the government would provide land and means of subsistence, jeopardizing labor relationships between planters and former slaves. Some former Confederates

even suggested that black troops conspired with freed-people, hoping to initiate a Haitian-style race war. The “demoralizing” influence of African American occupiers thus reflected, for white southerners, their worst fears incarnate: the destruction of slavery and the creation of a bi-racial society based on equality. Black occupation erected a substantial barrier against the resurrection of the old antebellum order. White southerners thus embarked on a campaign to rid the region of African American soldiers, using the language of republicanism to call into question the legitimacy of the black troops’ presence. Southerners hoped to demonstrate that black occupation actually constituted an all-too-real case of the much-dreaded standing army. If such fears caught on widely, the occupying troops might be sent home or be reassigned, effectively defeating at least one of the great social transformations wrought by the war.41

White southerners believed that the federal government purposely garrisoned the former Confederacy with African American troops as a means of punishing the crime of secession and capitalizing arbitrarily on victory. In addition, planters charged that the army deliberately unleashed the black occupiers into the countryside to plunder and terrorize civilians. Harvey M. Watterson, a conservative unionist from New Bern, North Carolina, pleaded with Andrew Johnson to remove the black soldiers from the South. “No people were ever more thoroughly conquered and subdued,” he wrote of former Confederates. But the presence of free blacks, guided and protected by African American soldiers, caused great outrage in the white mind, preventing national reunion. Other white observers warned that violent collisions might inevitably result from a continued occupation by black soldiers. Indeed, William H. Holden advocated that “a body of white troops be stationed at points where there are large numbers of colored troops.” A correspondent from Knoxville informed the president of purported attacks on

41 Robert H. Gifford to Capt. Upham, October 30, 1865, Robert H. Gifford Letters, Wingate Family Papers, 1835-1887, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina; Hahn, Nation Under Our Feet, 133; Fletcher, Negro Volunteer in Reconstruction, 126-27; Berlin, et al., eds., BME, 735-37.
white citizens from black soldiers, who even killed milk cows. “The conduct of these negro soldiers is such that while they remain we cannot expect to have good order,” he declared. “I am perfectly satisfied that if they could be removed, we would have peace and good order at once and thereby put down much prejudice against the negro.”

Former Confederates integrated the rhetoric of republicanism and victimization, most likely aware that Johnson sympathized with their racial plight, as a veiled method to undercut the broader project of postwar occupation. They reasoned that if the president could be convinced that black occupation represented instability, chaos, and violence—the very ingredients undergirding the cultural fears of a peacetime standing army—the military as a whole might pull out, leaving former Confederates to reconstruct the South on their own terms. Indeed, Johnson had long advocated a conservative program of self-reconstruction, ignoring Carl Schurz’s suggestions about black occupiers. Negative accusations against black soldiers only served to confirm the president’s belief that the army should play, at most, a minimal role. If African American troops continued to “disrupt” the postwar scene, Johnson concluded, they should be mustered out of service as quickly as possible, a position upon which he quickly acted. The president fully accepted white southerners’ accounts and agreed that black soldiers propagated acts of violence against helpless victims, even as he ignored pleas from unionists and radicals, such as Carl Schurz, who contradicted the former Confederates’ claims.

Even Ulysses S. Grant, distressed by the tensions between white southerners and black occupiers, struggled to find a solution to the racial imbalance. Although an ardent supporter of black garrison and field troops during the war, Grant approached the Reconstruction period with

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42 Harvey M. Watterson to Andrew Johnson, June 20, 1865, William H. Holden to Andrew Johnson, June 26, 1865, and S. R. Rodgers to Andrew Johnson, November 22, 1865, in PAJ, 8: 265, 293, 9:417-18; Fletcher, “Negro Volunteer in Reconstruction, 126-27.

43 Andrew Johnson to William L. Sharkey, August 25, 1865, and Johnson to George H. Thomas, September 4, 8, 1865, both in PAJ, 8: 653-54, 9:26, 48-49; Zalimas, “Black Union Soldiers in the Postwar South,” 37.
much greater caution, searching for an efficient route to national reconciliation. The famed commander accordingly wrestled with the ironies of the postwar scene. On the one hand, he desired that white southerners accept the realities of defeat, including emancipation, believing that their compliance would speed national healing. Yet on the other hand, he could not escape news about the unsettling violence against African Americans, whether soldiers or civilians, and believed in the necessity of a substantial military occupation. But even so, Grant, like many of his contemporaries, believed that too strong of an occupation could perpetuate societal and political chaos, which was precisely how he interpreted the Memphis race riot in May 1866, an extended street brawl between black troops and local white police. Grant examined the present conditions of black occupation, determining that its mere presence arrested any move toward reunion. “To him,” writes historian Brooks D. Simpson, “truth of the charges [from white southerners] was irrelevant; the mere presence of black troops was destabilizing and inhibited reconciliation, which justified their removal.” Thus, between late 1865 and the middle of 1866, the vast majority of USCT units were transferred from the interior of the South to coastal garrisons, the frontier plains, or mustered out altogether. By early 1867, no more African American soldiers remained in the South.44

The failure of black occupation reflected a trait of the nineteenth-century American character, which had long-established roots. The insistence on peacetime stability emanated from a strong desire for national reunion, but also from a keen awareness that the army must maintain order, not spread unrest. Although Grant interpreted race as the central factor in postwar tension

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44 Brooks D. Simpson, *Let Us Have Peace: Ulysses S. Grant and the Politics of War and Reconstruction, 1861-1868* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 113; Grant to John Pope, October 14, 1865, *PUSG*, 15:337-38; Grant to Sherman, October 31, 1865, ibid., 15:377; Grant to Sherman, March 3, 14, 1866, ibid., 16:93, 117; Simpson, “Quandaries of Command,” 136-49. The Memphis race riot, May 1-3, 1866, was a result of tensions between local white police forces and African American soldiers. After police fired on black troops, local white residents stormed the neighborhoods of recently freed slaves and killed more than forty African Americans. Contemporaries interpreted the event as a problem of black occupation. (Rable, *But There Was No Peace*, 33-42).
and volatility, he did so by linking it to the nature of military occupation in which the army was seen as the culprit in civil destabilization. Grant construed the presence of black soldiers as the presumed source of societal and racial turmoil. What if black occupation had remained a fixed component of Reconstruction? Hypotheticals, of course, have little bearing on historical understanding. Yet in this instance, such inquiries illustrate that had African Americans soldiers remained in the South, military occupation would have reflected both the consolidation of Union victory as well as the promise of emancipation. Indeed, military intervention governed by black occupiers, who once were enslaved laborers, would have underscored the profound changes occasioned by the war. Their influence was instead interpreted differently, clouded by an indissoluble dedication to republican principles that preached national reunion, southern self-government, and a postwar role for the army that was seen neither as domineering nor chaos-inducing. Thus another irony of postwar occupation was written: emancipation and the enlistment of black troops, elements that helped preserve the Union, ultimately helped undermine their blossoming during Reconstruction.

By late 1866, the South had reemerged as a society that closely resembled the Confederate nation that went to war in 1861. The planter class had been refashioned; southern partisans and many former Confederates were elected to national and state office; and African Americans were segregated into second-class positions, governed by the Black Codes and a restrictive, quasi-slavery labor system. On the surface, though, the South had been reconstructed, at least according to the conservative visions of presidential policy.45

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45 Presidential Reconstruction, as first envisioned by Abraham Lincoln and later Andrew Johnson, reflected conservative approach to the postwar years. Both presidents sought a quick reintegration of the southern states, repudiation of secession, and acceptance that slavery had been eliminated. Congress, however, believed that both presidents’ approaches were naïve, because former Confederates quickly assumed state and national office. (Foner, *Reconstruction*, 176-227).
However, increasing numbers of northerners declared that reconstruction meant not only the reintegration of the states and southern congressmen. It also required, they argued, a reconstructed ideology, a belief that the South must shed its Confederate, slaveholding identity. The war for Union had been waged, in part, to eliminate the southern slavocracy, an institution that threatened the essence of liberty and American exceptionalism. Yet it survived the war, arguably stronger and more unified than during the conflict. Thus the American public opted for the so-called Radical Republicans to wrest control of Reconstruction away from the president, hoping that change would finally be secured. The military played a passive role during the first two postwar years of Presidential Reconstruction. During the subsequent Congressional phase, though, the army was looked to as the central institution to carry out the “radical” agenda, directly assisting the Republican Party to gain a substantial foothold in the South. Presumably shedding bits of their republican identity, Americans clamored for a robust military occupation of the South, looking to the regular army to ensure lasting peace and order.

The Reconstruction Acts of 1867 embodied congressional Radicals’ visions of military government and occupation. Effectively ignoring all of the previous Reconstruction requirements under Lincoln’s and Johnson’s plans, the Acts appointed the army to supervise the creation of a new southern political and racial order. The laws divided the South into five military districts, governed by a general, and supervised by the regular army. Over the next few years, the military oversaw free, fair, open elections in which African Americans voted and enjoyed the fruits of equal citizenship, in addition to the establishment of Republican state governments, authorization of public education, protection of private property, and enforcement of civil law. This project of massive and beneficial change, which materialized in a stunningly brief amount of time, would

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46 For a recent interpretation of the maintenance and flowering of postwar Confederate identity, see Anne Sarah Rubin, A Shattered Nation: The Rise and Fall of the Confederacy, 1861-1868 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 141-248.
not have occurred without the army’s central influence. Voting rights and newly reformed state governments reflected a northern consensus about the purpose of Reconstruction. By 1870 the southern states were readmitted to the Union under the banner of racial and political equality, due in large part to the army’s participation.47

Although the United States army played a substantial role during Congressional Reconstruction, and the American public appeared willing to use the military during peacetime to occasion civil and political ends, the debate continued about the army’s proper influence. This national conversation had never died in the aftermath of Presidential Reconstruction. Politicians, civilians, and especially the regular army’s generals and soldiers—all of whom identified with competing elements of the political spectrum—remained wedded to their republican heritage and looked askance at a standing army. Yes, the military had created and protected the environment in which the great elections of 1868 and 1870 took place.

But that was the problem, at least according to contemporaries. Observers argued that, in spite of the military’s increased role in this admittedly special occasion, the army should as a normal rule be used as moderately as possible, masking any appearance of coercion and appearing not as a radical, intrusive institution. This insistence on moderation reflected the American publics’ profound, yet ironic desire for a conservative military presence during a radical phase of Reconstruction.

The numbers of military personnel in the South between 1867 and 1870 testifies to the American publics’ insistence on a moderate continuation of peacetime occupation. When Congress passed the Reconstruction Acts in 1867, 20,117 soldiers occupied the former

47 Foner, Reconstruction, 271-91; Sefton, United States Army and Reconstruction, 109-85; Blair, “Use of Military Force to Protect the Gains of Reconstruction,” 395-96. The First Military District included only Virginia, commanded by John M. Schofield; The Second District comprised North and South Carolina, commanded by Daniel E. Sickles; the Third District comprised Alabama, Georgia, and Florida, commanded by John Pope; the Fourth District comprised Mississippi and Arkansas, commanded by Edward O. C. Ord; and the Fifth District included Texas and Louisiana, commanded by Philip H. Sheridan (Dawson, “US Army in the South,” 45).
Confederacy, or an average of 1,828 per state. By October 1870, at which time most southern states had been readmitted under Congress’s plans, only 9,050 soldiers remained, constituting a mean of 823 per state.\(^{48}\) During this rapid demobilization of United States forces, the government did not create a bureaucratic structure to protect the rights of African American citizenship nor did it establish mechanisms for economic advancement: the Freedmen’s Bureau was disbanded in 1872.

In essence, Congress believed that once citizenship and voting privileges were guaranteed and new state constitutions written—a process that would be supervised and regulated by the military—each individual, black and white, would be autonomous actors in the drama of American democracy, effectively eliminating the great national stain of racial discrimination. Indeed, “once accorded equal rights,” historian Eric Foner comments rather fatalistically of the fundamental Republican assumption, “the freedmen would find their social level and assume responsibility for their own fate.” Congressional Republicans understood that the American public never would have supported vast expenditures, requiring increased taxation, to support a substantial and indefinite military presence in the former Confederacy.\(^{49}\)

Why had this dramatic numerical and ideological decline occurred, especially considering that the military proved to be an exceptional force for positive change, ridding the South of the Black Codes, supervising free and fair elections, regulating tax relief for the poor, and overseeing constitutional conventions? The answer is troubling, at least according to modern, twenty-first century sensibilities. Congressional Republicans, both radical and

\(^{48}\) Sefton, *United States Army and Reconstruction*, 261-62. These numbers are slightly skewed because of the substantial military presence in Texas, which contained, by far, the largest numbers of United States forces. But, with Texas removed from the equation, the average number of soldiers drops considerably throughout the rest of the former Confederacy, buttressing the idea that the military’s presence was unusually small. Thus, if Texas was removed, an average of 1,508 soldiers occupied each southern state in 1867; 431, on average, in 1870. The numbers dropped consistently thereafter through 1877.

\(^{49}\) Foner, *Reconstruction*, 277.
moderate, genuinely believed that they, along with the military, had refashioned traditional social and economic structures in which all citizens were guaranteed the right to rise, or fall, as free individuals. The Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments collectively embodied nineteenth-century America’s conceptions of liberty in which the individual freely assumed responsibility for her or his fate. And the essence of the Reconstruction Acts, which assigned the army to implement political policies, reflected a radical and ambitious departure from national tradition.⁵⁰

In the minds of most contemporary observers, therefore, Congress and the military had departed greatly from national tradition by incorporating themselves so intimately into the nation’s political, economic, and social realms. The federal government was always seen as the institution that guaranteed and protected personal liberty. It retained that responsibility during Congressional Reconstruction, but on a level never before seen in American history. In addition, the military was traditionally viewed as a threat to liberty, especially during peacetime, yet it too assumed a profoundly important role in the post-1867 nation, expanding its influence and charting unprecedented, necessary obligations.

Recent historians have criticized, or at least questioned, what they consider to be a costly departure from the “promise” of Congressional Reconstruction and a retreat from the military support afforded to black southerners and white unionists in the wake of the Reconstruction Acts and Amendments. Although African American citizenship and voting rights had been secured, as well as state governments seemingly reconstructed, a wave of violence struck the South after 1870 in which white conservative insurgents, clothed in the pale sheets of the Ku Klux Klan or the bright garments of the Red Shirts, terrorized black people and Republican institutions, hoping to resurrect a semblance of the former Confederacy. Scholars traditionally interpret the violence

⁵⁰ Dawson, “US Army in the South,” 44.
and chaos of the 1870s, coupled with the relatively limited response from the federal government and military, as a “lost moment,” a failure to capitalize on the gains from the Civil War and its aftermath.⁵¹

There is no question that there existed a failed opportunity for black people to enjoy the fruits of freedom and equality in the face of such concentrated violence. Yet this interpretation misses a broader understanding of why such an environment of inequality and intimidation flourished. In many ways, recent scholarship has focused more on the question of what could have been done to secure genuine equality, than on identifying the nineteenth-century context in which white northerners operated and how they interpreted the roles of the government and military not only during the second half of Reconstruction but also during peacetime society at large. For example, the idea of Union, a concept that defined much of the antebellum experience and which guided loyal Americans through the secession crisis and four years of war, did not die in 1865. Rather, it remained an equally profound concept deep into the postwar years. United States victory during the conflict consolidated the notion that people were capable of, and also entitled to, self-government and the promise of individual liberty, defined by personal autonomy and protected by the Constitution. This ideology supplied the basis for the Reconstruction Amendments, necessary additions that certainly would not have been possible without a decisive military victory, and which confirmed existing understandings of Union.⁵²

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White northerners, especially those in Congress and the military, recognized that the great Constitutional amendments could not be secured without thorough regulation by the United States army, which would need to integrate itself deeply into the southern states’ social, political, and economic fabrics. This decision reflected a stunning departure from national republican custom and gave meaning to the era’s revolutionary nature. Both moderate and radical Republicans, in addition to army generals, recognized the absolute necessity to buck tradition and temporarily alter the relationship between citizen and government. Yet once the amendments were secured and the wayward states assimilated in the Union, northerners believed that liberty, based on their definitions of the term, had been established. The protection of self-government and democracy, they inferred—the very reasons for which they had waged war—had finally been established in the South, due in large part to the military’s participation. Thus, they considered that the revolutionary approach undertaken by the military to be transitory and sought a quick return to standard procedure.

After white southern conservatives rose to challenge the Republican state governments, often in horrendously violent and chaotic ways, northern observers commented extensively on the continued but seemingly short-term presence of the military as imperative for stemming the tide of racial and political intimidation. These northern responses, to any twenty-first century observer, seem frustratingly outmoded and obsolete, based on a presumably unrealistic adherence to republicanism. Yet it is crucial to understand why and how northerners remained wedded to concepts that had long defined the American character. They believed that they had already acted far out of the bounds of national tradition when securing and enforcing the Reconstruction Amendments and Acts; any additional military involvement in state affairs, they argued, would carry potentially damaging consequences. Thus, they faced a difficult choice. On
the one hand, they could discard national tradition and fundamentally alter the ideological nature of Union—the very institution for which more than 300,000 United States soldiers died to protect. Or, they could conduct a serious, indefinite military occupation of the South, using a standing army to enforce every aspect of social, political, and racial equality in the South.

The answer, to modern observers, seems immediately obvious, due to the absence of nineteenth-century republican thought in today’s lexicon, combined with a firm dedication to racial awareness. A majority of contemporaries, though, remained devoted to the restraints of military involvement in the states, buttressed by their prejudiced views on race, regardless of the obvious chaos and rampant inequality growing in the South. Their attitudes confirmed the commentary of citizen-soldiers who, at the beginning of Reconstruction, remarked consistently about the implications of peacetime military activity. And the opinions expressed between 1867 and 1877 further highlighted why African American soldiers and civilians had sought a marked alteration to what they considered the unnecessary constraints placed on occupation by republican ideology. In the end, though, the culture of American republican thought, born during the Revolution and secured during the Civil War, won the day. It is crucial to take seriously the reasons for which white northerners clung so dearly to the continuity of republicanism, their concerns about a standing army, and their fears of long-term military occupation. Their answers, while seemingly irrelevant and antiquated today, were undertaken with great focus more than a century ago.

Testimony from regular army officers, the popular press, and politicians underscored a national consensus about the role of the federal government and military during the second-half of Reconstruction. Brigadier General Samuel D. Sturgis, a regular army officer serving in Texas, referred bluntly to his occupation responsibilities as “going entirely outside the duty of my
profession.” He had not been trained to oversee political affairs or regulate the state’s economy. Indeed, the complexity of Reconstruction, Sturgis considered, fell beyond the bounds of his obligations as a soldier. Sturgis’s comments reflected a growing concern among officers who believed that they served in very peculiar, extraordinary conditions. They were sent to the South to maintain order, yet were also expected to walk a fine line between military responsibility and local civilian affairs.53

The very nature of the Reconstruction Acts necessitated that soldiers involve themselves in state matters, but the fear of military usurpation checked most officers’ actions. Observers, both in and out of the military, ironically believed that the army would be more likely than white southerners to initiate instability and social chaos. Troops in the Fourth Military District of Arkansas, for instance, incurred the wrath of their commanding general after entering a private home. “The military are the servants of the laws, and are for the benefit of the people,” the general declared. “The assumption that a party of soldiers can, at their own option, forcibly destroy a citizen’s property, and commit a gross violation of the public peace, would not be tolerated under a Napoleon.” The fear of being compared to European-style instability motivated other officers to maintain strict control of their men, even when white southerners perpetuated violence. Once state governments had been reestablished, officers were ordered “not to act at all in the matter unless called upon [by] the properly constituted Civil authorities and then only to protect them from violence while in the discharge of their duties.”54

Federal military policy mirrored the concerns of army officers. Once a state was readmitted and a Republican government established, military officials were expected to


54 Quotations in Pfanz, “Soldiering in the South,” 485, 488-89.
maintain, at best, a “peacekeeping” presence, ordered into action only when civilian authorities requested assistance. Although the army stationed itself in garrisons across the South, its minuscule numbers meant it was unable to provide adequate protection to Republicans and African Americans on election days. In addition, it is necessary to comprehend that many soldiers did not harbor the idealistic sensibilities of Congressional radicals but rather leaned toward the conservative views of either the Democrats or Republicans. Thus, they possessed little ideological concern for the plight of freed-people, and most certainly did not advocate using the military to enforce racial equality. Although soldiers participated in routine patrols of the countryside, battled white terrorist insurgents, and prevented political coups from forming, especially in Louisiana, the military largely remained in the background on purpose, allowing civil authorities to govern daily affairs. And thus the garrison ethos continued to be defined by radicalized dimensions.55

Army generals such as George G. Meade, John M. Schofield, and William T. Sherman, although conservative in nature, drew a clear distinction between military government and the maintenance of peace through martial law. Writing collectively in the post-1867 environment, especially once the southern states were readmitted, these commanders explained that civil government had to function on its own, lest the entire experiment in republican democracy be threatened. They willingly employed martial law as a temporary measure because it supported civil government; yet they stopped short of supplanting the state governments, fearing the prospect of military despotism. This did not mean that they neglected to employ troops to administer the Enforcement Acts against the Ku Klux Klan. But they continued to believe that they stood on shaky ground. Occupying the South, Meade explained to Regis de Trobriand, “you

55 Rable, But There Was No Peace, 109; Blair, “Use of Military Force to Protect the Gains of Reconstruction,” 396.
have not only to be a soldier, but must play the politician, a part which I am sure both to you and me would be not only difficult but disagreeable.”

Many army commanders built on Meade’s contentions. William T. Sherman especially despised the growing instability perpetuated by white conservatives against Republican governments. But his devotion to republican tradition, despite the restraint it mandated, guided the bulk of his decisions. Although presumably naïve, Sherman genuinely insisted that the army remain apolitical; this stance is crucially important for understanding the evolution of Reconstruction. Hesitant to employ his troops in a substantial fashion, he wrote in 1870, “I think the use of our soldiers should be limited to maintaining the peace.” He endorsed arresting Ku Klux and other white southerners who threatened violence but firmly opposed entering any realm of political or social affairs.

His position revealed striking continuity across the entire Reconstruction era, most of which time he spent as General in Chief of the army. “No matter what change we desire in the feelings and thoughts of people South,” he wrote in September 1865, “we cannot accomplish it by force. Nor can we maintain there an army large enough to hold them in subjugation. All we can, or should attempt is to give them rope, to develop in an honest way if possible, preserving in reserve enough military power to check any excesses if they attempt any.” A decade later, he retained this attitude. “I have all along tried to save our officers and soldiers from the dirty work imposed on them,” he informed his brother in 1875, “and may, thereby, have incurred the suspicion of the President that I did not cordially sustain his force.” He considered himself

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exonerated, though, believing, “I have always thought it wrong to bolster up weak State
governments by our troops. We should keep the peace always; but not act as bailiff constables
and catch thieves. That should be beneath a soldier’s vocation.” In today’s language, neither
Sherman nor most other officers believed in “nation building.” 

On the surface it appears that Sherman constructed a worldview divorced from the
meaning of Union triumph and troubling realities of the postwar South. Yet ironically, his
outlook encapsulated the very essence of the American definition of victory during the postwar
period. Although the solution to the challenges of Reconstruction seems vexingly evident to
modern eyes, Sherman and his contemporaries operated within an ideological context that was
only one century removed from the Revolution; their experiences with long-term military
occupation were only five to ten years old, practiced exclusively during wartime. Thus, Sherman
deemed inconceivable using the military to refashion citizens’ ideologies and governing
structures, no matter how much he may have hated secession, the destructive war perpetuated by
white southerners, or the chaotic defiance practiced by unrepentant insurgents. Employing the
United States army as a tool of social and political change against white citizens, and for the
benefit of African Americans, simply did not enter into his worldview. To him, maintenance of
the republican tradition, a quest embraced by many Americans across the nineteenth century,
assumed top priority.

The army alone did not articulate these views. The popular press, especially Harper’s Weekly,
gave voice to the national pulse, articulating how a majority of white northerners
interpreted the military’s role in the post–Civil War period, and especially post-1870 South.

58 William T. Sherman to John Sherman, September 21, 1865, and William to John, January 7, 1875, in Rachel
Sherman Thorndike, ed., The Sherman Letters: Correspondence between General and Senator Sherman, 1837 to
1891 (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1894), 256, 342. See also Sherman to Grant, April 28, 1865, OR, vol. 47,
pt. 3, pp. 334-35.
Harper’s emerged as a great champion of emancipation and racial equality, arguing for permanent equality for both whites and blacks. The newspaper’s writers deplored the conservative insurgency in the South against African Americans, called on the national government and military to maintain a strict presence in the region, and offer protection on election days to ensure that voting rights were maintained.59

However, after a decade of firm dedication to racial equality, it appeared that by 1875, Harper’s had retreated radically from its long-held beliefs. In February of that year the paper praised the Republican Party for its focused, pragmatic, and magnanimous approach to Reconstruction in which “not a drop of blood did it shed in vengeance [for secession and war]. It established no system of confiscation. It made merely every man free and a citizen, and embodied his rights in the fundamental law.” Yet one month later, Harper’s concluded that the Republicans had overstepped their authority in the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1875, which authorized the army to suspend the writ of habeas corpus as well as use great martial force in protecting black and white voters. The bill “was too monstrous,” the paper declared, claiming that Republican support was based on consolidating political power in the South. “[T]he bill was urged not because it was just, or wise, or constitutional, but because it was necessary, in order to save the Republican party at the next election,” the writer remarked sarcastically. Adopting a much more serious tone, the paper concluded, “[t]hat is new doctrine for the English-speaking race. Its struggles for centuries have been to restrict the exercise of those powers to the most extraordinary emergencies and to time of war, and then to guard them

59 Gary W. Gallagher explains that weekly periodicals such as Harper’s Weekly and Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper “provide a lens through which to examine mainstream [northern] attitudes” regarding the central issues of the day. “Hoping to reach the widest possible readership, neither pursued a strong ideological agenda—though on the whole Republicans, much more than Democrats, would have found coverage . . . in both papers to their taste.” (Gallagher, Union War, 93-94); Gillette, Retreat from Reconstruction, 198, 201, 209, 263-64, 275.
in the most jealous manner.” The Republican Party, Harper’s concluded, had proven that it no longer could conduct Reconstruction policy.\textsuperscript{60}

Harper’s did not consider its stance to be a retreat from a racial promise of Reconstruction. Underlying the explicit praise of African American freedom, citizenship, and equality, Harper’s maintained a consistent position on the role of the military during postwar Reconstruction. “Indefinite military occupation,” the paper announced in 1867, “must be avoided if possible,” even though the postwar South required the army’s presence at least for a while. Harper’s long sought a balance between republican military tradition and protection of civil rights. But when the latter’s prescriptions exceeded the contemporary definitions of the former, Harper’s, along with the bulk of American society, retreated promptly the project of the military occupation in the former Confederacy.\textsuperscript{61}

By 1877 the newspaper finally explicated its perceptions of the previous twelve years. “[T]he presence of troops has not preserved the Republican party” in the South. “A State government,” it continued, “which can be upheld only by the national army is not in the American sense a government of the people.” Harper’s blamed the violence and chaos of the 1870s on the military’s presence, believing that southern garrisons helped nurture the region’s instability. “To insist that the army shall be retained in a State so long as there is disorder or the chance of disorder, is to propose a military administration; and for the State authorities to appeal immediately to the general government on the outbreak of trouble, is to disregard the fundamental conditions of the American system.” The piece concluded with an ironic admission. The voters in southern states who perpetuated violence were merely acting in defiance of the

\textsuperscript{60} Harper’s Weekly, February 27, p. 170, and March 20, 1875, p. 230.

\textsuperscript{61} Harper’s Weekly, November 9, 1867, p. 706.
military, the newspaper explained. If the army were not there, this logic concluded, voters would abstain from violent protest, exercising their majority rights at the polls, in accordance with American tradition. “They may be ignorant, brutal, and corrupt,” the author acknowledged. “But if they cast lawfully the majority of the votes, the government they establish is the lawful government, and the national government, if lawfully invoked, can not see it overthrown by domestic violence.”

These statements did not reflect a stunning shift in, or departure from, Harper’s visions of Reconstruction. Rather, they underscored long-held American beliefs, predating the Civil War era, which held that the military, if not checked, would be a source of social instability. This was the manner in which Harper’s interpreted the situation in 1877. The United States army, it believed, although proven to be an integral component in protecting black freedom and citizenship, had become an obstruction to self-government. The continued presence of the military in the South, Harper’s explained, spawned instability and perpetuated violence; only the absence of armed force could eliminate these societal ills.

Regardless of the questionable accuracy of these beliefs, even some radical Republican politicians arrived at the same conclusion, underscoring widespread American concerns about a peacetime standing army. Indeed, radicals could be wedded to both racial egalitarianism and nineteenth-century suspicions about the military. By its very nature, Congressional Reconstruction reflected a public discourse on the current state of American republicanism, based on the assumptions underlying black suffrage and citizenship, the hesitancy to disfranchise former Confederates, and the debate about the proper role of the military. Many Americans, though, found it difficult to balance these considerations, which were all based on contemporary theories of liberty and self-government. The radical vision would succeed, though, if all three

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62 Harper’s Weekly, April 7, 1877, p. 262.
components could achieve a working equilibrium within the postwar South’s political, economic, and social frameworks.  

Richard Yates, a radical senator from Illinois, declared as much as early as 1867, presaging the transpiration of events over the next decade. Inquiring rhetorically who, in America, should enjoy the fruits of citizenship, Yates declared, “[t]hese questions are asked not in reference to citizenship in some foreign Government, not in reference to the common law, but in reference to the United States of America, where we have founded a Government upon the basis of equal laws and universal liberty.” Yates explained that voting rights and the privilege of self-government should be extended to all Americans, regardless of race, previous condition, or even treasonous acts committed against the nation. “[I]n the United States,” he continued, “on account of the democratic features thereof, all the terms I have used have a distinctive national meaning, applicable to our nation alone.” Referencing his profound faith in American exceptionalism, Yates concluded idealistically, yet in his mind realistically, “the ballot will finish the negro question; it will settle everything. . . . Give the freedman the ballot, and we need no Freedmen’s Bureau, we need no military regime, we need no vast expenditures, we need no standing army. The ballot will be his standing army. The ballot is the cheap and impregnable fortress of liberty.”

Although Yates grounded his visions in romantic, optimistic rhetoric, he retained a belief that the army needed to maintain a presence in the South to ensure peaceful transitions to a new social and political order. Basing his suggestions on the purpose of the Reconstruction Acts, the army should be used immediately, rather than later, to provide “a change of heart in the southern

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63 Foner, *Reconstruction*, 278.

people.” If not employed with substantial force, Yates feared, “our omission to use the power we already clearly have might result in a calamitous change of parties and in the restoration of the rebellious States in a condition quite as objectionable as when they first rebelled with all the chances and probabilities of a future war and final separation.”

In an ironic twist of fate, these beliefs were the most idealistic among all of Yates’s musings. He, along with countless northerners, did not recognize that the American tradition, as they defined it, would prevent any use of overwhelming military force against white citizens during peacetime, regardless of black citizens’ rights being threatened. Thus, in the years following Yates’s speech, the army was employed on a moderate basis, its southern components demobilized, and increasing numbers of soldiers sent to the West to battle Native Americans, opening the frontier to white settlement. Contemporary observers attributed the escalating deterioration of order in the South to the military’s continued, and in their minds pointless, existence. White southerners, who sought a return to the old order, learned that they could enforce their belligerence with little fear of Yankee reprisal. As historian George C. Rable concluded, “moderate force, such as that applied by the army in the South, is more likely to produce a violent response than more draconian measures or a laissez-faire policy.”

The white southern insurgency that rose in response to the advent of Republican state governments reflected the fears expressed by army generals, Harper’s Weekly, and Richard Yates, all of whom voiced the concerns of the broader American public. Battles waged by the Ku Klux Klan, Knights of the White Camellia, and Red Shirts came to be interpreted in the same manner in which Union soldiers construed the guerrilla conflict during the war. Unbounded violence, they believed, was caused partly by the military standing in the way of otherwise

65 Ibid.
66 Rable, But There Was No Peace, 110.
peaceful self-government. By the mid-to-late 1870s, Americans examined this troubling scenario with even greater scrutiny, equating instability in the South to the destabilization of Latin America and Western Europe. Both regions, Americans warned, contained large standing armies that threatened to seize power, regulate social and political affairs, and attempt to overthrow civilian governments. And the growing chaos of Reconstruction symbolized that the nation, and especially the military, failed to exert proper control of its territory, even though restrained by internal ideological principles. If the United States’ experiment in republicanism were to succeed, therefore, elements of republican theory must rescue the nation from slipping into the throes of volatility and despotism.67

In many ways, the prospect of preserving African American freedom and equality in the South met striking national challenges; by 1877, white northerners focused more on maintaining a republican identity that had been in place for one hundred years. Indeed, nineteenth-century attitudes regarding the role of government and the military assumed much loftier importance than a dedication to racial equality. Americans, both moderate and radical, were fluent in the language of republicanism, which celebrated liberty, self-government, and individual opportunity, as well as a military that was detached from societal and political affairs. Yet in a marked departure from national tradition, they attached these qualities to race, enforced temporarily by the army, during the Reconstruction era. They never assumed, however, that a long-term military presence should be used to enforce what citizens had always taken for granted.68

68 President Rutherford B. Hayes, a Republican, compromised with Congressional Democrats in 1877 as a means of settling the disputed election of 1876. Part of the compromise entailed pulling the remaining federal troops out of the South, effectively ended postwar military occupation and Reconstruction. See C. Vann Woodward, Reunion and Reaction: The Compromise of 1877 and the End of Reconstruction (Boston: Little, Brown, 1951); Vincent P. de
The experience of military occupation during the Civil War era forced Americans to confront a host of troubling issues that had long plagued the nation: the relationship between the citizen and government; the proper function of the military in a free society; the racial components of volunteer service; and the bureaucratic, governing functions of the army. In many ways, the experience of nineteenth-century occupation departed from national military tradition; in other ways, it laid the foundation for future American wars. Most important, though, the occupations during Reconstruction especially forced Americans to choose between two competing forces that would have stunning consequences well into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Rule by the people, a faith in democratic majority-rule, and self-determination at the ballot-box rather than policed arbitrarily by the bayonet, were chosen over racial equality and opportunity. The ironies of Reconstruction had, oddly, only just begun.69


69 For similar conclusions, see Blair, “The Use of Military Force to Protect the Gains of Reconstruction,” 399.
Rather than proclaiming the fanfares of victory, the end of Reconstruction instead sounded rather ominous, audible only by the faint clatter of United States troops exiting the South. Many white northerners were glad Reconstruction was over in 1877 but ambivalent about its outcomes; the road to reunion and reconciliation, paved by the Civil War’s mystic chords of memory, now assumed much loftier importance. Growing weary under the increasing stress and indefinite character of Reconstruction, northerners turned their attention to industrializing America, urbanizing its cities, and consolidating the nation’s great power. In the midst of mounting white southern violence, civilians north of Mason and Dixon’s line considered that the lands of the former Confederacy were beyond redemption. Such thoughts were confirmed, quite literally, by “Redemption” itself.¹

Vestiges of a peculiar Union spirit, which had been felt since the late 1840s, still lingered ever so slightly in the South. The garrison ethos, the strong force that had for so long troubled American military occupation, was, by 1876 and 1877, on its deathbed. Although United States garrisons still dotted the southern landscape, they resembled tiny islands in a sea of white defiance. The military’s formidable presence dwindled in the days following the Reconstruction Acts, evolving into a symbol of diminishing hope for black and white Republicans, while eliciting a call to arms from white southern insurgents. Garrison service no longer prompted disillusioned reactions from Federal troops who had long chafed against the limits of occupation duty. Instead by 1877, the garrison ethos had weakened, depleted of its former strength by northern apathy and southern recalcitrance. Whereas garrisons once stood as pillars of strength,

projecting the power of the Union army and victory over the Confederacy, they now tottered upon the weakest of foundations.²

By 1877, the once mighty and feared United States army had become drained of its former vigor, relegated again to the fringes of American life. As the controversy surrounding the garrison ethos and the spirit of occupation evaporated, another cultural force remained strong, arguably more durable than ever before in the nation’s history. The culture of republicanism, buttressed by a fierce contemporary dedication to its survival, stood firm. In many ways, the United States’ great, bloody conflicts between 1846 and 1877 had been waged to demonstrate the exceptional character of a concept born from the Revolution.

Yet republicanism, which included a fundamental opposition to standing armies, functioned in a peculiar way during the United States’ thirty-year experiment in occupation. Whereas common citizens, acting through their civic virtue, hurriedly volunteered for their nation’s martial causes, many found themselves trapped within an environment that seemed to erase their republican freedom and morality. Nineteenth-century military occupation, according to contemporary participants, restricted mobility, placed unnecessary limits on behavior, forced men to act outside the bounds of accepted military decorum, and symbolized the dreaded standing army. In Mexico, the Confederacy, and the post-bellum South, however, republicanism had to be sustained, proven that it could withstand crisis and chaos. The republican ethos indeed survived each conflict, flourishing as a unique beacon of American identity.

But underneath the surface, republicanism had grown to be incompatible with the emergence of long-term military occupation, especially during the “peacetime” world of Reconstruction. If the United States’ wars against Mexico and the Confederacy had been waged

to prove the sanctity of majority rule, the exceptionalism of popular government, and the supremacy of democratic egalitarianism, then Reconstruction, implemented by these same tenets of republicanism, should follow the same rubric. Yet by 1877, white Americans had made a calculated decision: the military, they claimed, propped up unpopular governments, supported only the minority, and reeked of undemocratic corruption. In order to free the post-war United States from sectionalism’s tight grip, observers argued, the nation must honor its republican heritage of civilian rule and its tradition of suspicion of peacetime armies. Racial equality and equal protection under the law were precariously absent from this equation.³

Americans reaffirmed their adherence to republicanism when Congress in 1878 passed the Posse Comitatus Act. Underscoring an aversion to peacetime military occupation, the act prohibited the army from enforcing the law and regulating civil affairs unless approved by the United States Constitution or prescribed by an act of Congress. State militias, which later evolved into the National Guard, would assume these responsibilities. Posse Comitatus, enforced through fines and imprisonment, seemed to be the capstone of victory for the American conception of republicanism in the aftermath of Reconstruction. It appeared that peacetime “nation-building” at home, directed at the behest of the military, had proven incompatible with American ideals.⁴

In spite of the presumably strict nature of Posse Comitatus, American presidents later ignored its decrees. The great labor unrest during the late nineteenth century, for instance, pushed Grover Cleveland and Theodore Roosevelt to threaten and employ the army to quell the social conflict wrought by the advent of organized unions. The Pullman Strike of 1894

³ Ibid., 172.
endangered national railway commerce, prompting Cleveland to order thousands of federal soldiers to Chicago to maintain order, break the strike, and restore railroad activity. Bloody battles between troops and laborers once again demonstrated the volatility of incorporating the military in civil affairs. Roosevelt considered solving a strike in 1902 through similar means. When coal miners in eastern Pennsylvania walked off the job, threatening the Northeast with a prospect of a cold winter without coal to heat homes, Roosevelt considered sending in the army to administer the abandoned coalfields. Although management and labor reached a mediated solution, Roosevelt’s thinking nevertheless highlights the willingness of America’s leaders to use the military to regulate social upheaval.\(^5\)

By the turn of the century, imperialism abroad captured the nation’s martial attention, as Americans left their own borders to populate the world with “Christian civilization,” democracy, and republican uniqueness. The imperial mission incorporated many elements of the Civil War era’s tradition of military occupation. Yet governing peoples with darker skins and different customs in the Philippines, Nicaragua, and Haiti seemed much more palatable than peacetime nation-building at home. International occupation, though, like domestic occupation during the Civil War and Reconstruction, was met with resistance and violence, as the occupied peoples struggled to resist conquest. The project of American military government nevertheless grew, achieving its greatest victories in Japan and Germany during the aftermath of World War II. And the heritage of American occupation *abroad* continues to the present day.\(^6\)

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The United States’ twentieth-century imperial forays, which enlisted the military for occupations abroad, presumed that Americans had forever retreated from the use of military intervention to cure domestic social ills. Indeed, the army during Reconstruction never completely succeeded in stemming the rising tide of southern racial violence and inequality, which ultimately culminated in Jim Crow segregation. By the late nineteenth century, Americans continued to distrust any future attempts by the army to reform civil society. Thus, most white contemporaries agreed that the military would be better used abroad, transplanting American ideals and making the world safe for democracy. Yet as the military turned its focus to theaters abroad, the culture of race-based discrimination at home continued to escalate.

In September 1957, eighty years after they left the South, United States troops returned once again to Dixie. They came not as occupiers, but as agents of change, bringing the unkept racial promises of Reconstruction back to the lands of the former Confederacy. This time, another Republican president, Dwight D. Eisenhower, followed in the footsteps of his mid-nineteenth-century predecessors, yet ordered the army to break racial barriers. Acting independently, Eisenhower deployed the 101st Airborne Division, along with the National Guard, to the steps of Little Rock High School, protecting black students as they sought an equal education. If the United States continued to preach the gospels of democracy and equality abroad, using the military to enforce its ideals, fundamental change needed to occur at home. Eisenhower’s actions suggested that the United States might be shedding pieces of its nineteenth-century republican heritage: perhaps the army could be used as a force of positive, domestic social good, without enduring the complications of long-term military occupation. And thus

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